Project Gutenberg's The Hound of the Baskervilles, by A. Conan Doyle

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere at no cost and with

almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or

re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included

with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org

Title: The Hound of the Baskervilles

Author: A. Conan Doyle

Posting Date: December 8, 2008 [EBook #2852]

Release Date: October, 2001

Language: English

\*\*\* START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES \*\*\*

Produced by Shreevatsa R

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES

By A. Conan Doyle

Chapter 1. Mr. Sherlock Holmes

Mr. Sherlock Holmes, who was usually very late in the mornings, save

upon those not infrequent occasions when he was up all night, was seated

at the breakfast table. I stood upon the hearth-rug and picked up the

stick which our visitor had left behind him the night before. It was a

fine, thick piece of wood, bulbous-headed, of the sort which is known as

a "Penang lawyer." Just under the head was a broad silver band nearly

an inch across. "To James Mortimer, M.R.C.S., from his friends of the

C.C.H.," was engraved upon it, with the date "1884." It was just such a

stick as the old-fashioned family practitioner used to carry--dignified,

solid, and reassuring.

"Well, Watson, what do you make of it?"

Holmes was sitting with his back to me, and I had given him no sign of

my occupation.

"How did you know what I was doing? I believe you have eyes in the back

of your head."

"I have, at least, a well-polished, silver-plated coffee-pot in front of

me," said he. "But, tell me, Watson, what do you make of our visitor's

stick? Since we have been so unfortunate as to miss him and have no

notion of his errand, this accidental souvenir becomes of importance.

Let me hear you reconstruct the man by an examination of it."

"I think," said I, following as far as I could the methods of my

companion, "that Dr. Mortimer is a successful, elderly medical man,

well-esteemed since those who know him give him this mark of their

appreciation."

"Good!" said Holmes. "Excellent!"

"I think also that the probability is in favour of his being a country

practitioner who does a great deal of his visiting on foot."

"Why so?"

"Because this stick, though originally a very handsome one has been so

knocked about that I can hardly imagine a town practitioner carrying it.

The thick-iron ferrule is worn down, so it is evident that he has done a

great amount of walking with it."

"Perfectly sound!" said Holmes.

"And then again, there is the 'friends of the C.C.H.' I should guess

that to be the Something Hunt, the local hunt to whose members he has

possibly given some surgical assistance, and which has made him a small

presentation in return."

"Really, Watson, you excel yourself," said Holmes, pushing back his

chair and lighting a cigarette. "I am bound to say that in all the

accounts which you have been so good as to give of my own small

achievements you have habitually underrated your own abilities. It may

be that you are not yourself luminous, but you are a conductor of

light. Some people without possessing genius have a remarkable power of

stimulating it. I confess, my dear fellow, that I am very much in your

debt."

He had never said as much before, and I must admit that his words gave

me keen pleasure, for I had often been piqued by his indifference to my

admiration and to the attempts which I had made to give publicity to

his methods. I was proud, too, to think that I had so far mastered his

system as to apply it in a way which earned his approval. He now took

the stick from my hands and examined it for a few minutes with his naked

eyes. Then with an expression of interest he laid down his cigarette,

and carrying the cane to the window, he looked over it again with a

convex lens.

"Interesting, though elementary," said he as he returned to his

favourite corner of the settee. "There are certainly one or two

indications upon the stick. It gives us the basis for several

deductions."

"Has anything escaped me?" I asked with some self-importance. "I trust

that there is nothing of consequence which I have overlooked?"

"I am afraid, my dear Watson, that most of your conclusions were

erroneous. When I said that you stimulated me I meant, to be frank, that

in noting your fallacies I was occasionally guided towards the truth.

Not that you are entirely wrong in this instance. The man is certainly a

country practitioner. And he walks a good deal."

"Then I was right."

"To that extent."

"But that was all."

"No, no, my dear Watson, not all--by no means all. I would suggest, for

example, that a presentation to a doctor is more likely to come from a

hospital than from a hunt, and that when the initials 'C.C.' are placed

before that hospital the words 'Charing Cross' very naturally suggest

themselves."

"You may be right."

"The probability lies in that direction. And if we take this as a

working hypothesis we have a fresh basis from which to start our

construction of this unknown visitor."

"Well, then, supposing that 'C.C.H.' does stand for 'Charing Cross

Hospital,' what further inferences may we draw?"

"Do none suggest themselves? You know my methods. Apply them!"

"I can only think of the obvious conclusion that the man has practised

in town before going to the country."

"I think that we might venture a little farther than this. Look at it

in this light. On what occasion would it be most probable that such a

presentation would be made? When would his friends unite to give him

a pledge of their good will? Obviously at the moment when Dr. Mortimer

withdrew from the service of the hospital in order to start a practice

for himself. We know there has been a presentation. We believe there has

been a change from a town hospital to a country practice. Is it, then,

stretching our inference too far to say that the presentation was on the

occasion of the change?"

"It certainly seems probable."

"Now, you will observe that he could not have been on the staff of the

hospital, since only a man well-established in a London practice could

hold such a position, and such a one would not drift into the country.

What was he, then? If he was in the hospital and yet not on the staff he

could only have been a house-surgeon or a house-physician--little more

than a senior student. And he left five years ago--the date is on the

stick. So your grave, middle-aged family practitioner vanishes into

thin air, my dear Watson, and there emerges a young fellow under thirty,

amiable, unambitious, absent-minded, and the possessor of a favourite

dog, which I should describe roughly as being larger than a terrier and

smaller than a mastiff."

I laughed incredulously as Sherlock Holmes leaned back in his settee and

blew little wavering rings of smoke up to the ceiling.

"As to the latter part, I have no means of checking you," said I, "but

at least it is not difficult to find out a few particulars about the

man's age and professional career." From my small medical shelf I took

down the Medical Directory and turned up the name. There were several

Mortimers, but only one who could be our visitor. I read his record

aloud.

"Mortimer, James, M.R.C.S., 1882, Grimpen, Dartmoor, Devon.

House-surgeon, from 1882 to 1884, at Charing Cross Hospital.

Winner of the Jackson prize for Comparative Pathology,

with essay entitled 'Is Disease a Reversion?' Corresponding

member of the Swedish Pathological Society. Author of

'Some Freaks of Atavism' (Lancet 1882). 'Do We Progress?'

(Journal of Psychology, March, 1883). Medical Officer

for the parishes of Grimpen, Thorsley, and High Barrow."

"No mention of that local hunt, Watson," said Holmes with a mischievous

smile, "but a country doctor, as you very astutely observed. I think

that I am fairly justified in my inferences. As to the adjectives, I

said, if I remember right, amiable, unambitious, and absent-minded.

It is my experience that it is only an amiable man in this world who

receives testimonials, only an unambitious one who abandons a London

career for the country, and only an absent-minded one who leaves his

stick and not his visiting-card after waiting an hour in your room."

"And the dog?"

"Has been in the habit of carrying this stick behind his master. Being a

heavy stick the dog has held it tightly by the middle, and the marks of

his teeth are very plainly visible. The dog's jaw, as shown in the space

between these marks, is too broad in my opinion for a terrier and not

broad enough for a mastiff. It may have been--yes, by Jove, it is a

curly-haired spaniel."

He had risen and paced the room as he spoke. Now he halted in the recess

of the window. There was such a ring of conviction in his voice that I

glanced up in surprise.

"My dear fellow, how can you possibly be so sure of that?"

"For the very simple reason that I see the dog himself on our very

door-step, and there is the ring of its owner. Don't move, I beg you,

Watson. He is a professional brother of yours, and your presence may be

of assistance to me. Now is the dramatic moment of fate, Watson, when

you hear a step upon the stair which is walking into your life, and you

know not whether for good or ill. What does Dr. James Mortimer, the man

of science, ask of Sherlock Holmes, the specialist in crime? Come in!"

The appearance of our visitor was a surprise to me, since I had expected

a typical country practitioner. He was a very tall, thin man, with a

long nose like a beak, which jutted out between two keen, gray eyes,

set closely together and sparkling brightly from behind a pair of

gold-rimmed glasses. He was clad in a professional but rather slovenly

fashion, for his frock-coat was dingy and his trousers frayed. Though

young, his long back was already bowed, and he walked with a forward

thrust of his head and a general air of peering benevolence. As he

entered his eyes fell upon the stick in Holmes's hand, and he ran

towards it with an exclamation of joy. "I am so very glad," said he.

"I was not sure whether I had left it here or in the Shipping Office. I

would not lose that stick for the world."

"A presentation, I see," said Holmes.

"Yes, sir."

"From Charing Cross Hospital?"

"From one or two friends there on the occasion of my marriage."

"Dear, dear, that's bad!" said Holmes, shaking his head.

Dr. Mortimer blinked through his glasses in mild astonishment. "Why was

it bad?"

"Only that you have disarranged our little deductions. Your marriage,

you say?"

"Yes, sir. I married, and so left the hospital, and with it all hopes of

a consulting practice. It was necessary to make a home of my own."

"Come, come, we are not so far wrong, after all," said Holmes. "And now,

Dr. James Mortimer--"

"Mister, sir, Mister--a humble M.R.C.S."

"And a man of precise mind, evidently."

"A dabbler in science, Mr. Holmes, a picker up of shells on the shores

of the great unknown ocean. I presume that it is Mr. Sherlock Holmes

whom I am addressing and not--"

"No, this is my friend Dr. Watson."

"Glad to meet you, sir. I have heard your name mentioned in connection

with that of your friend. You interest me very much, Mr. Holmes. I

had hardly expected so dolichocephalic a skull or such well-marked

supra-orbital development. Would you have any objection to my running my

finger along your parietal fissure? A cast of your skull, sir, until

the original is available, would be an ornament to any anthropological

museum. It is not my intention to be fulsome, but I confess that I covet

your skull."

Sherlock Holmes waved our strange visitor into a chair. "You are an

enthusiast in your line of thought, I perceive, sir, as I am in

mine," said he. "I observe from your forefinger that you make your own

cigarettes. Have no hesitation in lighting one."

The man drew out paper and tobacco and twirled the one up in the other

with surprising dexterity. He had long, quivering fingers as agile and

restless as the antennae of an insect.

Holmes was silent, but his little darting glances showed me the interest

which he took in our curious companion. "I presume, sir," said he at

last, "that it was not merely for the purpose of examining my skull that

you have done me the honour to call here last night and again today?"

"No, sir, no; though I am happy to have had the opportunity of doing

that as well. I came to you, Mr. Holmes, because I recognized that I am

myself an unpractical man and because I am suddenly confronted with a

most serious and extraordinary problem. Recognizing, as I do, that you

are the second highest expert in Europe--"

"Indeed, sir! May I inquire who has the honour to be the first?" asked

Holmes with some asperity.

"To the man of precisely scientific mind the work of Monsieur Bertillon

must always appeal strongly."

"Then had you not better consult him?"

"I said, sir, to the precisely scientific mind. But as a practical man

of affairs it is acknowledged that you stand alone. I trust, sir, that I

have not inadvertently--"

"Just a little," said Holmes. "I think, Dr. Mortimer, you would do

wisely if without more ado you would kindly tell me plainly what the

exact nature of the problem is in which you demand my assistance."

Chapter 2. The Curse of the Baskervilles

"I have in my pocket a manuscript," said Dr. James Mortimer.

"I observed it as you entered the room," said Holmes.

"It is an old manuscript."

"Early eighteenth century, unless it is a forgery."

"How can you say that, sir?"

"You have presented an inch or two of it to my examination all the time

that you have been talking. It would be a poor expert who could not give

the date of a document within a decade or so. You may possibly have read

my little monograph upon the subject. I put that at 1730."

"The exact date is 1742." Dr. Mortimer drew it from his breast-pocket.

"This family paper was committed to my care by Sir Charles Baskerville,

whose sudden and tragic death some three months ago created so much

excitement in Devonshire. I may say that I was his personal friend as

well as his medical attendant. He was a strong-minded man, sir, shrewd,

practical, and as unimaginative as I am myself. Yet he took this

document very seriously, and his mind was prepared for just such an end

as did eventually overtake him."

Holmes stretched out his hand for the manuscript and flattened it upon

his knee. "You will observe, Watson, the alternative use of the long s

and the short. It is one of several indications which enabled me to fix

the date."

I looked over his shoulder at the yellow paper and the faded script. At

the head was written: "Baskerville Hall," and below in large, scrawling

figures: "1742."

"It appears to be a statement of some sort."

"Yes, it is a statement of a certain legend which runs in the

Baskerville family."

"But I understand that it is something more modern and practical upon

which you wish to consult me?"

"Most modern. A most practical, pressing matter, which must be decided

within twenty-four hours. But the manuscript is short and is intimately

connected with the affair. With your permission I will read it to you."

Holmes leaned back in his chair, placed his finger-tips together, and

closed his eyes, with an air of resignation. Dr. Mortimer turned the

manuscript to the light and read in a high, cracking voice the following

curious, old-world narrative:

"Of the origin of the Hound of the Baskervilles there

have been many statements, yet as I come in a direct

line from Hugo Baskerville, and as I had the story from

my father, who also had it from his, I have set it down

with all belief that it occurred even as is here set

forth. And I would have you believe, my sons, that the

same Justice which punishes sin may also most graciously

forgive it, and that no ban is so heavy but that by prayer

and repentance it may be removed. Learn then from this

story not to fear the fruits of the past, but rather to

be circumspect in the future, that those foul passions

whereby our family has suffered so grievously may not

again be loosed to our undoing.

"Know then that in the time of the Great Rebellion (the

history of which by the learned Lord Clarendon I most

earnestly commend to your attention) this Manor of

Baskerville was held by Hugo of that name, nor can it be

gainsaid that he was a most wild, profane, and godless

man. This, in truth, his neighbours might have pardoned,

seeing that saints have never flourished in those parts,

but there was in him a certain wanton and cruel humour

which made his name a by-word through the West. It

chanced that this Hugo came to love (if, indeed, so dark

a passion may be known under so bright a name) the daughter

of a yeoman who held lands near the Baskerville estate.

But the young maiden, being discreet and of good repute,

would ever avoid him, for she feared his evil name. So

it came to pass that one Michaelmas this Hugo, with five

or six of his idle and wicked companions, stole down upon

the farm and carried off the maiden, her father and

brothers being from home, as he well knew. When they had

brought her to the Hall the maiden was placed in an upper

chamber, while Hugo and his friends sat down to a long

carouse, as was their nightly custom. Now, the poor lass

upstairs was like to have her wits turned at the singing

and shouting and terrible oaths which came up to her from

below, for they say that the words used by Hugo Baskerville,

when he was in wine, were such as might blast the man who

said them. At last in the stress of her fear she did that

which might have daunted the bravest or most active man,

for by the aid of the growth of ivy which covered (and

still covers) the south wall she came down from under the

eaves, and so homeward across the moor, there being three

leagues betwixt the Hall and her father's farm.

"It chanced that some little time later Hugo left his

guests to carry food and drink--with other worse things,

perchance--to his captive, and so found the cage empty

and the bird escaped. Then, as it would seem, he became

as one that hath a devil, for, rushing down the stairs

into the dining-hall, he sprang upon the great table,

flagons and trenchers flying before him, and he cried

aloud before all the company that he would that very

night render his body and soul to the Powers of Evil if

he might but overtake the wench. And while the revellers

stood aghast at the fury of the man, one more wicked or,

it may be, more drunken than the rest, cried out that

they should put the hounds upon her. Whereat Hugo ran

from the house, crying to his grooms that they should

saddle his mare and unkennel the pack, and giving the

hounds a kerchief of the maid's, he swung them to the

line, and so off full cry in the moonlight over the moor.

"Now, for some space the revellers stood agape, unable

to understand all that had been done in such haste. But

anon their bemused wits awoke to the nature of the deed

which was like to be done upon the moorlands. Everything

was now in an uproar, some calling for their pistols,

some for their horses, and some for another flask of

wine. But at length some sense came back to their crazed

minds, and the whole of them, thirteen in number, took

horse and started in pursuit. The moon shone clear above

them, and they rode swiftly abreast, taking that course

which the maid must needs have taken if she were to reach

her own home.

"They had gone a mile or two when they passed one of the

night shepherds upon the moorlands, and they cried to

him to know if he had seen the hunt. And the man, as

the story goes, was so crazed with fear that he could

scarce speak, but at last he said that he had indeed seen

the unhappy maiden, with the hounds upon her track. 'But

I have seen more than that,' said he, 'for Hugo Baskerville

passed me upon his black mare, and there ran mute behind

him such a hound of hell as God forbid should ever be at

my heels.' So the drunken squires cursed the shepherd

and rode onward. But soon their skins turned cold, for

there came a galloping across the moor, and the black

mare, dabbled with white froth, went past with trailing

bridle and empty saddle. Then the revellers rode close

together, for a great fear was on them, but they still

followed over the moor, though each, had he been alone,

would have been right glad to have turned his horse's

head. Riding slowly in this fashion they came at last

upon the hounds. These, though known for their valour

and their breed, were whimpering in a cluster at the

head of a deep dip or goyal, as we call it, upon the

moor, some slinking away and some, with starting hackles

and staring eyes, gazing down the narrow valley before them.

"The company had come to a halt, more sober men, as you

may guess, than when they started. The most of them

would by no means advance, but three of them, the boldest,

or it may be the most drunken, rode forward down the goyal.

Now, it opened into a broad space in which stood two of

those great stones, still to be seen there, which were

set by certain forgotten peoples in the days of old.

The moon was shining bright upon the clearing, and there

in the centre lay the unhappy maid where she had fallen,

dead of fear and of fatigue. But it was not the sight

of her body, nor yet was it that of the body of Hugo

Baskerville lying near her, which raised the hair upon

the heads of these three dare-devil roysterers, but it

was that, standing over Hugo, and plucking at his throat,

there stood a foul thing, a great, black beast, shaped

like a hound, yet larger than any hound that ever mortal

eye has rested upon. And even as they looked the thing

tore the throat out of Hugo Baskerville, on which, as it

turned its blazing eyes and dripping jaws upon them, the

three shrieked with fear and rode for dear life, still

screaming, across the moor. One, it is said, died that

very night of what he had seen, and the other twain were

but broken men for the rest of their days.

"Such is the tale, my sons, of the coming of the hound

which is said to have plagued the family so sorely ever

since. If I have set it down it is because that which

is clearly known hath less terror than that which is but

hinted at and guessed. Nor can it be denied that many

of the family have been unhappy in their deaths, which

have been sudden, bloody, and mysterious. Yet may we

shelter ourselves in the infinite goodness of Providence,

which would not forever punish the innocent beyond that

third or fourth generation which is threatened in Holy

Writ. To that Providence, my sons, I hereby commend

you, and I counsel you by way of caution to forbear from

crossing the moor in those dark hours when the powers of

evil are exalted.

"[This from Hugo Baskerville to his sons Rodger and John,

with instructions that they say nothing thereof to their

sister Elizabeth.]"

When Dr. Mortimer had finished reading this singular narrative he pushed

his spectacles up on his forehead and stared across at Mr. Sherlock

Holmes. The latter yawned and tossed the end of his cigarette into the

fire.

"Well?" said he.

"Do you not find it interesting?"

"To a collector of fairy tales."

Dr. Mortimer drew a folded newspaper out of his pocket.

"Now, Mr. Holmes, we will give you something a little more recent. This

is the Devon County Chronicle of May 14th of this year. It is a short

account of the facts elicited at the death of Sir Charles Baskerville

which occurred a few days before that date."

My friend leaned a little forward and his expression became intent. Our

visitor readjusted his glasses and began:

"The recent sudden death of Sir Charles Baskerville, whose

name has been mentioned as the probable Liberal candidate

for Mid-Devon at the next election, has cast a gloom over

the county. Though Sir Charles had resided at Baskerville

Hall for a comparatively short period his amiability of

character and extreme generosity had won the affection

and respect of all who had been brought into contact with

him. In these days of nouveaux riches it is refreshing

to find a case where the scion of an old county family

which has fallen upon evil days is able to make his own

fortune and to bring it back with him to restore the

fallen grandeur of his line. Sir Charles, as is well known,

made large sums of money in South African speculation.

More wise than those who go on until the wheel turns

against them, he realized his gains and returned to England

with them. It is only two years since he took up his

residence at Baskerville Hall, and it is common talk how

large were those schemes of reconstruction and improvement

which have been interrupted by his death. Being himself

childless, it was his openly expressed desire that the

whole countryside should, within his own lifetime, profit

by his good fortune, and many will have personal reasons

for bewailing his untimely end. His generous donations

to local and county charities have been frequently

chronicled in these columns.

"The circumstances connected with the death of Sir Charles

cannot be said to have been entirely cleared up by the

inquest, but at least enough has been done to dispose of

those rumours to which local superstition has given rise.

There is no reason whatever to suspect foul play, or to

imagine that death could be from any but natural causes.

Sir Charles was a widower, and a man who may be said to

have been in some ways of an eccentric habit of mind.

In spite of his considerable wealth he was simple in his

personal tastes, and his indoor servants at Baskerville

Hall consisted of a married couple named Barrymore, the

husband acting as butler and the wife as housekeeper.

Their evidence, corroborated by that of several friends,

tends to show that Sir Charles's health has for some time

been impaired, and points especially to some affection

of the heart, manifesting itself in changes of colour,

breathlessness, and acute attacks of nervous depression.

Dr. James Mortimer, the friend and medical attendant of

the deceased, has given evidence to the same effect.

"The facts of the case are simple. Sir Charles Baskerville

was in the habit every night before going to bed of walking

down the famous yew alley of Baskerville Hall. The evidence

of the Barrymores shows that this had been his custom.

On the fourth of May Sir Charles had declared his intention

of starting next day for London, and had ordered Barrymore

to prepare his luggage. That night he went out as usual

for his nocturnal walk, in the course of which he was in

the habit of smoking a cigar. He never returned. At

twelve o'clock Barrymore, finding the hall door still open,

became alarmed, and, lighting a lantern, went in search

of his master. The day had been wet, and Sir Charles's

footmarks were easily traced down the alley. Halfway down

this walk there is a gate which leads out on to the moor.

There were indications that Sir Charles had stood for some

little time here. He then proceeded down the alley, and

it was at the far end of it that his body was discovered.

One fact which has not been explained is the statement

of Barrymore that his master's footprints altered their

character from the time that he passed the moor-gate, and

that he appeared from thence onward to have been walking

upon his toes. One Murphy, a gipsy horse-dealer, was on

the moor at no great distance at the time, but he appears

by his own confession to have been the worse for drink.

He declares that he heard cries but is unable to state

from what direction they came. No signs of violence were

to be discovered upon Sir Charles's person, and though

the doctor's evidence pointed to an almost incredible

facial distortion--so great that Dr. Mortimer refused at

first to believe that it was indeed his friend and patient

who lay before him--it was explained that that is a symptom

which is not unusual in cases of dyspnoea and death from

cardiac exhaustion. This explanation was borne out by

the post-mortem examination, which showed long-standing

organic disease, and the coroner's jury returned a

verdict in accordance with the medical evidence. It is

well that this is so, for it is obviously of the utmost

importance that Sir Charles's heir should settle at the

Hall and continue the good work which has been so sadly

interrupted. Had the prosaic finding of the coroner not

finally put an end to the romantic stories which have been

whispered in connection with the affair, it might have been

difficult to find a tenant for Baskerville Hall. It is

understood that the next of kin is Mr. Henry Baskerville,

if he be still alive, the son of Sir Charles Baskerville's

younger brother. The young man when last heard of was

in America, and inquiries are being instituted with a

view to informing him of his good fortune."

Dr. Mortimer refolded his paper and replaced it in his pocket. "Those

are the public facts, Mr. Holmes, in connection with the death of Sir

Charles Baskerville."

"I must thank you," said Sherlock Holmes, "for calling my attention to a

case which certainly presents some features of interest. I had observed

some newspaper comment at the time, but I was exceedingly preoccupied

by that little affair of the Vatican cameos, and in my anxiety to oblige

the Pope I lost touch with several interesting English cases. This

article, you say, contains all the public facts?"

"It does."

"Then let me have the private ones." He leaned back, put his finger-tips

together, and assumed his most impassive and judicial expression.

"In doing so," said Dr. Mortimer, who had begun to show signs of some

strong emotion, "I am telling that which I have not confided to anyone.

My motive for withholding it from the coroner's inquiry is that a man of

science shrinks from placing himself in the public position of seeming

to indorse a popular superstition. I had the further motive that

Baskerville Hall, as the paper says, would certainly remain untenanted

if anything were done to increase its already rather grim reputation.

For both these reasons I thought that I was justified in telling rather

less than I knew, since no practical good could result from it, but with

you there is no reason why I should not be perfectly frank.

"The moor is very sparsely inhabited, and those who live near each other

are thrown very much together. For this reason I saw a good deal of

Sir Charles Baskerville. With the exception of Mr. Frankland, of Lafter

Hall, and Mr. Stapleton, the naturalist, there are no other men of

education within many miles. Sir Charles was a retiring man, but the

chance of his illness brought us together, and a community of interests

in science kept us so. He had brought back much scientific information

from South Africa, and many a charming evening we have spent together

discussing the comparative anatomy of the Bushman and the Hottentot.

"Within the last few months it became increasingly plain to me that

Sir Charles's nervous system was strained to the breaking point. He had

taken this legend which I have read you exceedingly to heart--so much

so that, although he would walk in his own grounds, nothing would induce

him to go out upon the moor at night. Incredible as it may appear to

you, Mr. Holmes, he was honestly convinced that a dreadful fate overhung

his family, and certainly the records which he was able to give of

his ancestors were not encouraging. The idea of some ghastly presence

constantly haunted him, and on more than one occasion he has asked me

whether I had on my medical journeys at night ever seen any strange

creature or heard the baying of a hound. The latter question he put

to me several times, and always with a voice which vibrated with

excitement.

"I can well remember driving up to his house in the evening some three

weeks before the fatal event. He chanced to be at his hall door. I had

descended from my gig and was standing in front of him, when I saw

his eyes fix themselves over my shoulder and stare past me with an

expression of the most dreadful horror. I whisked round and had just

time to catch a glimpse of something which I took to be a large black

calf passing at the head of the drive. So excited and alarmed was he

that I was compelled to go down to the spot where the animal had been

and look around for it. It was gone, however, and the incident appeared

to make the worst impression upon his mind. I stayed with him all the

evening, and it was on that occasion, to explain the emotion which he

had shown, that he confided to my keeping that narrative which I read to

you when first I came. I mention this small episode because it assumes

some importance in view of the tragedy which followed, but I was

convinced at the time that the matter was entirely trivial and that his

excitement had no justification.

"It was at my advice that Sir Charles was about to go to London. His

heart was, I knew, affected, and the constant anxiety in which he lived,

however chimerical the cause of it might be, was evidently having a

serious effect upon his health. I thought that a few months among the

distractions of town would send him back a new man. Mr. Stapleton, a

mutual friend who was much concerned at his state of health, was of the

same opinion. At the last instant came this terrible catastrophe.

"On the night of Sir Charles's death Barrymore the butler, who made

the discovery, sent Perkins the groom on horseback to me, and as I was

sitting up late I was able to reach Baskerville Hall within an hour of

the event. I checked and corroborated all the facts which were mentioned

at the inquest. I followed the footsteps down the yew alley, I saw the

spot at the moor-gate where he seemed to have waited, I remarked the

change in the shape of the prints after that point, I noted that there

were no other footsteps save those of Barrymore on the soft gravel, and

finally I carefully examined the body, which had not been touched until

my arrival. Sir Charles lay on his face, his arms out, his fingers dug

into the ground, and his features convulsed with some strong emotion to

such an extent that I could hardly have sworn to his identity. There was

certainly no physical injury of any kind. But one false statement was

made by Barrymore at the inquest. He said that there were no traces

upon the ground round the body. He did not observe any. But I did--some

little distance off, but fresh and clear."

"Footprints?"

"Footprints."

"A man's or a woman's?"

Dr. Mortimer looked strangely at us for an instant, and his voice sank

almost to a whisper as he answered.

"Mr. Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic hound!"

Chapter 3. The Problem

I confess at these words a shudder passed through me. There was a thrill

in the doctor's voice which showed that he was himself deeply moved by

that which he told us. Holmes leaned forward in his excitement and his

eyes had the hard, dry glitter which shot from them when he was keenly

interested.

"You saw this?"

"As clearly as I see you."

"And you said nothing?"

"What was the use?"

"How was it that no one else saw it?"

"The marks were some twenty yards from the body and no one gave them

a thought. I don't suppose I should have done so had I not known this

legend."

"There are many sheep-dogs on the moor?"

"No doubt, but this was no sheep-dog."

"You say it was large?"

"Enormous."

"But it had not approached the body?"

"No."

"What sort of night was it?'

"Damp and raw."

"But not actually raining?"

"No."

"What is the alley like?"

"There are two lines of old yew hedge, twelve feet high and

impenetrable. The walk in the centre is about eight feet across."

"Is there anything between the hedges and the walk?"

"Yes, there is a strip of grass about six feet broad on either side."

"I understand that the yew hedge is penetrated at one point by a gate?"

"Yes, the wicket-gate which leads on to the moor."

"Is there any other opening?"

"None."

"So that to reach the yew alley one either has to come down it from the

house or else to enter it by the moor-gate?"

"There is an exit through a summer-house at the far end."

"Had Sir Charles reached this?"

"No; he lay about fifty yards from it."

"Now, tell me, Dr. Mortimer--and this is important--the marks which you

saw were on the path and not on the grass?"

"No marks could show on the grass."

"Were they on the same side of the path as the moor-gate?"

"Yes; they were on the edge of the path on the same side as the

moor-gate."

"You interest me exceedingly. Another point. Was the wicket-gate

closed?"

"Closed and padlocked."

"How high was it?"

"About four feet high."

"Then anyone could have got over it?"

"Yes."

"And what marks did you see by the wicket-gate?"

"None in particular."

"Good heaven! Did no one examine?"

"Yes, I examined, myself."

"And found nothing?"

"It was all very confused. Sir Charles had evidently stood there for

five or ten minutes."

"How do you know that?"

"Because the ash had twice dropped from his cigar."

"Excellent! This is a colleague, Watson, after our own heart. But the

marks?"

"He had left his own marks all over that small patch of gravel. I could

discern no others."

Sherlock Holmes struck his hand against his knee with an impatient

gesture.

"If I had only been there!" he cried. "It is evidently a case of

extraordinary interest, and one which presented immense opportunities to

the scientific expert. That gravel page upon which I might have read so

much has been long ere this smudged by the rain and defaced by the clogs

of curious peasants. Oh, Dr. Mortimer, Dr. Mortimer, to think that you

should not have called me in! You have indeed much to answer for."

"I could not call you in, Mr. Holmes, without disclosing these facts to

the world, and I have already given my reasons for not wishing to do so.

Besides, besides--"

"Why do you hesitate?"

"There is a realm in which the most acute and most experienced of

detectives is helpless."

"You mean that the thing is supernatural?"

"I did not positively say so."

"No, but you evidently think it."

"Since the tragedy, Mr. Holmes, there have come to my ears several

incidents which are hard to reconcile with the settled order of Nature."

"For example?"

"I find that before the terrible event occurred several people had seen

a creature upon the moor which corresponds with this Baskerville demon,

and which could not possibly be any animal known to science. They all

agreed that it was a huge creature, luminous, ghastly, and spectral. I

have cross-examined these men, one of them a hard-headed countryman,

one a farrier, and one a moorland farmer, who all tell the same story of

this dreadful apparition, exactly corresponding to the hell-hound of the

legend. I assure you that there is a reign of terror in the district,

and that it is a hardy man who will cross the moor at night."

"And you, a trained man of science, believe it to be supernatural?"

"I do not know what to believe."

Holmes shrugged his shoulders. "I have hitherto confined my

investigations to this world," said he. "In a modest way I have combated

evil, but to take on the Father of Evil himself would, perhaps, be too

ambitious a task. Yet you must admit that the footmark is material."

"The original hound was material enough to tug a man's throat out, and

yet he was diabolical as well."

"I see that you have quite gone over to the supernaturalists. But now,

Dr. Mortimer, tell me this. If you hold these views, why have you come

to consult me at all? You tell me in the same breath that it is useless

to investigate Sir Charles's death, and that you desire me to do it."

"I did not say that I desired you to do it."

"Then, how can I assist you?"

"By advising me as to what I should do with Sir Henry Baskerville, who

arrives at Waterloo Station"--Dr. Mortimer looked at his watch--"in

exactly one hour and a quarter."

"He being the heir?"

"Yes. On the death of Sir Charles we inquired for this young gentleman

and found that he had been farming in Canada. From the accounts which

have reached us he is an excellent fellow in every way. I speak now not

as a medical man but as a trustee and executor of Sir Charles's will."

"There is no other claimant, I presume?"

"None. The only other kinsman whom we have been able to trace was Rodger

Baskerville, the youngest of three brothers of whom poor Sir Charles was

the elder. The second brother, who died young, is the father of this lad

Henry. The third, Rodger, was the black sheep of the family. He came of

the old masterful Baskerville strain and was the very image, they tell

me, of the family picture of old Hugo. He made England too hot to hold

him, fled to Central America, and died there in 1876 of yellow fever.

Henry is the last of the Baskervilles. In one hour and five minutes

I meet him at Waterloo Station. I have had a wire that he arrived at

Southampton this morning. Now, Mr. Holmes, what would you advise me to

do with him?"

"Why should he not go to the home of his fathers?"

"It seems natural, does it not? And yet, consider that every Baskerville

who goes there meets with an evil fate. I feel sure that if Sir Charles

could have spoken with me before his death he would have warned me

against bringing this, the last of the old race, and the heir to great

wealth, to that deadly place. And yet it cannot be denied that the

prosperity of the whole poor, bleak countryside depends upon his

presence. All the good work which has been done by Sir Charles will

crash to the ground if there is no tenant of the Hall. I fear lest I

should be swayed too much by my own obvious interest in the matter, and

that is why I bring the case before you and ask for your advice."

Holmes considered for a little time.

"Put into plain words, the matter is this," said he. "In your opinion

there is a diabolical agency which makes Dartmoor an unsafe abode for a

Baskerville--that is your opinion?"

"At least I might go the length of saying that there is some evidence

that this may be so."

"Exactly. But surely, if your supernatural theory be correct, it could

work the young man evil in London as easily as in Devonshire. A devil

with merely local powers like a parish vestry would be too inconceivable

a thing."

"You put the matter more flippantly, Mr. Holmes, than you would probably

do if you were brought into personal contact with these things. Your

advice, then, as I understand it, is that the young man will be as safe

in Devonshire as in London. He comes in fifty minutes. What would you

recommend?"

"I recommend, sir, that you take a cab, call off your spaniel who is

scratching at my front door, and proceed to Waterloo to meet Sir Henry

Baskerville."

"And then?"

"And then you will say nothing to him at all until I have made up my

mind about the matter."

"How long will it take you to make up your mind?"

"Twenty-four hours. At ten o'clock tomorrow, Dr. Mortimer, I will be

much obliged to you if you will call upon me here, and it will be

of help to me in my plans for the future if you will bring Sir Henry

Baskerville with you."

"I will do so, Mr. Holmes." He scribbled the appointment on his

shirt-cuff and hurried off in his strange, peering, absent-minded

fashion. Holmes stopped him at the head of the stair.

"Only one more question, Dr. Mortimer. You say that before Sir Charles

Baskerville's death several people saw this apparition upon the moor?"

"Three people did."

"Did any see it after?"

"I have not heard of any."

"Thank you. Good-morning."

Holmes returned to his seat with that quiet look of inward satisfaction

which meant that he had a congenial task before him.

"Going out, Watson?"

"Unless I can help you."

"No, my dear fellow, it is at the hour of action that I turn to you for

aid. But this is splendid, really unique from some points of view.

When you pass Bradley's, would you ask him to send up a pound of the

strongest shag tobacco? Thank you. It would be as well if you could make

it convenient not to return before evening. Then I should be very glad

to compare impressions as to this most interesting problem which has

been submitted to us this morning."

I knew that seclusion and solitude were very necessary for my friend

in those hours of intense mental concentration during which he weighed

every particle of evidence, constructed alternative theories, balanced

one against the other, and made up his mind as to which points were

essential and which immaterial. I therefore spent the day at my club and

did not return to Baker Street until evening. It was nearly nine o'clock

when I found myself in the sitting-room once more.

My first impression as I opened the door was that a fire had broken out,

for the room was so filled with smoke that the light of the lamp upon

the table was blurred by it. As I entered, however, my fears were set at

rest, for it was the acrid fumes of strong coarse tobacco which took me

by the throat and set me coughing. Through the haze I had a vague vision

of Holmes in his dressing-gown coiled up in an armchair with his black

clay pipe between his lips. Several rolls of paper lay around him.

"Caught cold, Watson?" said he.

"No, it's this poisonous atmosphere."

"I suppose it is pretty thick, now that you mention it."

"Thick! It is intolerable."

"Open the window, then! You have been at your club all day, I perceive."

"My dear Holmes!"

"Am I right?"

"Certainly, but how?"

He laughed at my bewildered expression. "There is a delightful freshness

about you, Watson, which makes it a pleasure to exercise any small

powers which I possess at your expense. A gentleman goes forth on a

showery and miry day. He returns immaculate in the evening with the

gloss still on his hat and his boots. He has been a fixture therefore

all day. He is not a man with intimate friends. Where, then, could he

have been? Is it not obvious?"

"Well, it is rather obvious."

"The world is full of obvious things which nobody by any chance ever

observes. Where do you think that I have been?"

"A fixture also."

"On the contrary, I have been to Devonshire."

"In spirit?"

"Exactly. My body has remained in this armchair and has, I regret

to observe, consumed in my absence two large pots of coffee and an

incredible amount of tobacco. After you left I sent down to Stamford's

for the Ordnance map of this portion of the moor, and my spirit has

hovered over it all day. I flatter myself that I could find my way

about."

"A large-scale map, I presume?"

"Very large."

He unrolled one section and held it over his knee. "Here you have the

particular district which concerns us. That is Baskerville Hall in the

middle."

"With a wood round it?"

"Exactly. I fancy the yew alley, though not marked under that name, must

stretch along this line, with the moor, as you perceive, upon the right

of it. This small clump of buildings here is the hamlet of Grimpen,

where our friend Dr. Mortimer has his headquarters. Within a radius of

five miles there are, as you see, only a very few scattered dwellings.

Here is Lafter Hall, which was mentioned in the narrative. There is

a house indicated here which may be the residence of the

naturalist--Stapleton, if I remember right, was his name. Here are two

moorland farmhouses, High Tor and Foulmire. Then fourteen miles away the

great convict prison of Princetown. Between and around these scattered

points extends the desolate, lifeless moor. This, then, is the stage

upon which tragedy has been played, and upon which we may help to play

it again."

"It must be a wild place."

"Yes, the setting is a worthy one. If the devil did desire to have a

hand in the affairs of men--"

"Then you are yourself inclining to the supernatural explanation."

"The devil's agents may be of flesh and blood, may they not? There are

two questions waiting for us at the outset. The one is whether any crime

has been committed at all; the second is, what is the crime and how was

it committed? Of course, if Dr. Mortimer's surmise should be correct,

and we are dealing with forces outside the ordinary laws of Nature,

there is an end of our investigation. But we are bound to exhaust all

other hypotheses before falling back upon this one. I think we'll shut

that window again, if you don't mind. It is a singular thing, but I find

that a concentrated atmosphere helps a concentration of thought. I have

not pushed it to the length of getting into a box to think, but that is

the logical outcome of my convictions. Have you turned the case over in

your mind?"

"Yes, I have thought a good deal of it in the course of the day."

"What do you make of it?"

"It is very bewildering."

"It has certainly a character of its own. There are points of

distinction about it. That change in the footprints, for example. What

do you make of that?"

"Mortimer said that the man had walked on tiptoe down that portion of

the alley."

"He only repeated what some fool had said at the inquest. Why should a

man walk on tiptoe down the alley?"

"What then?"

"He was running, Watson--running desperately, running for his life,

running until he burst his heart--and fell dead upon his face."

"Running from what?"

"There lies our problem. There are indications that the man was crazed

with fear before ever he began to run."

"How can you say that?"

"I am presuming that the cause of his fears came to him across the moor.

If that were so, and it seems most probable, only a man who had lost his

wits would have run from the house instead of towards it. If the

gipsy's evidence may be taken as true, he ran with cries for help in the

direction where help was least likely to be. Then, again, whom was he

waiting for that night, and why was he waiting for him in the yew alley

rather than in his own house?"

"You think that he was waiting for someone?"

"The man was elderly and infirm. We can understand his taking an evening

stroll, but the ground was damp and the night inclement. Is it natural

that he should stand for five or ten minutes, as Dr. Mortimer, with more

practical sense than I should have given him credit for, deduced from

the cigar ash?"

"But he went out every evening."

"I think it unlikely that he waited at the moor-gate every evening. On

the contrary, the evidence is that he avoided the moor. That night he

waited there. It was the night before he made his departure for London.

The thing takes shape, Watson. It becomes coherent. Might I ask you to

hand me my violin, and we will postpone all further thought upon this

business until we have had the advantage of meeting Dr. Mortimer and Sir

Henry Baskerville in the morning."

Chapter 4. Sir Henry Baskerville

Our breakfast table was cleared early, and Holmes waited in his

dressing-gown for the promised interview. Our clients were punctual to

their appointment, for the clock had just struck ten when Dr. Mortimer

was shown up, followed by the young baronet. The latter was a small,

alert, dark-eyed man about thirty years of age, very sturdily built,

with thick black eyebrows and a strong, pugnacious face. He wore a

ruddy-tinted tweed suit and had the weather-beaten appearance of one who

has spent most of his time in the open air, and yet there was something

in his steady eye and the quiet assurance of his bearing which indicated

the gentleman.

"This is Sir Henry Baskerville," said Dr. Mortimer.

"Why, yes," said he, "and the strange thing is, Mr. Sherlock Holmes,

that if my friend here had not proposed coming round to you this morning

I should have come on my own account. I understand that you think out

little puzzles, and I've had one this morning which wants more thinking

out than I am able to give it."

"Pray take a seat, Sir Henry. Do I understand you to say that you have

yourself had some remarkable experience since you arrived in London?"

"Nothing of much importance, Mr. Holmes. Only a joke, as like as not.

It was this letter, if you can call it a letter, which reached me this

morning."

He laid an envelope upon the table, and we all bent over it. It was of

common quality, grayish in colour. The address, "Sir Henry Baskerville,

Northumberland Hotel," was printed in rough characters; the post-mark

"Charing Cross," and the date of posting the preceding evening.

"Who knew that you were going to the Northumberland Hotel?" asked

Holmes, glancing keenly across at our visitor.

"No one could have known. We only decided after I met Dr. Mortimer."

"But Dr. Mortimer was no doubt already stopping there?"

"No, I had been staying with a friend," said the doctor.

"There was no possible indication that we intended to go to this hotel."

"Hum! Someone seems to be very deeply interested in your movements." Out

of the envelope he took a half-sheet of foolscap paper folded into four.

This he opened and spread flat upon the table. Across the middle of it

a single sentence had been formed by the expedient of pasting printed

words upon it. It ran:

As you value your life or your reason keep away from the moor.

The word "moor" only was printed in ink.

"Now," said Sir Henry Baskerville, "perhaps you will tell me, Mr.

Holmes, what in thunder is the meaning of that, and who it is that takes

so much interest in my affairs?"

"What do you make of it, Dr. Mortimer? You must allow that there is

nothing supernatural about this, at any rate?"

"No, sir, but it might very well come from someone who was convinced

that the business is supernatural."

"What business?" asked Sir Henry sharply. "It seems to me that all you

gentlemen know a great deal more than I do about my own affairs."

"You shall share our knowledge before you leave this room, Sir Henry. I

promise you that," said Sherlock Holmes. "We will confine ourselves

for the present with your permission to this very interesting document,

which must have been put together and posted yesterday evening. Have you

yesterday's Times, Watson?"

"It is here in the corner."

"Might I trouble you for it--the inside page, please, with the leading

articles?" He glanced swiftly over it, running his eyes up and down the

columns. "Capital article this on free trade. Permit me to give you an

extract from it.

'You may be cajoled into imagining that your own special

trade or your own industry will be encouraged by a

protective tariff, but it stands to reason that such

legislation must in the long run keep away wealth from the

country, diminish the value of our imports, and lower the

general conditions of life in this island.'

"What do you think of that, Watson?" cried Holmes in high glee, rubbing

his hands together with satisfaction. "Don't you think that is an

admirable sentiment?"

Dr. Mortimer looked at Holmes with an air of professional interest, and

Sir Henry Baskerville turned a pair of puzzled dark eyes upon me.

"I don't know much about the tariff and things of that kind," said he,

"but it seems to me we've got a bit off the trail so far as that note is

concerned."

"On the contrary, I think we are particularly hot upon the trail, Sir

Henry. Watson here knows more about my methods than you do, but I fear

that even he has not quite grasped the significance of this sentence."

"No, I confess that I see no connection."

"And yet, my dear Watson, there is so very close a connection that

the one is extracted out of the other. 'You,' 'your,' 'your,' 'life,'

'reason,' 'value,' 'keep away,' 'from the.' Don't you see now whence

these words have been taken?"

"By thunder, you're right! Well, if that isn't smart!" cried Sir Henry.

"If any possible doubt remained it is settled by the fact that 'keep

away' and 'from the' are cut out in one piece."

"Well, now--so it is!"

"Really, Mr. Holmes, this exceeds anything which I could have imagined,"

said Dr. Mortimer, gazing at my friend in amazement. "I could understand

anyone saying that the words were from a newspaper; but that you should

name which, and add that it came from the leading article, is really one

of the most remarkable things which I have ever known. How did you do

it?"

"I presume, Doctor, that you could tell the skull of a negro from that

of an Esquimau?"

"Most certainly."

"But how?"

"Because that is my special hobby. The differences are obvious. The

supra-orbital crest, the facial angle, the maxillary curve, the--"

"But this is my special hobby, and the differences are equally obvious.

There is as much difference to my eyes between the leaded bourgeois type

of a Times article and the slovenly print of an evening half-penny paper

as there could be between your negro and your Esquimau. The detection of

types is one of the most elementary branches of knowledge to the special

expert in crime, though I confess that once when I was very young I

confused the Leeds Mercury with the Western Morning News. But a Times

leader is entirely distinctive, and these words could have been taken

from nothing else. As it was done yesterday the strong probability was

that we should find the words in yesterday's issue."

"So far as I can follow you, then, Mr. Holmes," said Sir Henry

Baskerville, "someone cut out this message with a scissors--"

"Nail-scissors," said Holmes. "You can see that it was a very

short-bladed scissors, since the cutter had to take two snips over 'keep

away.'"

"That is so. Someone, then, cut out the message with a pair of

short-bladed scissors, pasted it with paste--"

"Gum," said Holmes.

"With gum on to the paper. But I want to know why the word 'moor' should

have been written?"

"Because he could not find it in print. The other words were all simple

and might be found in any issue, but 'moor' would be less common."

"Why, of course, that would explain it. Have you read anything else in

this message, Mr. Holmes?"

"There are one or two indications, and yet the utmost pains have been

taken to remove all clues. The address, you observe is printed in rough

characters. But the Times is a paper which is seldom found in any hands

but those of the highly educated. We may take it, therefore, that

the letter was composed by an educated man who wished to pose as an

uneducated one, and his effort to conceal his own writing suggests that

that writing might be known, or come to be known, by you. Again, you

will observe that the words are not gummed on in an accurate line, but

that some are much higher than others. 'Life,' for example is quite out

of its proper place. That may point to carelessness or it may point to

agitation and hurry upon the part of the cutter. On the whole I incline

to the latter view, since the matter was evidently important, and it

is unlikely that the composer of such a letter would be careless. If he

were in a hurry it opens up the interesting question why he should be

in a hurry, since any letter posted up to early morning would reach

Sir Henry before he would leave his hotel. Did the composer fear an

interruption--and from whom?"

"We are coming now rather into the region of guesswork," said Dr.

Mortimer.

"Say, rather, into the region where we balance probabilities and choose

the most likely. It is the scientific use of the imagination, but we

have always some material basis on which to start our speculation. Now,

you would call it a guess, no doubt, but I am almost certain that this

address has been written in a hotel."

"How in the world can you say that?"

"If you examine it carefully you will see that both the pen and the ink

have given the writer trouble. The pen has spluttered twice in a single

word and has run dry three times in a short address, showing that there

was very little ink in the bottle. Now, a private pen or ink-bottle is

seldom allowed to be in such a state, and the combination of the two

must be quite rare. But you know the hotel ink and the hotel pen, where

it is rare to get anything else. Yes, I have very little hesitation

in saying that could we examine the waste-paper baskets of the hotels

around Charing Cross until we found the remains of the mutilated Times

leader we could lay our hands straight upon the person who sent this

singular message. Halloa! Halloa! What's this?"

He was carefully examining the foolscap, upon which the words were

pasted, holding it only an inch or two from his eyes.

"Well?"

"Nothing," said he, throwing it down. "It is a blank half-sheet of

paper, without even a water-mark upon it. I think we have drawn as much

as we can from this curious letter; and now, Sir Henry, has anything

else of interest happened to you since you have been in London?"

"Why, no, Mr. Holmes. I think not."

"You have not observed anyone follow or watch you?"

"I seem to have walked right into the thick of a dime novel," said our

visitor. "Why in thunder should anyone follow or watch me?"

"We are coming to that. You have nothing else to report to us before we

go into this matter?"

"Well, it depends upon what you think worth reporting."

"I think anything out of the ordinary routine of life well worth

reporting."

Sir Henry smiled. "I don't know much of British life yet, for I have

spent nearly all my time in the States and in Canada. But I hope that to

lose one of your boots is not part of the ordinary routine of life over

here."

"You have lost one of your boots?"

"My dear sir," cried Dr. Mortimer, "it is only mislaid. You will find

it when you return to the hotel. What is the use of troubling Mr. Holmes

with trifles of this kind?"

"Well, he asked me for anything outside the ordinary routine."

"Exactly," said Holmes, "however foolish the incident may seem. You have

lost one of your boots, you say?"

"Well, mislaid it, anyhow. I put them both outside my door last night,

and there was only one in the morning. I could get no sense out of the

chap who cleans them. The worst of it is that I only bought the pair

last night in the Strand, and I have never had them on."

"If you have never worn them, why did you put them out to be cleaned?"

"They were tan boots and had never been varnished. That was why I put

them out."

"Then I understand that on your arrival in London yesterday you went out

at once and bought a pair of boots?"

"I did a good deal of shopping. Dr. Mortimer here went round with me.

You see, if I am to be squire down there I must dress the part, and

it may be that I have got a little careless in my ways out West. Among

other things I bought these brown boots--gave six dollars for them--and

had one stolen before ever I had them on my feet."

"It seems a singularly useless thing to steal," said Sherlock Holmes.

"I confess that I share Dr. Mortimer's belief that it will not be long

before the missing boot is found."

"And, now, gentlemen," said the baronet with decision, "it seems to me

that I have spoken quite enough about the little that I know. It is time

that you kept your promise and gave me a full account of what we are all

driving at."

"Your request is a very reasonable one," Holmes answered. "Dr. Mortimer,

I think you could not do better than to tell your story as you told it

to us."

Thus encouraged, our scientific friend drew his papers from his pocket

and presented the whole case as he had done upon the morning before.

Sir Henry Baskerville listened with the deepest attention and with an

occasional exclamation of surprise.

"Well, I seem to have come into an inheritance with a vengeance," said

he when the long narrative was finished. "Of course, I've heard of the

hound ever since I was in the nursery. It's the pet story of the family,

though I never thought of taking it seriously before. But as to my

uncle's death--well, it all seems boiling up in my head, and I can't

get it clear yet. You don't seem quite to have made up your mind whether

it's a case for a policeman or a clergyman."

"Precisely."

"And now there's this affair of the letter to me at the hotel. I suppose

that fits into its place."

"It seems to show that someone knows more than we do about what goes on

upon the moor," said Dr. Mortimer.

"And also," said Holmes, "that someone is not ill-disposed towards you,

since they warn you of danger."

"Or it may be that they wish, for their own purposes, to scare me away."

"Well, of course, that is possible also. I am very much indebted to you,

Dr. Mortimer, for introducing me to a problem which presents several

interesting alternatives. But the practical point which we now have to

decide, Sir Henry, is whether it is or is not advisable for you to go to

Baskerville Hall."

"Why should I not go?"

"There seems to be danger."

"Do you mean danger from this family fiend or do you mean danger from

human beings?"

"Well, that is what we have to find out."

"Whichever it is, my answer is fixed. There is no devil in hell, Mr.

Holmes, and there is no man upon earth who can prevent me from going to

the home of my own people, and you may take that to be my final answer."

His dark brows knitted and his face flushed to a dusky red as he spoke.

It was evident that the fiery temper of the Baskervilles was not extinct

in this their last representative. "Meanwhile," said he, "I have hardly

had time to think over all that you have told me. It's a big thing for a

man to have to understand and to decide at one sitting. I should like

to have a quiet hour by myself to make up my mind. Now, look here, Mr.

Holmes, it's half-past eleven now and I am going back right away to my

hotel. Suppose you and your friend, Dr. Watson, come round and lunch

with us at two. I'll be able to tell you more clearly then how this

thing strikes me."

"Is that convenient to you, Watson?"

"Perfectly."

"Then you may expect us. Shall I have a cab called?"

"I'd prefer to walk, for this affair has flurried me rather."

"I'll join you in a walk, with pleasure," said his companion.

"Then we meet again at two o'clock. Au revoir, and good-morning!"

We heard the steps of our visitors descend the stair and the bang of the

front door. In an instant Holmes had changed from the languid dreamer to

the man of action.

"Your hat and boots, Watson, quick! Not a moment to lose!" He rushed

into his room in his dressing-gown and was back again in a few seconds

in a frock-coat. We hurried together down the stairs and into the

street. Dr. Mortimer and Baskerville were still visible about two

hundred yards ahead of us in the direction of Oxford Street.

"Shall I run on and stop them?"

"Not for the world, my dear Watson. I am perfectly satisfied with your

company if you will tolerate mine. Our friends are wise, for it is

certainly a very fine morning for a walk."

He quickened his pace until we had decreased the distance which divided

us by about half. Then, still keeping a hundred yards behind, we

followed into Oxford Street and so down Regent Street. Once our friends

stopped and stared into a shop window, upon which Holmes did the

same. An instant afterwards he gave a little cry of satisfaction, and,

following the direction of his eager eyes, I saw that a hansom cab with

a man inside which had halted on the other side of the street was now

proceeding slowly onward again.

"There's our man, Watson! Come along! We'll have a good look at him, if

we can do no more."

At that instant I was aware of a bushy black beard and a pair of

piercing eyes turned upon us through the side window of the cab.

Instantly the trapdoor at the top flew up, something was screamed to

the driver, and the cab flew madly off down Regent Street. Holmes looked

eagerly round for another, but no empty one was in sight. Then he dashed

in wild pursuit amid the stream of the traffic, but the start was too

great, and already the cab was out of sight.

"There now!" said Holmes bitterly as he emerged panting and white with

vexation from the tide of vehicles. "Was ever such bad luck and such

bad management, too? Watson, Watson, if you are an honest man you will

record this also and set it against my successes!"

"Who was the man?"

"I have not an idea."

"A spy?"

"Well, it was evident from what we have heard that Baskerville has been

very closely shadowed by someone since he has been in town. How else

could it be known so quickly that it was the Northumberland Hotel which

he had chosen? If they had followed him the first day I argued that they

would follow him also the second. You may have observed that I twice

strolled over to the window while Dr. Mortimer was reading his legend."

"Yes, I remember."

"I was looking out for loiterers in the street, but I saw none. We

are dealing with a clever man, Watson. This matter cuts very deep, and

though I have not finally made up my mind whether it is a benevolent or

a malevolent agency which is in touch with us, I am conscious always of

power and design. When our friends left I at once followed them in the

hopes of marking down their invisible attendant. So wily was he that he

had not trusted himself upon foot, but he had availed himself of a cab

so that he could loiter behind or dash past them and so escape their

notice. His method had the additional advantage that if they were to

take a cab he was all ready to follow them. It has, however, one obvious

disadvantage."

"It puts him in the power of the cabman."

"Exactly."

"What a pity we did not get the number!"

"My dear Watson, clumsy as I have been, you surely do not seriously

imagine that I neglected to get the number? No. 2704 is our man. But

that is no use to us for the moment."

"I fail to see how you could have done more."

"On observing the cab I should have instantly turned and walked in the

other direction. I should then at my leisure have hired a second cab

and followed the first at a respectful distance, or, better still, have

driven to the Northumberland Hotel and waited there. When our unknown

had followed Baskerville home we should have had the opportunity of

playing his own game upon himself and seeing where he made for. As

it is, by an indiscreet eagerness, which was taken advantage of with

extraordinary quickness and energy by our opponent, we have betrayed

ourselves and lost our man."

We had been sauntering slowly down Regent Street during this

conversation, and Dr. Mortimer, with his companion, had long vanished in

front of us.

"There is no object in our following them," said Holmes. "The shadow has

departed and will not return. We must see what further cards we have

in our hands and play them with decision. Could you swear to that man's

face within the cab?"

"I could swear only to the beard."

"And so could I--from which I gather that in all probability it was

a false one. A clever man upon so delicate an errand has no use for a

beard save to conceal his features. Come in here, Watson!"

He turned into one of the district messenger offices, where he was

warmly greeted by the manager.

"Ah, Wilson, I see you have not forgotten the little case in which I had

the good fortune to help you?"

"No, sir, indeed I have not. You saved my good name, and perhaps my

life."

"My dear fellow, you exaggerate. I have some recollection, Wilson, that

you had among your boys a lad named Cartwright, who showed some ability

during the investigation."

"Yes, sir, he is still with us."

"Could you ring him up?--thank you! And I should be glad to have change

of this five-pound note."

A lad of fourteen, with a bright, keen face, had obeyed the summons

of the manager. He stood now gazing with great reverence at the famous

detective.

"Let me have the Hotel Directory," said Holmes. "Thank you! Now,

Cartwright, there are the names of twenty-three hotels here, all in the

immediate neighbourhood of Charing Cross. Do you see?"

"Yes, sir."

"You will visit each of these in turn."

"Yes, sir."

"You will begin in each case by giving the outside porter one shilling.

Here are twenty-three shillings."

"Yes, sir."

"You will tell him that you want to see the waste-paper of yesterday.

You will say that an important telegram has miscarried and that you are

looking for it. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"But what you are really looking for is the centre page of the Times

with some holes cut in it with scissors. Here is a copy of the Times. It

is this page. You could easily recognize it, could you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"In each case the outside porter will send for the hall porter, to whom

also you will give a shilling. Here are twenty-three shillings. You will

then learn in possibly twenty cases out of the twenty-three that the

waste of the day before has been burned or removed. In the three other

cases you will be shown a heap of paper and you will look for this page

of the Times among it. The odds are enormously against your finding

it. There are ten shillings over in case of emergencies. Let me have a

report by wire at Baker Street before evening. And now, Watson, it only

remains for us to find out by wire the identity of the cabman, No. 2704,

and then we will drop into one of the Bond Street picture galleries and

fill in the time until we are due at the hotel."

Chapter 5. Three Broken Threads

Sherlock Holmes had, in a very remarkable degree, the power of detaching

his mind at will. For two hours the strange business in which we had

been involved appeared to be forgotten, and he was entirely absorbed in

the pictures of the modern Belgian masters. He would talk of nothing

but art, of which he had the crudest ideas, from our leaving the gallery

until we found ourselves at the Northumberland Hotel.

"Sir Henry Baskerville is upstairs expecting you," said the clerk. "He

asked me to show you up at once when you came."

"Have you any objection to my looking at your register?" said Holmes.

"Not in the least."

The book showed that two names had been added after that of Baskerville.

One was Theophilus Johnson and family, of Newcastle; the other Mrs.

Oldmore and maid, of High Lodge, Alton.

"Surely that must be the same Johnson whom I used to know," said Holmes

to the porter. "A lawyer, is he not, gray-headed, and walks with a

limp?"

"No, sir, this is Mr. Johnson, the coal-owner, a very active gentleman,

not older than yourself."

"Surely you are mistaken about his trade?"

"No, sir! he has used this hotel for many years, and he is very well

known to us."

"Ah, that settles it. Mrs. Oldmore, too; I seem to remember the name.

Excuse my curiosity, but often in calling upon one friend one finds

another."

"She is an invalid lady, sir. Her husband was once mayor of Gloucester.

She always comes to us when she is in town."

"Thank you; I am afraid I cannot claim her acquaintance. We have

established a most important fact by these questions, Watson," he

continued in a low voice as we went upstairs together. "We know now that

the people who are so interested in our friend have not settled down

in his own hotel. That means that while they are, as we have seen, very

anxious to watch him, they are equally anxious that he should not see

them. Now, this is a most suggestive fact."

"What does it suggest?"

"It suggests--halloa, my dear fellow, what on earth is the matter?"

As we came round the top of the stairs we had run up against Sir Henry

Baskerville himself. His face was flushed with anger, and he held an old

and dusty boot in one of his hands. So furious was he that he was hardly

articulate, and when he did speak it was in a much broader and more

Western dialect than any which we had heard from him in the morning.

"Seems to me they are playing me for a sucker in this hotel," he cried.

"They'll find they've started in to monkey with the wrong man unless

they are careful. By thunder, if that chap can't find my missing boot

there will be trouble. I can take a joke with the best, Mr. Holmes, but

they've got a bit over the mark this time."

"Still looking for your boot?"

"Yes, sir, and mean to find it."

"But, surely, you said that it was a new brown boot?"

"So it was, sir. And now it's an old black one."

"What! you don't mean to say--?"

"That's just what I do mean to say. I only had three pairs in the

world--the new brown, the old black, and the patent leathers, which I am

wearing. Last night they took one of my brown ones, and today they have

sneaked one of the black. Well, have you got it? Speak out, man, and

don't stand staring!"

An agitated German waiter had appeared upon the scene.

"No, sir; I have made inquiry all over the hotel, but I can hear no word

of it."

"Well, either that boot comes back before sundown or I'll see the

manager and tell him that I go right straight out of this hotel."

"It shall be found, sir--I promise you that if you will have a little

patience it will be found."

"Mind it is, for it's the last thing of mine that I'll lose in this den

of thieves. Well, well, Mr. Holmes, you'll excuse my troubling you about

such a trifle--"

"I think it's well worth troubling about."

"Why, you look very serious over it."

"How do you explain it?"

"I just don't attempt to explain it. It seems the very maddest, queerest

thing that ever happened to me."

"The queerest perhaps--" said Holmes thoughtfully.

"What do you make of it yourself?"

"Well, I don't profess to understand it yet. This case of yours is very

complex, Sir Henry. When taken in conjunction with your uncle's death

I am not sure that of all the five hundred cases of capital importance

which I have handled there is one which cuts so deep. But we hold

several threads in our hands, and the odds are that one or other of them

guides us to the truth. We may waste time in following the wrong one,

but sooner or later we must come upon the right."

We had a pleasant luncheon in which little was said of the business

which had brought us together. It was in the private sitting-room to

which we afterwards repaired that Holmes asked Baskerville what were his

intentions.

"To go to Baskerville Hall."

"And when?"

"At the end of the week."

"On the whole," said Holmes, "I think that your decision is a wise one.

I have ample evidence that you are being dogged in London, and amid the

millions of this great city it is difficult to discover who these people

are or what their object can be. If their intentions are evil they might

do you a mischief, and we should be powerless to prevent it. You did not

know, Dr. Mortimer, that you were followed this morning from my house?"

Dr. Mortimer started violently. "Followed! By whom?"

"That, unfortunately, is what I cannot tell you. Have you among your

neighbours or acquaintances on Dartmoor any man with a black, full

beard?"

"No--or, let me see--why, yes. Barrymore, Sir Charles's butler, is a man

with a full, black beard."

"Ha! Where is Barrymore?"

"He is in charge of the Hall."

"We had best ascertain if he is really there, or if by any possibility

he might be in London."

"How can you do that?"

"Give me a telegraph form. 'Is all ready for Sir Henry?' That will

do. Address to Mr. Barrymore, Baskerville Hall. What is the nearest

telegraph-office? Grimpen. Very good, we will send a second wire to the

postmaster, Grimpen: 'Telegram to Mr. Barrymore to be delivered into

his own hand. If absent, please return wire to Sir Henry Baskerville,

Northumberland Hotel.' That should let us know before evening whether

Barrymore is at his post in Devonshire or not."

"That's so," said Baskerville. "By the way, Dr. Mortimer, who is this

Barrymore, anyhow?"

"He is the son of the old caretaker, who is dead. They have looked after

the Hall for four generations now. So far as I know, he and his wife are

as respectable a couple as any in the county."

"At the same time," said Baskerville, "it's clear enough that so long as

there are none of the family at the Hall these people have a mighty fine

home and nothing to do."

"That is true."

"Did Barrymore profit at all by Sir Charles's will?" asked Holmes.

"He and his wife had five hundred pounds each."

"Ha! Did they know that they would receive this?"

"Yes; Sir Charles was very fond of talking about the provisions of his

will."

"That is very interesting."

"I hope," said Dr. Mortimer, "that you do not look with suspicious eyes

upon everyone who received a legacy from Sir Charles, for I also had a

thousand pounds left to me."

"Indeed! And anyone else?"

"There were many insignificant sums to individuals, and a large number

of public charities. The residue all went to Sir Henry."

"And how much was the residue?"

"Seven hundred and forty thousand pounds."

Holmes raised his eyebrows in surprise. "I had no idea that so gigantic

a sum was involved," said he.

"Sir Charles had the reputation of being rich, but we did not know how

very rich he was until we came to examine his securities. The total

value of the estate was close on to a million."

"Dear me! It is a stake for which a man might well play a desperate

game. And one more question, Dr. Mortimer. Supposing that anything

happened to our young friend here--you will forgive the unpleasant

hypothesis!--who would inherit the estate?"

"Since Rodger Baskerville, Sir Charles's younger brother died unmarried,

the estate would descend to the Desmonds, who are distant cousins. James

Desmond is an elderly clergyman in Westmoreland."

"Thank you. These details are all of great interest. Have you met Mr.

James Desmond?"

"Yes; he once came down to visit Sir Charles. He is a man of venerable

appearance and of saintly life. I remember that he refused to accept any

settlement from Sir Charles, though he pressed it upon him."

"And this man of simple tastes would be the heir to Sir Charles's

thousands."

"He would be the heir to the estate because that is entailed. He would

also be the heir to the money unless it were willed otherwise by the

present owner, who can, of course, do what he likes with it."

"And have you made your will, Sir Henry?"

"No, Mr. Holmes, I have not. I've had no time, for it was only yesterday

that I learned how matters stood. But in any case I feel that the money

should go with the title and estate. That was my poor uncle's idea. How

is the owner going to restore the glories of the Baskervilles if he has

not money enough to keep up the property? House, land, and dollars must

go together."

"Quite so. Well, Sir Henry, I am of one mind with you as to the

advisability of your going down to Devonshire without delay. There is

only one provision which I must make. You certainly must not go alone."

"Dr. Mortimer returns with me."

"But Dr. Mortimer has his practice to attend to, and his house is miles

away from yours. With all the goodwill in the world he may be unable to

help you. No, Sir Henry, you must take with you someone, a trusty man,

who will be always by your side."

"Is it possible that you could come yourself, Mr. Holmes?"

"If matters came to a crisis I should endeavour to be present in person;

but you can understand that, with my extensive consulting practice

and with the constant appeals which reach me from many quarters, it is

impossible for me to be absent from London for an indefinite time. At

the present instant one of the most revered names in England is being

besmirched by a blackmailer, and only I can stop a disastrous scandal.

You will see how impossible it is for me to go to Dartmoor."

"Whom would you recommend, then?"

Holmes laid his hand upon my arm. "If my friend would undertake it there

is no man who is better worth having at your side when you are in a

tight place. No one can say so more confidently than I."

The proposition took me completely by surprise, but before I had time to

answer, Baskerville seized me by the hand and wrung it heartily.

"Well, now, that is real kind of you, Dr. Watson," said he. "You see how

it is with me, and you know just as much about the matter as I do. If

you will come down to Baskerville Hall and see me through I'll never

forget it."

The promise of adventure had always a fascination for me, and I was

complimented by the words of Holmes and by the eagerness with which the

baronet hailed me as a companion.

"I will come, with pleasure," said I. "I do not know how I could employ

my time better."

"And you will report very carefully to me," said Holmes. "When a crisis

comes, as it will do, I will direct how you shall act. I suppose that by

Saturday all might be ready?"

"Would that suit Dr. Watson?"

"Perfectly."

"Then on Saturday, unless you hear to the contrary, we shall meet at the

ten-thirty train from Paddington."

We had risen to depart when Baskerville gave a cry, of triumph, and

diving into one of the corners of the room he drew a brown boot from

under a cabinet.

"My missing boot!" he cried.

"May all our difficulties vanish as easily!" said Sherlock Holmes.

"But it is a very singular thing," Dr. Mortimer remarked. "I searched

this room carefully before lunch."

"And so did I," said Baskerville. "Every inch of it."

"There was certainly no boot in it then."

"In that case the waiter must have placed it there while we were

lunching."

The German was sent for but professed to know nothing of the matter,

nor could any inquiry clear it up. Another item had been added to that

constant and apparently purposeless series of small mysteries which had

succeeded each other so rapidly. Setting aside the whole grim story of

Sir Charles's death, we had a line of inexplicable incidents all within

the limits of two days, which included the receipt of the printed

letter, the black-bearded spy in the hansom, the loss of the new brown

boot, the loss of the old black boot, and now the return of the new

brown boot. Holmes sat in silence in the cab as we drove back to Baker

Street, and I knew from his drawn brows and keen face that his mind,

like my own, was busy in endeavouring to frame some scheme into which

all these strange and apparently disconnected episodes could be fitted.

All afternoon and late into the evening he sat lost in tobacco and

thought.

Just before dinner two telegrams were handed in. The first ran:

Have just heard that Barrymore is at the Hall. BASKERVILLE.

The second:

Visited twenty-three hotels as directed, but sorry, to report unable to

trace cut sheet of Times. CARTWRIGHT.

"There go two of my threads, Watson. There is nothing more stimulating

than a case where everything goes against you. We must cast round for

another scent."

"We have still the cabman who drove the spy."

"Exactly. I have wired to get his name and address from the Official

Registry. I should not be surprised if this were an answer to my

question."

The ring at the bell proved to be something even more satisfactory

than an answer, however, for the door opened and a rough-looking fellow

entered who was evidently the man himself.

"I got a message from the head office that a gent at this address had

been inquiring for No. 2704," said he. "I've driven my cab this seven

years and never a word of complaint. I came here straight from the Yard

to ask you to your face what you had against me."

"I have nothing in the world against you, my good man," said Holmes.

"On the contrary, I have half a sovereign for you if you will give me a

clear answer to my questions."

"Well, I've had a good day and no mistake," said the cabman with a grin.

"What was it you wanted to ask, sir?"

"First of all your name and address, in case I want you again."

"John Clayton, 3 Turpey Street, the Borough. My cab is out of Shipley's

Yard, near Waterloo Station."

Sherlock Holmes made a note of it.

"Now, Clayton, tell me all about the fare who came and watched this

house at ten o'clock this morning and afterwards followed the two

gentlemen down Regent Street."

The man looked surprised and a little embarrassed. "Why, there's no good

my telling you things, for you seem to know as much as I do already,"

said he. "The truth is that the gentleman told me that he was a

detective and that I was to say nothing about him to anyone."

"My good fellow; this is a very serious business, and you may find

yourself in a pretty bad position if you try to hide anything from me.

You say that your fare told you that he was a detective?"

"Yes, he did."

"When did he say this?"

"When he left me."

"Did he say anything more?"

"He mentioned his name."

Holmes cast a swift glance of triumph at me. "Oh, he mentioned his name,

did he? That was imprudent. What was the name that he mentioned?"

"His name," said the cabman, "was Mr. Sherlock Holmes."

Never have I seen my friend more completely taken aback than by the

cabman's reply. For an instant he sat in silent amazement. Then he burst

into a hearty laugh.

"A touch, Watson--an undeniable touch!" said he. "I feel a foil as quick

and supple as my own. He got home upon me very prettily that time. So

his name was Sherlock Holmes, was it?"

"Yes, sir, that was the gentleman's name."

"Excellent! Tell me where you picked him up and all that occurred."

"He hailed me at half-past nine in Trafalgar Square. He said that he was

a detective, and he offered me two guineas if I would do exactly what he

wanted all day and ask no questions. I was glad enough to agree. First

we drove down to the Northumberland Hotel and waited there until two

gentlemen came out and took a cab from the rank. We followed their cab

until it pulled up somewhere near here."

"This very door," said Holmes.

"Well, I couldn't be sure of that, but I dare say my fare knew all about

it. We pulled up halfway down the street and waited an hour and a half.

Then the two gentlemen passed us, walking, and we followed down Baker

Street and along--"

"I know," said Holmes.

"Until we got three-quarters down Regent Street. Then my gentleman threw

up the trap, and he cried that I should drive right away to Waterloo

Station as hard as I could go. I whipped up the mare and we were there

under the ten minutes. Then he paid up his two guineas, like a good one,

and away he went into the station. Only just as he was leaving he turned

round and he said: 'It might interest you to know that you have been

driving Mr. Sherlock Holmes.' That's how I come to know the name."

"I see. And you saw no more of him?"

"Not after he went into the station."

"And how would you describe Mr. Sherlock Holmes?"

The cabman scratched his head. "Well, he wasn't altogether such an easy

gentleman to describe. I'd put him at forty years of age, and he was

of a middle height, two or three inches shorter than you, sir. He was

dressed like a toff, and he had a black beard, cut square at the end,

and a pale face. I don't know as I could say more than that."

"Colour of his eyes?"

"No, I can't say that."

"Nothing more that you can remember?"

"No, sir; nothing."

"Well, then, here is your half-sovereign. There's another one waiting

for you if you can bring any more information. Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir, and thank you!"

John Clayton departed chuckling, and Holmes turned to me with a shrug of

his shoulders and a rueful smile.

"Snap goes our third thread, and we end where we began," said he. "The

cunning rascal! He knew our number, knew that Sir Henry Baskerville had

consulted me, spotted who I was in Regent Street, conjectured that I had

got the number of the cab and would lay my hands on the driver, and so

sent back this audacious message. I tell you, Watson, this time we have

got a foeman who is worthy of our steel. I've been checkmated in London.

I can only wish you better luck in Devonshire. But I'm not easy in my

mind about it."

"About what?"

"About sending you. It's an ugly business, Watson, an ugly dangerous

business, and the more I see of it the less I like it. Yes, my dear

fellow, you may laugh, but I give you my word that I shall be very glad

to have you back safe and sound in Baker Street once more."

Chapter 6. Baskerville Hall

Sir Henry Baskerville and Dr. Mortimer were ready upon the appointed

day, and we started as arranged for Devonshire. Mr. Sherlock Holmes

drove with me to the station and gave me his last parting injunctions

and advice.

"I will not bias your mind by suggesting theories or suspicions,

Watson," said he; "I wish you simply to report facts in the fullest

possible manner to me, and you can leave me to do the theorizing."

"What sort of facts?" I asked.

"Anything which may seem to have a bearing however indirect upon the

case, and especially the relations between young Baskerville and his

neighbours or any fresh particulars concerning the death of Sir Charles.

I have made some inquiries myself in the last few days, but the results

have, I fear, been negative. One thing only appears to be certain, and

that is that Mr. James Desmond, who is the next heir, is an elderly

gentleman of a very amiable disposition, so that this persecution does

not arise from him. I really think that we may eliminate him entirely

from our calculations. There remain the people who will actually

surround Sir Henry Baskerville upon the moor."

"Would it not be well in the first place to get rid of this Barrymore

couple?"

"By no means. You could not make a greater mistake. If they are innocent

it would be a cruel injustice, and if they are guilty we should be

giving up all chance of bringing it home to them. No, no, we will

preserve them upon our list of suspects. Then there is a groom at the

Hall, if I remember right. There are two moorland farmers. There is our

friend Dr. Mortimer, whom I believe to be entirely honest, and there is

his wife, of whom we know nothing. There is this naturalist, Stapleton,

and there is his sister, who is said to be a young lady of attractions.

There is Mr. Frankland, of Lafter Hall, who is also an unknown factor,

and there are one or two other neighbours. These are the folk who must

be your very special study."

"I will do my best."

"You have arms, I suppose?"

"Yes, I thought it as well to take them."

"Most certainly. Keep your revolver near you night and day, and never

relax your precautions."

Our friends had already secured a first-class carriage and were waiting

for us upon the platform.

"No, we have no news of any kind," said Dr. Mortimer in answer to my

friend's questions. "I can swear to one thing, and that is that we

have not been shadowed during the last two days. We have never gone

out without keeping a sharp watch, and no one could have escaped our

notice."

"You have always kept together, I presume?"

"Except yesterday afternoon. I usually give up one day to pure amusement

when I come to town, so I spent it at the Museum of the College of

Surgeons."

"And I went to look at the folk in the park," said Baskerville.

"But we had no trouble of any kind."

"It was imprudent, all the same," said Holmes, shaking his head and

looking very grave. "I beg, Sir Henry, that you will not go about alone.

Some great misfortune will befall you if you do. Did you get your other

boot?"

"No, sir, it is gone forever."

"Indeed. That is very interesting. Well, good-bye," he added as the

train began to glide down the platform. "Bear in mind, Sir Henry, one of

the phrases in that queer old legend which Dr. Mortimer has read to us,

and avoid the moor in those hours of darkness when the powers of evil

are exalted."

I looked back at the platform when we had left it far behind and saw the

tall, austere figure of Holmes standing motionless and gazing after us.

The journey was a swift and pleasant one, and I spent it in making the

more intimate acquaintance of my two companions and in playing with

Dr. Mortimer's spaniel. In a very few hours the brown earth had

become ruddy, the brick had changed to granite, and red cows grazed in

well-hedged fields where the lush grasses and more luxuriant vegetation

spoke of a richer, if a damper, climate. Young Baskerville stared

eagerly out of the window and cried aloud with delight as he recognized

the familiar features of the Devon scenery.

"I've been over a good part of the world since I left it, Dr. Watson,"

said he; "but I have never seen a place to compare with it."

"I never saw a Devonshire man who did not swear by his county," I

remarked.

"It depends upon the breed of men quite as much as on the county," said

Dr. Mortimer. "A glance at our friend here reveals the rounded head of

the Celt, which carries inside it the Celtic enthusiasm and power

of attachment. Poor Sir Charles's head was of a very rare type, half

Gaelic, half Ivernian in its characteristics. But you were very young

when you last saw Baskerville Hall, were you not?"

"I was a boy in my teens at the time of my father's death and had never

seen the Hall, for he lived in a little cottage on the South Coast.

Thence I went straight to a friend in America. I tell you it is all as

new to me as it is to Dr. Watson, and I'm as keen as possible to see the

moor."

"Are you? Then your wish is easily granted, for there is your first

sight of the moor," said Dr. Mortimer, pointing out of the carriage

window.

Over the green squares of the fields and the low curve of a wood there

rose in the distance a gray, melancholy hill, with a strange jagged

summit, dim and vague in the distance, like some fantastic landscape in

a dream. Baskerville sat for a long time, his eyes fixed upon it, and I

read upon his eager face how much it meant to him, this first sight of

that strange spot where the men of his blood had held sway so long

and left their mark so deep. There he sat, with his tweed suit and his

American accent, in the corner of a prosaic railway-carriage, and yet as

I looked at his dark and expressive face I felt more than ever how

true a descendant he was of that long line of high-blooded, fiery,

and masterful men. There were pride, valour, and strength in his thick

brows, his sensitive nostrils, and his large hazel eyes. If on that

forbidding moor a difficult and dangerous quest should lie before us,

this was at least a comrade for whom one might venture to take a risk

with the certainty that he would bravely share it.

The train pulled up at a small wayside station and we all descended.

Outside, beyond the low, white fence, a wagonette with a pair of cobs

was waiting. Our coming was evidently a great event, for station-master

and porters clustered round us to carry out our luggage. It was a sweet,

simple country spot, but I was surprised to observe that by the gate

there stood two soldierly men in dark uniforms who leaned upon their

short rifles and glanced keenly at us as we passed. The coachman, a

hard-faced, gnarled little fellow, saluted Sir Henry Baskerville, and in

a few minutes we were flying swiftly down the broad, white road. Rolling

pasture lands curved upward on either side of us, and old gabled houses

peeped out from amid the thick green foliage, but behind the peaceful

and sunlit countryside there rose ever, dark against the evening sky,

the long, gloomy curve of the moor, broken by the jagged and sinister

hills.

The wagonette swung round into a side road, and we curved upward through

deep lanes worn by centuries of wheels, high banks on either side, heavy

with dripping moss and fleshy hart's-tongue ferns. Bronzing bracken and

mottled bramble gleamed in the light of the sinking sun. Still steadily

rising, we passed over a narrow granite bridge and skirted a noisy

stream which gushed swiftly down, foaming and roaring amid the gray

boulders. Both road and stream wound up through a valley dense with

scrub oak and fir. At every turn Baskerville gave an exclamation of

delight, looking eagerly about him and asking countless questions. To

his eyes all seemed beautiful, but to me a tinge of melancholy lay upon

the countryside, which bore so clearly the mark of the waning year.

Yellow leaves carpeted the lanes and fluttered down upon us as we

passed. The rattle of our wheels died away as we drove through drifts of

rotting vegetation--sad gifts, as it seemed to me, for Nature to throw

before the carriage of the returning heir of the Baskervilles.

"Halloa!" cried Dr. Mortimer, "what is this?"

A steep curve of heath-clad land, an outlying spur of the moor, lay in

front of us. On the summit, hard and clear like an equestrian statue

upon its pedestal, was a mounted soldier, dark and stern, his rifle

poised ready over his forearm. He was watching the road along which we

travelled.

"What is this, Perkins?" asked Dr. Mortimer.

Our driver half turned in his seat. "There's a convict escaped from

Princetown, sir. He's been out three days now, and the warders watch

every road and every station, but they've had no sight of him yet. The

farmers about here don't like it, sir, and that's a fact."

"Well, I understand that they get five pounds if they can give

information."

"Yes, sir, but the chance of five pounds is but a poor thing compared

to the chance of having your throat cut. You see, it isn't like any

ordinary convict. This is a man that would stick at nothing."

"Who is he, then?"

"It is Selden, the Notting Hill murderer."

I remembered the case well, for it was one in which Holmes had taken an

interest on account of the peculiar ferocity of the crime and the

wanton brutality which had marked all the actions of the assassin. The

commutation of his death sentence had been due to some doubts as to his

complete sanity, so atrocious was his conduct. Our wagonette had topped

a rise and in front of us rose the huge expanse of the moor, mottled

with gnarled and craggy cairns and tors. A cold wind swept down from

it and set us shivering. Somewhere there, on that desolate plain, was

lurking this fiendish man, hiding in a burrow like a wild beast, his

heart full of malignancy against the whole race which had cast him out.

It needed but this to complete the grim suggestiveness of the barren

waste, the chilling wind, and the darkling sky. Even Baskerville fell

silent and pulled his overcoat more closely around him.

We had left the fertile country behind and beneath us. We looked back on

it now, the slanting rays of a low sun turning the streams to threads of

gold and glowing on the red earth new turned by the plough and the broad

tangle of the woodlands. The road in front of us grew bleaker and wilder

over huge russet and olive slopes, sprinkled with giant boulders. Now

and then we passed a moorland cottage, walled and roofed with stone,

with no creeper to break its harsh outline. Suddenly we looked down into

a cuplike depression, patched with stunted oaks and firs which had been

twisted and bent by the fury of years of storm. Two high, narrow towers

rose over the trees. The driver pointed with his whip.

"Baskerville Hall," said he.

Its master had risen and was staring with flushed cheeks and shining

eyes. A few minutes later we had reached the lodge-gates, a maze of

fantastic tracery in wrought iron, with weather-bitten pillars on either

side, blotched with lichens, and surmounted by the boars' heads of the

Baskervilles. The lodge was a ruin of black granite and bared ribs of

rafters, but facing it was a new building, half constructed, the first

fruit of Sir Charles's South African gold.

Through the gateway we passed into the avenue, where the wheels were

again hushed amid the leaves, and the old trees shot their branches in a

sombre tunnel over our heads. Baskerville shuddered as he looked up

the long, dark drive to where the house glimmered like a ghost at the

farther end.

"Was it here?" he asked in a low voice.

"No, no, the yew alley is on the other side."

The young heir glanced round with a gloomy face.

"It's no wonder my uncle felt as if trouble were coming on him in such a

place as this," said he. "It's enough to scare any man. I'll have a row

of electric lamps up here inside of six months, and you won't know it

again, with a thousand candle-power Swan and Edison right here in front

of the hall door."

The avenue opened into a broad expanse of turf, and the house lay before

us. In the fading light I could see that the centre was a heavy block

of building from which a porch projected. The whole front was draped in

ivy, with a patch clipped bare here and there where a window or a coat

of arms broke through the dark veil. From this central block rose the

twin towers, ancient, crenelated, and pierced with many loopholes. To

right and left of the turrets were more modern wings of black granite.

A dull light shone through heavy mullioned windows, and from the high

chimneys which rose from the steep, high-angled roof there sprang a

single black column of smoke.

"Welcome, Sir Henry! Welcome to Baskerville Hall!"

A tall man had stepped from the shadow of the porch to open the door of

the wagonette. The figure of a woman was silhouetted against the yellow

light of the hall. She came out and helped the man to hand down our

bags.

"You don't mind my driving straight home, Sir Henry?" said Dr. Mortimer.

"My wife is expecting me."

"Surely you will stay and have some dinner?"

"No, I must go. I shall probably find some work awaiting me. I would

stay to show you over the house, but Barrymore will be a better guide

than I. Good-bye, and never hesitate night or day to send for me if I

can be of service."

The wheels died away down the drive while Sir Henry and I turned

into the hall, and the door clanged heavily behind us. It was a fine

apartment in which we found ourselves, large, lofty, and heavily

raftered with huge baulks of age-blackened oak. In the great

old-fashioned fireplace behind the high iron dogs a log-fire crackled

and snapped. Sir Henry and I held out our hands to it, for we were numb

from our long drive. Then we gazed round us at the high, thin window

of old stained glass, the oak panelling, the stags' heads, the coats

of arms upon the walls, all dim and sombre in the subdued light of the

central lamp.

"It's just as I imagined it," said Sir Henry. "Is it not the very

picture of an old family home? To think that this should be the same

hall in which for five hundred years my people have lived. It strikes me

solemn to think of it."

I saw his dark face lit up with a boyish enthusiasm as he gazed about

him. The light beat upon him where he stood, but long shadows trailed

down the walls and hung like a black canopy above him. Barrymore had

returned from taking our luggage to our rooms. He stood in front of

us now with the subdued manner of a well-trained servant. He was a

remarkable-looking man, tall, handsome, with a square black beard and

pale, distinguished features.

"Would you wish dinner to be served at once, sir?"

"Is it ready?"

"In a very few minutes, sir. You will find hot water in your rooms. My

wife and I will be happy, Sir Henry, to stay with you until you have

made your fresh arrangements, but you will understand that under the new

conditions this house will require a considerable staff."

"What new conditions?"

"I only meant, sir, that Sir Charles led a very retired life, and we

were able to look after his wants. You would, naturally, wish to have

more company, and so you will need changes in your household."

"Do you mean that your wife and you wish to leave?"

"Only when it is quite convenient to you, sir."

"But your family have been with us for several generations, have they

not? I should be sorry to begin my life here by breaking an old family

connection."

I seemed to discern some signs of emotion upon the butler's white face.

"I feel that also, sir, and so does my wife. But to tell the truth, sir,

we were both very much attached to Sir Charles, and his death gave us

a shock and made these surroundings very painful to us. I fear that we

shall never again be easy in our minds at Baskerville Hall."

"But what do you intend to do?"

"I have no doubt, sir, that we shall succeed in establishing ourselves

in some business. Sir Charles's generosity has given us the means to do

so. And now, sir, perhaps I had best show you to your rooms."

A square balustraded gallery ran round the top of the old hall,

approached by a double stair. From this central point two long corridors

extended the whole length of the building, from which all the bedrooms

opened. My own was in the same wing as Baskerville's and almost next

door to it. These rooms appeared to be much more modern than the

central part of the house, and the bright paper and numerous candles

did something to remove the sombre impression which our arrival had left

upon my mind.

But the dining-room which opened out of the hall was a place of shadow

and gloom. It was a long chamber with a step separating the dais where

the family sat from the lower portion reserved for their dependents.

At one end a minstrel's gallery overlooked it. Black beams shot across

above our heads, with a smoke-darkened ceiling beyond them. With rows of

flaring torches to light it up, and the colour and rude hilarity of

an old-time banquet, it might have softened; but now, when two

black-clothed gentlemen sat in the little circle of light thrown by a

shaded lamp, one's voice became hushed and one's spirit subdued. A

dim line of ancestors, in every variety of dress, from the Elizabethan

knight to the buck of the Regency, stared down upon us and daunted us by

their silent company. We talked little, and I for one was glad when the

meal was over and we were able to retire into the modern billiard-room

and smoke a cigarette.

"My word, it isn't a very cheerful place," said Sir Henry. "I suppose

one can tone down to it, but I feel a bit out of the picture at present.

I don't wonder that my uncle got a little jumpy if he lived all alone

in such a house as this. However, if it suits you, we will retire early

tonight, and perhaps things may seem more cheerful in the morning."

I drew aside my curtains before I went to bed and looked out from my

window. It opened upon the grassy space which lay in front of the hall

door. Beyond, two copses of trees moaned and swung in a rising wind. A

half moon broke through the rifts of racing clouds. In its cold light I

saw beyond the trees a broken fringe of rocks, and the long, low curve

of the melancholy moor. I closed the curtain, feeling that my last

impression was in keeping with the rest.

And yet it was not quite the last. I found myself weary and yet wakeful,

tossing restlessly from side to side, seeking for the sleep which would

not come. Far away a chiming clock struck out the quarters of the

hours, but otherwise a deathly silence lay upon the old house. And then

suddenly, in the very dead of the night, there came a sound to my

ears, clear, resonant, and unmistakable. It was the sob of a woman, the

muffled, strangling gasp of one who is torn by an uncontrollable sorrow.

I sat up in bed and listened intently. The noise could not have been

far away and was certainly in the house. For half an hour I waited with

every nerve on the alert, but there came no other sound save the chiming

clock and the rustle of the ivy on the wall.

Chapter 7. The Stapletons of Merripit House

The fresh beauty of the following morning did something to efface from

our minds the grim and gray impression which had been left upon both of

us by our first experience of Baskerville Hall. As Sir Henry and I sat

at breakfast the sunlight flooded in through the high mullioned windows,

throwing watery patches of colour from the coats of arms which covered

them. The dark panelling glowed like bronze in the golden rays, and it

was hard to realize that this was indeed the chamber which had struck

such a gloom into our souls upon the evening before.

"I guess it is ourselves and not the house that we have to blame!" said

the baronet. "We were tired with our journey and chilled by our drive,

so we took a gray view of the place. Now we are fresh and well, so it is

all cheerful once more."

"And yet it was not entirely a question of imagination," I answered.

"Did you, for example, happen to hear someone, a woman I think, sobbing

in the night?"

"That is curious, for I did when I was half asleep fancy that I heard

something of the sort. I waited quite a time, but there was no more of

it, so I concluded that it was all a dream."

"I heard it distinctly, and I am sure that it was really the sob of a

woman."

"We must ask about this right away." He rang the bell and asked

Barrymore whether he could account for our experience. It seemed to me

that the pallid features of the butler turned a shade paler still as he

listened to his master's question.

"There are only two women in the house, Sir Henry," he answered. "One is

the scullery-maid, who sleeps in the other wing. The other is my wife,

and I can answer for it that the sound could not have come from her."

And yet he lied as he said it, for it chanced that after breakfast I met

Mrs. Barrymore in the long corridor with the sun full upon her face. She

was a large, impassive, heavy-featured woman with a stern set expression

of mouth. But her telltale eyes were red and glanced at me from between

swollen lids. It was she, then, who wept in the night, and if she did so

her husband must know it. Yet he had taken the obvious risk of discovery

in declaring that it was not so. Why had he done this? And why did she

weep so bitterly? Already round this pale-faced, handsome, black-bearded

man there was gathering an atmosphere of mystery and of gloom. It was he

who had been the first to discover the body of Sir Charles, and we had

only his word for all the circumstances which led up to the old man's

death. Was it possible that it was Barrymore, after all, whom we had

seen in the cab in Regent Street? The beard might well have been the

same. The cabman had described a somewhat shorter man, but such an

impression might easily have been erroneous. How could I settle the

point forever? Obviously the first thing to do was to see the Grimpen

postmaster and find whether the test telegram had really been placed in

Barrymore's own hands. Be the answer what it might, I should at least

have something to report to Sherlock Holmes.

Sir Henry had numerous papers to examine after breakfast, so that the

time was propitious for my excursion. It was a pleasant walk of four

miles along the edge of the moor, leading me at last to a small gray

hamlet, in which two larger buildings, which proved to be the inn and

the house of Dr. Mortimer, stood high above the rest. The postmaster,

who was also the village grocer, had a clear recollection of the

telegram.

"Certainly, sir," said he, "I had the telegram delivered to Mr.

Barrymore exactly as directed."

"Who delivered it?"

"My boy here. James, you delivered that telegram to Mr. Barrymore at the

Hall last week, did you not?"

"Yes, father, I delivered it."

"Into his own hands?" I asked.

"Well, he was up in the loft at the time, so that I could not put it

into his own hands, but I gave it into Mrs. Barrymore's hands, and she

promised to deliver it at once."

"Did you see Mr. Barrymore?"

"No, sir; I tell you he was in the loft."

"If you didn't see him, how do you know he was in the loft?"

"Well, surely his own wife ought to know where he is," said the

postmaster testily. "Didn't he get the telegram? If there is any mistake

it is for Mr. Barrymore himself to complain."

It seemed hopeless to pursue the inquiry any farther, but it was clear

that in spite of Holmes's ruse we had no proof that Barrymore had not

been in London all the time. Suppose that it were so--suppose that the

same man had been the last who had seen Sir Charles alive, and the first

to dog the new heir when he returned to England. What then? Was he the

agent of others or had he some sinister design of his own? What interest

could he have in persecuting the Baskerville family? I thought of the

strange warning clipped out of the leading article of the Times. Was

that his work or was it possibly the doing of someone who was bent upon

counteracting his schemes? The only conceivable motive was that which

had been suggested by Sir Henry, that if the family could be scared away

a comfortable and permanent home would be secured for the Barrymores.

But surely such an explanation as that would be quite inadequate to

account for the deep and subtle scheming which seemed to be weaving an

invisible net round the young baronet. Holmes himself had said that

no more complex case had come to him in all the long series of his

sensational investigations. I prayed, as I walked back along the gray,

lonely road, that my friend might soon be freed from his preoccupations

and able to come down to take this heavy burden of responsibility from

my shoulders.

Suddenly my thoughts were interrupted by the sound of running feet

behind me and by a voice which called me by name. I turned, expecting to

see Dr. Mortimer, but to my surprise it was a stranger who was pursuing

me. He was a small, slim, clean-shaven, prim-faced man, flaxen-haired

and leanjawed, between thirty and forty years of age, dressed in a gray

suit and wearing a straw hat. A tin box for botanical specimens hung

over his shoulder and he carried a green butterfly-net in one of his

hands.

"You will, I am sure, excuse my presumption, Dr. Watson," said he as he

came panting up to where I stood. "Here on the moor we are homely folk

and do not wait for formal introductions. You may possibly have heard

my name from our mutual friend, Mortimer. I am Stapleton, of Merripit

House."

"Your net and box would have told me as much," said I, "for I knew that

Mr. Stapleton was a naturalist. But how did you know me?"

"I have been calling on Mortimer, and he pointed you out to me from

the window of his surgery as you passed. As our road lay the same way I

thought that I would overtake you and introduce myself. I trust that Sir

Henry is none the worse for his journey?"

"He is very well, thank you."

"We were all rather afraid that after the sad death of Sir Charles the

new baronet might refuse to live here. It is asking much of a wealthy

man to come down and bury himself in a place of this kind, but I need

not tell you that it means a very great deal to the countryside. Sir

Henry has, I suppose, no superstitious fears in the matter?"

"I do not think that it is likely."

"Of course you know the legend of the fiend dog which haunts the

family?"

"I have heard it."

"It is extraordinary how credulous the peasants are about here! Any

number of them are ready to swear that they have seen such a creature

upon the moor." He spoke with a smile, but I seemed to read in his eyes

that he took the matter more seriously. "The story took a great hold

upon the imagination of Sir Charles, and I have no doubt that it led to

his tragic end."

"But how?"

"His nerves were so worked up that the appearance of any dog might have

had a fatal effect upon his diseased heart. I fancy that he really

did see something of the kind upon that last night in the yew alley. I

feared that some disaster might occur, for I was very fond of the old

man, and I knew that his heart was weak."

"How did you know that?"

"My friend Mortimer told me."

"You think, then, that some dog pursued Sir Charles, and that he died of

fright in consequence?"

"Have you any better explanation?"

"I have not come to any conclusion."

"Has Mr. Sherlock Holmes?"

The words took away my breath for an instant but a glance at the placid

face and steadfast eyes of my companion showed that no surprise was

intended.

"It is useless for us to pretend that we do not know you, Dr. Watson,"

said he. "The records of your detective have reached us here, and you

could not celebrate him without being known yourself. When Mortimer told

me your name he could not deny your identity. If you are here, then it

follows that Mr. Sherlock Holmes is interesting himself in the matter,

and I am naturally curious to know what view he may take."

"I am afraid that I cannot answer that question."

"May I ask if he is going to honour us with a visit himself?"

"He cannot leave town at present. He has other cases which engage his

attention."

"What a pity! He might throw some light on that which is so dark to us.

But as to your own researches, if there is any possible way in which I

can be of service to you I trust that you will command me. If I had

any indication of the nature of your suspicions or how you propose to

investigate the case, I might perhaps even now give you some aid or

advice."

"I assure you that I am simply here upon a visit to my friend, Sir

Henry, and that I need no help of any kind."

"Excellent!" said Stapleton. "You are perfectly right to be wary and

discreet. I am justly reproved for what I feel was an unjustifiable

intrusion, and I promise you that I will not mention the matter again."

We had come to a point where a narrow grassy path struck off from the

road and wound away across the moor. A steep, boulder-sprinkled hill lay

upon the right which had in bygone days been cut into a granite quarry.

The face which was turned towards us formed a dark cliff, with ferns and

brambles growing in its niches. From over a distant rise there floated a

gray plume of smoke.

"A moderate walk along this moor-path brings us to Merripit House,"

said he. "Perhaps you will spare an hour that I may have the pleasure of

introducing you to my sister."

My first thought was that I should be by Sir Henry's side. But then I

remembered the pile of papers and bills with which his study table was

littered. It was certain that I could not help with those. And Holmes

had expressly said that I should study the neighbours upon the moor. I

accepted Stapleton's invitation, and we turned together down the path.

"It is a wonderful place, the moor," said he, looking round over the

undulating downs, long green rollers, with crests of jagged granite

foaming up into fantastic surges. "You never tire of the moor. You

cannot think the wonderful secrets which it contains. It is so vast, and

so barren, and so mysterious."

"You know it well, then?"

"I have only been here two years. The residents would call me a

newcomer. We came shortly after Sir Charles settled. But my tastes led

me to explore every part of the country round, and I should think that

there are few men who know it better than I do."

"Is it hard to know?"

"Very hard. You see, for example, this great plain to the north here

with the queer hills breaking out of it. Do you observe anything

remarkable about that?"

"It would be a rare place for a gallop."

"You would naturally think so and the thought has cost several their

lives before now. You notice those bright green spots scattered thickly

over it?"

"Yes, they seem more fertile than the rest."

Stapleton laughed. "That is the great Grimpen Mire," said he. "A false

step yonder means death to man or beast. Only yesterday I saw one of the

moor ponies wander into it. He never came out. I saw his head for quite

a long time craning out of the bog-hole, but it sucked him down at last.

Even in dry seasons it is a danger to cross it, but after these autumn

rains it is an awful place. And yet I can find my way to the very heart

of it and return alive. By George, there is another of those miserable

ponies!"

Something brown was rolling and tossing among the green sedges. Then a

long, agonized, writhing neck shot upward and a dreadful cry echoed

over the moor. It turned me cold with horror, but my companion's nerves

seemed to be stronger than mine.

"It's gone!" said he. "The mire has him. Two in two days, and many more,

perhaps, for they get in the way of going there in the dry weather and

never know the difference until the mire has them in its clutches. It's

a bad place, the great Grimpen Mire."

"And you say you can penetrate it?"

"Yes, there are one or two paths which a very active man can take. I

have found them out."

"But why should you wish to go into so horrible a place?"

"Well, you see the hills beyond? They are really islands cut off on all

sides by the impassable mire, which has crawled round them in the course

of years. That is where the rare plants and the butterflies are, if you

have the wit to reach them."

"I shall try my luck some day."

He looked at me with a surprised face. "For God's sake put such an idea

out of your mind," said he. "Your blood would be upon my head. I assure

you that there would not be the least chance of your coming back alive.

It is only by remembering certain complex landmarks that I am able to do

it."

"Halloa!" I cried. "What is that?"

A long, low moan, indescribably sad, swept over the moor. It filled the

whole air, and yet it was impossible to say whence it came. From a

dull murmur it swelled into a deep roar, and then sank back into a

melancholy, throbbing murmur once again. Stapleton looked at me with a

curious expression in his face.

"Queer place, the moor!" said he.

"But what is it?"

"The peasants say it is the Hound of the Baskervilles calling for its

prey. I've heard it once or twice before, but never quite so loud."

I looked round, with a chill of fear in my heart, at the huge swelling

plain, mottled with the green patches of rushes. Nothing stirred over

the vast expanse save a pair of ravens, which croaked loudly from a tor

behind us.

"You are an educated man. You don't believe such nonsense as that?" said

I. "What do you think is the cause of so strange a sound?"

"Bogs make queer noises sometimes. It's the mud settling, or the water

rising, or something."

"No, no, that was a living voice."

"Well, perhaps it was. Did you ever hear a bittern booming?"

"No, I never did."

"It's a very rare bird--practically extinct--in England now, but all

things are possible upon the moor. Yes, I should not be surprised to

learn that what we have heard is the cry of the last of the bitterns."

"It's the weirdest, strangest thing that ever I heard in my life."

"Yes, it's rather an uncanny place altogether. Look at the hillside

yonder. What do you make of those?"

The whole steep slope was covered with gray circular rings of stone, a

score of them at least.

"What are they? Sheep-pens?"

"No, they are the homes of our worthy ancestors. Prehistoric man lived

thickly on the moor, and as no one in particular has lived there since,

we find all his little arrangements exactly as he left them. These are

his wigwams with the roofs off. You can even see his hearth and his

couch if you have the curiosity to go inside.

"But it is quite a town. When was it inhabited?"

"Neolithic man--no date."

"What did he do?"

"He grazed his cattle on these slopes, and he learned to dig for tin

when the bronze sword began to supersede the stone axe. Look at the

great trench in the opposite hill. That is his mark. Yes, you will find

some very singular points about the moor, Dr. Watson. Oh, excuse me an

instant! It is surely Cyclopides."

A small fly or moth had fluttered across our path, and in an instant

Stapleton was rushing with extraordinary energy and speed in pursuit of

it. To my dismay the creature flew straight for the great mire, and my

acquaintance never paused for an instant, bounding from tuft to tuft

behind it, his green net waving in the air. His gray clothes and jerky,

zigzag, irregular progress made him not unlike some huge moth himself.

I was standing watching his pursuit with a mixture of admiration for his

extraordinary activity and fear lest he should lose his footing in the

treacherous mire, when I heard the sound of steps and, turning round,

found a woman near me upon the path. She had come from the direction in

which the plume of smoke indicated the position of Merripit House, but

the dip of the moor had hid her until she was quite close.

I could not doubt that this was the Miss Stapleton of whom I had

been told, since ladies of any sort must be few upon the moor, and I

remembered that I had heard someone describe her as being a beauty. The

woman who approached me was certainly that, and of a most uncommon type.

There could not have been a greater contrast between brother and sister,

for Stapleton was neutral tinted, with light hair and gray eyes, while

she was darker than any brunette whom I have seen in England--slim,

elegant, and tall. She had a proud, finely cut face, so regular that it

might have seemed impassive were it not for the sensitive mouth and the

beautiful dark, eager eyes. With her perfect figure and elegant dress

she was, indeed, a strange apparition upon a lonely moorland path. Her

eyes were on her brother as I turned, and then she quickened her pace

towards me. I had raised my hat and was about to make some explanatory

remark when her own words turned all my thoughts into a new channel.

"Go back!" she said. "Go straight back to London, instantly."

I could only stare at her in stupid surprise. Her eyes blazed at me, and

she tapped the ground impatiently with her foot.

"Why should I go back?" I asked.

"I cannot explain." She spoke in a low, eager voice, with a curious lisp

in her utterance. "But for God's sake do what I ask you. Go back and

never set foot upon the moor again."

"But I have only just come."

"Man, man!" she cried. "Can you not tell when a warning is for your own

good? Go back to London! Start tonight! Get away from this place at all

costs! Hush, my brother is coming! Not a word of what I have said. Would

you mind getting that orchid for me among the mare's-tails yonder? We

are very rich in orchids on the moor, though, of course, you are rather

late to see the beauties of the place."

Stapleton had abandoned the chase and came back to us breathing hard and

flushed with his exertions.

"Halloa, Beryl!" said he, and it seemed to me that the tone of his

greeting was not altogether a cordial one.

"Well, Jack, you are very hot."

"Yes, I was chasing a Cyclopides. He is very rare and seldom found in

the late autumn. What a pity that I should have missed him!" He spoke

unconcernedly, but his small light eyes glanced incessantly from the

girl to me.

"You have introduced yourselves, I can see."

"Yes. I was telling Sir Henry that it was rather late for him to see the

true beauties of the moor."

"Why, who do you think this is?"

"I imagine that it must be Sir Henry Baskerville."

"No, no," said I. "Only a humble commoner, but his friend. My name is

Dr. Watson."

A flush of vexation passed over her expressive face. "We have been

talking at cross purposes," said she.

"Why, you had not very much time for talk," her brother remarked with

the same questioning eyes.

"I talked as if Dr. Watson were a resident instead of being merely a

visitor," said she. "It cannot much matter to him whether it is early

or late for the orchids. But you will come on, will you not, and see

Merripit House?"

A short walk brought us to it, a bleak moorland house, once the farm

of some grazier in the old prosperous days, but now put into repair and

turned into a modern dwelling. An orchard surrounded it, but the trees,

as is usual upon the moor, were stunted and nipped, and the effect of

the whole place was mean and melancholy. We were admitted by a strange,

wizened, rusty-coated old manservant, who seemed in keeping with

the house. Inside, however, there were large rooms furnished with an

elegance in which I seemed to recognize the taste of the lady. As I

looked from their windows at the interminable granite-flecked moor

rolling unbroken to the farthest horizon I could not but marvel at what

could have brought this highly educated man and this beautiful woman to

live in such a place.

"Queer spot to choose, is it not?" said he as if in answer to my

thought. "And yet we manage to make ourselves fairly happy, do we not,

Beryl?"

"Quite happy," said she, but there was no ring of conviction in her

words.

"I had a school," said Stapleton. "It was in the north country. The work

to a man of my temperament was mechanical and uninteresting, but the

privilege of living with youth, of helping to mould those young minds,

and of impressing them with one's own character and ideals was very dear

to me. However, the fates were against us. A serious epidemic broke out

in the school and three of the boys died. It never recovered from the

blow, and much of my capital was irretrievably swallowed up. And yet,

if it were not for the loss of the charming companionship of the boys,

I could rejoice over my own misfortune, for, with my strong tastes

for botany and zoology, I find an unlimited field of work here, and my

sister is as devoted to Nature as I am. All this, Dr. Watson, has been

brought upon your head by your expression as you surveyed the moor out

of our window."

"It certainly did cross my mind that it might be a little dull--less for

you, perhaps, than for your sister."

"No, no, I am never dull," said she quickly.

"We have books, we have our studies, and we have interesting neighbours.

Dr. Mortimer is a most learned man in his own line. Poor Sir Charles was

also an admirable companion. We knew him well and miss him more than

I can tell. Do you think that I should intrude if I were to call this

afternoon and make the acquaintance of Sir Henry?"

"I am sure that he would be delighted."

"Then perhaps you would mention that I propose to do so. We may in

our humble way do something to make things more easy for him until he

becomes accustomed to his new surroundings. Will you come upstairs, Dr.

Watson, and inspect my collection of Lepidoptera? I think it is the most

complete one in the south-west of England. By the time that you have

looked through them lunch will be almost ready."

But I was eager to get back to my charge. The melancholy of the moor,

the death of the unfortunate pony, the weird sound which had been

associated with the grim legend of the Baskervilles, all these things

tinged my thoughts with sadness. Then on the top of these more or less

vague impressions there had come the definite and distinct warning of

Miss Stapleton, delivered with such intense earnestness that I could

not doubt that some grave and deep reason lay behind it. I resisted

all pressure to stay for lunch, and I set off at once upon my return

journey, taking the grass-grown path by which we had come.

It seems, however, that there must have been some short cut for those

who knew it, for before I had reached the road I was astounded to see

Miss Stapleton sitting upon a rock by the side of the track. Her face

was beautifully flushed with her exertions and she held her hand to her

side.

"I have run all the way in order to cut you off, Dr. Watson," said she.

"I had not even time to put on my hat. I must not stop, or my brother

may miss me. I wanted to say to you how sorry I am about the stupid

mistake I made in thinking that you were Sir Henry. Please forget the

words I said, which have no application whatever to you."

"But I can't forget them, Miss Stapleton," said I. "I am Sir Henry's

friend, and his welfare is a very close concern of mine. Tell me why it

was that you were so eager that Sir Henry should return to London."

"A woman's whim, Dr. Watson. When you know me better you will understand

that I cannot always give reasons for what I say or do."

"No, no. I remember the thrill in your voice. I remember the look in

your eyes. Please, please, be frank with me, Miss Stapleton, for ever

since I have been here I have been conscious of shadows all round me.

Life has become like that great Grimpen Mire, with little green patches

everywhere into which one may sink and with no guide to point the track.

Tell me then what it was that you meant, and I will promise to convey

your warning to Sir Henry."

An expression of irresolution passed for an instant over her face, but

her eyes had hardened again when she answered me.

"You make too much of it, Dr. Watson," said she. "My brother and I

were very much shocked by the death of Sir Charles. We knew him very

intimately, for his favourite walk was over the moor to our house. He

was deeply impressed with the curse which hung over the family, and when

this tragedy came I naturally felt that there must be some grounds

for the fears which he had expressed. I was distressed therefore when

another member of the family came down to live here, and I felt that he

should be warned of the danger which he will run. That was all which I

intended to convey.

"But what is the danger?"

"You know the story of the hound?"

"I do not believe in such nonsense."

"But I do. If you have any influence with Sir Henry, take him away from

a place which has always been fatal to his family. The world is wide.

Why should he wish to live at the place of danger?"

"Because it is the place of danger. That is Sir Henry's nature. I fear

that unless you can give me some more definite information than this it

would be impossible to get him to move."

"I cannot say anything definite, for I do not know anything definite."

"I would ask you one more question, Miss Stapleton. If you meant no

more than this when you first spoke to me, why should you not wish your

brother to overhear what you said? There is nothing to which he, or

anyone else, could object."

"My brother is very anxious to have the Hall inhabited, for he thinks it

is for the good of the poor folk upon the moor. He would be very angry

if he knew that I have said anything which might induce Sir Henry to

go away. But I have done my duty now and I will say no more. I must go

back, or he will miss me and suspect that I have seen you. Good-bye!"

She turned and had disappeared in a few minutes among the scattered

boulders, while I, with my soul full of vague fears, pursued my way to

Baskerville Hall.

Chapter 8. First Report of Dr. Watson

From this point onward I will follow the course of events by

transcribing my own letters to Mr. Sherlock Holmes which lie before me

on the table. One page is missing, but otherwise they are exactly

as written and show my feelings and suspicions of the moment more

accurately than my memory, clear as it is upon these tragic events, can

possibly do.

Baskerville Hall, October 13th. MY DEAR HOLMES: My previous letters

and telegrams have kept you pretty well up to date as to all that has

occurred in this most God-forsaken corner of the world. The longer one

stays here the more does the spirit of the moor sink into one's soul,

its vastness, and also its grim charm. When you are once out upon its

bosom you have left all traces of modern England behind you, but, on the

other hand, you are conscious everywhere of the homes and the work of

the prehistoric people. On all sides of you as you walk are the houses

of these forgotten folk, with their graves and the huge monoliths which

are supposed to have marked their temples. As you look at their gray

stone huts against the scarred hillsides you leave your own age behind

you, and if you were to see a skin-clad, hairy man crawl out from the

low door fitting a flint-tipped arrow on to the string of his bow, you

would feel that his presence there was more natural than your own. The

strange thing is that they should have lived so thickly on what must

always have been most unfruitful soil. I am no antiquarian, but I could

imagine that they were some unwarlike and harried race who were forced

to accept that which none other would occupy.

All this, however, is foreign to the mission on which you sent me and

will probably be very uninteresting to your severely practical mind.

I can still remember your complete indifference as to whether the sun

moved round the earth or the earth round the sun. Let me, therefore,

return to the facts concerning Sir Henry Baskerville.

If you have not had any report within the last few days it is because

up to today there was nothing of importance to relate. Then a very

surprising circumstance occurred, which I shall tell you in due course.

But, first of all, I must keep you in touch with some of the other

factors in the situation.

One of these, concerning which I have said little, is the escaped

convict upon the moor. There is strong reason now to believe that he

has got right away, which is a considerable relief to the lonely

householders of this district. A fortnight has passed since his flight,

during which he has not been seen and nothing has been heard of him. It

is surely inconceivable that he could have held out upon the moor during

all that time. Of course, so far as his concealment goes there is

no difficulty at all. Any one of these stone huts would give him a

hiding-place. But there is nothing to eat unless he were to catch and

slaughter one of the moor sheep. We think, therefore, that he has gone,

and the outlying farmers sleep the better in consequence.

We are four able-bodied men in this household, so that we could take

good care of ourselves, but I confess that I have had uneasy moments

when I have thought of the Stapletons. They live miles from any help.

There are one maid, an old manservant, the sister, and the brother, the

latter not a very strong man. They would be helpless in the hands of a

desperate fellow like this Notting Hill criminal if he could once effect

an entrance. Both Sir Henry and I were concerned at their situation, and

it was suggested that Perkins the groom should go over to sleep there,

but Stapleton would not hear of it.

The fact is that our friend, the baronet, begins to display a

considerable interest in our fair neighbour. It is not to be wondered

at, for time hangs heavily in this lonely spot to an active man like

him, and she is a very fascinating and beautiful woman. There is

something tropical and exotic about her which forms a singular contrast

to her cool and unemotional brother. Yet he also gives the idea of

hidden fires. He has certainly a very marked influence over her, for

I have seen her continually glance at him as she talked as if seeking

approbation for what she said. I trust that he is kind to her. There is

a dry glitter in his eyes and a firm set of his thin lips, which goes

with a positive and possibly a harsh nature. You would find him an

interesting study.

He came over to call upon Baskerville on that first day, and the very

next morning he took us both to show us the spot where the legend of the

wicked Hugo is supposed to have had its origin. It was an excursion of

some miles across the moor to a place which is so dismal that it might

have suggested the story. We found a short valley between rugged tors

which led to an open, grassy space flecked over with the white cotton

grass. In the middle of it rose two great stones, worn and sharpened at

the upper end until they looked like the huge corroding fangs of some

monstrous beast. In every way it corresponded with the scene of the old

tragedy. Sir Henry was much interested and asked Stapleton more

than once whether he did really believe in the possibility of the

interference of the supernatural in the affairs of men. He spoke

lightly, but it was evident that he was very much in earnest. Stapleton

was guarded in his replies, but it was easy to see that he said less

than he might, and that he would not express his whole opinion out of

consideration for the feelings of the baronet. He told us of similar

cases, where families had suffered from some evil influence, and he left

us with the impression that he shared the popular view upon the matter.

On our way back we stayed for lunch at Merripit House, and it was there

that Sir Henry made the acquaintance of Miss Stapleton. From the first

moment that he saw her he appeared to be strongly attracted by her, and

I am much mistaken if the feeling was not mutual. He referred to her

again and again on our walk home, and since then hardly a day has passed

that we have not seen something of the brother and sister. They dine

here tonight, and there is some talk of our going to them next week. One

would imagine that such a match would be very welcome to Stapleton, and

yet I have more than once caught a look of the strongest disapprobation

in his face when Sir Henry has been paying some attention to his sister.

He is much attached to her, no doubt, and would lead a lonely life

without her, but it would seem the height of selfishness if he were to

stand in the way of her making so brilliant a marriage. Yet I am certain

that he does not wish their intimacy to ripen into love, and I have

several times observed that he has taken pains to prevent them from

being tete-a-tete. By the way, your instructions to me never to allow

Sir Henry to go out alone will become very much more onerous if a love

affair were to be added to our other difficulties. My popularity would

soon suffer if I were to carry out your orders to the letter.

The other day--Thursday, to be more exact--Dr. Mortimer lunched with us.

He has been excavating a barrow at Long Down and has got a prehistoric

skull which fills him with great joy. Never was there such a

single-minded enthusiast as he! The Stapletons came in afterwards, and

the good doctor took us all to the yew alley at Sir Henry's request to

show us exactly how everything occurred upon that fatal night. It is

a long, dismal walk, the yew alley, between two high walls of clipped

hedge, with a narrow band of grass upon either side. At the far end is

an old tumble-down summer-house. Halfway down is the moor-gate, where

the old gentleman left his cigar-ash. It is a white wooden gate with

a latch. Beyond it lies the wide moor. I remembered your theory of the

affair and tried to picture all that had occurred. As the old man stood

there he saw something coming across the moor, something which terrified

him so that he lost his wits and ran and ran until he died of sheer

horror and exhaustion. There was the long, gloomy tunnel down which

he fled. And from what? A sheep-dog of the moor? Or a spectral hound,

black, silent, and monstrous? Was there a human agency in the matter?

Did the pale, watchful Barrymore know more than he cared to say? It was

all dim and vague, but always there is the dark shadow of crime behind

it.

One other neighbour I have met since I wrote last. This is Mr.

Frankland, of Lafter Hall, who lives some four miles to the south of us.

He is an elderly man, red-faced, white-haired, and choleric. His passion

is for the British law, and he has spent a large fortune in litigation.

He fights for the mere pleasure of fighting and is equally ready to take

up either side of a question, so that it is no wonder that he has found

it a costly amusement. Sometimes he will shut up a right of way and defy

the parish to make him open it. At others he will with his own hands

tear down some other man's gate and declare that a path has existed

there from time immemorial, defying the owner to prosecute him for

trespass. He is learned in old manorial and communal rights, and he

applies his knowledge sometimes in favour of the villagers of Fernworthy

and sometimes against them, so that he is periodically either carried in

triumph down the village street or else burned in effigy, according to

his latest exploit. He is said to have about seven lawsuits upon his

hands at present, which will probably swallow up the remainder of his

fortune and so draw his sting and leave him harmless for the future.

Apart from the law he seems a kindly, good-natured person, and I

only mention him because you were particular that I should send some

description of the people who surround us. He is curiously employed

at present, for, being an amateur astronomer, he has an excellent

telescope, with which he lies upon the roof of his own house and sweeps

the moor all day in the hope of catching a glimpse of the escaped

convict. If he would confine his energies to this all would be well, but

there are rumours that he intends to prosecute Dr. Mortimer for opening

a grave without the consent of the next of kin because he dug up the

Neolithic skull in the barrow on Long Down. He helps to keep our lives

from being monotonous and gives a little comic relief where it is badly

needed.

And now, having brought you up to date in the escaped convict, the

Stapletons, Dr. Mortimer, and Frankland, of Lafter Hall, let me end on

that which is most important and tell you more about the Barrymores, and

especially about the surprising development of last night.

First of all about the test telegram, which you sent from London in

order to make sure that Barrymore was really here. I have already

explained that the testimony of the postmaster shows that the test was

worthless and that we have no proof one way or the other. I told Sir

Henry how the matter stood, and he at once, in his downright fashion,

had Barrymore up and asked him whether he had received the telegram

himself. Barrymore said that he had.

"Did the boy deliver it into your own hands?" asked Sir Henry.

Barrymore looked surprised, and considered for a little time.

"No," said he, "I was in the box-room at the time, and my wife brought

it up to me."

"Did you answer it yourself?"

"No; I told my wife what to answer and she went down to write it."

In the evening he recurred to the subject of his own accord.

"I could not quite understand the object of your questions this morning,

Sir Henry," said he.