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Chapter 1 Dr Mortimer's Visit

Mr Sherlock Holmes, who was usually very late in the mornings, except on those quite frequent occasions when he did not go to bed all night, was sitting at the breakfast table. I was standing in front of the fire, and I picked up the walking stick which our visitor had left behind the night before. It was a fine, thick stick. Round it was a broad silver band. 'To James Mortimer, M. R. C. P.* from his friends of the C. C. H.' was written on it, with the date '1884'. It was just the kind of stick that an old-fashioned doctor often carried.

'Well, Watson, what do you think of it? There is its owner, who is ringing the doorbell. Now is the moment of fate, Watson, when you hear on the stairs a step which is walking into your life, whether for good or for evil. What does Dr James Mortimer ask from Sherlock Holmes? Come in!'

The appearance of our visitor surprised me. He was a very tall, thin man, with a long nose like a beak. It stuck out between two sharp, grey eyes, which shone brightly from behind a pair of glasses. Although he was still young, his back was already bent, and he walked with his head pushed forward in a weak-sighted but friendly manner. As he entered, he saw the stick in Holmes's hand.

'I am so very glad,' he said. 'I was not sure whether I had left it here. I would not want to lose that stick.'

'A present, I see,' said Holmes.

'Yes, sir.'

'From Charing Cross Hospital!'

*M. R. C. P.: Member of the Royal College of Physicians; these letters after a person's name show that he or she is a medical doctor

‘From one or two of my friends there on the occasion of my marriage. You interest me very much, Mr Holmes. I had hardly expected such a narrow head, nor such great development of the bone. Would you have any objection to my feeling it? I confess that I am very interested in the shape of your head.’

‘I suppose, sir, that it was not only to examine my head that you did me the honour to pay me a call here last night, and again today?’

‘No, sir, although I am happy to have had the opportunity to do that as well. I came to you, Mr Holmes, because I recognize that I am not myself a very worldly man, and because I have suddenly met a most serious problem . . .’

Chapter 2 The Baskerville Story

‘I have in my pocket some papers,’ said Dr James Mortimer. ‘They were given into my care by Sir Charles Baskerville, whose sudden death three months ago caused so much excitement in Devonshire. He took these papers very seriously, and his mind was prepared for just such a death as, in the end, he suffered.’

Holmes stretched out his hand to take them. I looked over his shoulder at the yellow paper and the writing, faint now with age. At the top was written: ‘Baskerville Hall’, and under that, in large, untidy figures: ‘1742’.

‘It appears to be a statement of some sort.’

‘Yes, it is an account of an event which is well known in the Baskerville family. With your permission, I will read it to you.’

Dr Mortimer turned the papers towards the light, and read the following strange old story:

“‘There have been many statements about the origin of the Hound of the Baskervilles. But as I can follow my family line directly back to Sir Hugo Baskerville, and as I was told the story

by my father, who was also told it by his father, I write this account fully believing that things happened just as I shall describe them. Learn from this story not to fear the results of the past, but to be careful in the future, so that our family – which has suffered so badly in the past – may not suffer again.

“Know then that about 1650 Baskerville Hall was owned by Hugo Baskerville. He was a wild and cruel man. It happened that he fell in love with the daughter of a poor man who owned some land near the Hall. But the young girl always avoided him, because she feared his evil name. So when her father and brothers were away from home, this Hugo, with five or six of his bad and lazy friends, went secretly to the farm where she lived and carried off the girl. When they brought her to the Hall, she was locked in an upstairs room, while Hugo and his friends sat down below and started drinking, as was their custom. The poor girl upstairs was nearly driven mad with fear by the singing and shouting and swearing which came up to her from below. And in her fear she did something that might have frightened the bravest and most active man; with the help of the thick climbing plant which covered (and still covers) the wall, she climbed from near the roof down to the ground, and ran towards her home, which was three miles away across the moor.

“Some time later Hugo found that the cage was empty and the bird had escaped. Then he became like a human devil. He ran down the stairs into the dining hall, jumped onto the great table, scattering the cups and dishes, and shouted to all his drunken friends that he would give up his body and soul to the Powers of Evil that same night if he could catch the girl. He ran from the house, calling to his servants to get his horse ready, and to let out the hounds. He gave the hounds a piece of cloth from the girl’s torn clothing so that they could find and follow her smell. Then he rode after them at full speed over the moor in the moonlight. For some time the drinkers stood still. But then their dull brains

realized what was likely to happen on the moor. Everything was in confusion, some of them calling for their guns, some for their horses, and some for more wine. But at last all of them, thirteen in number, found their horses and rode off after Hugo and the hounds.

““They had gone a mile or two when they passed one of the men who keep watch over the sheep at night on the moor. They called to him to ask if he had seen the hounds. The man was almost mad with fear and could hardly speak. But at last he said that he had seen the unfortunate girl, with the hounds on her track. ‘But I saw more than that,’ he said, ‘for Hugo Baskerville passed me on his black horse, and behind him was a hound of the devil such as I hope God will never allow to run after me.’

““The noisy horsemen swore at the man, and rode on. But soon they became cold with fear. They heard the sound of a horse coming rapidly back towards them across the moor. Then Hugo’s black horse ran past them, without its rider. After that, the men rode close together, because they were afraid. At last they came up to the hounds. These, though they were known to be brave hunting dogs, had stopped in a group beside a hollow, and were clearly very much afraid. Three of the men, who were the bravest or who had drunk the most wine, rode forward. The moon was shining brightly. In the centre of the hollow the poor girl lay where she had fallen. She had died of tiredness and fear. But these evil men were not frightened by the sight of her body, nor by the sight of Hugo Baskerville’s body lying near her, but by a terrible thing standing over Hugo and biting at his throat – a great, black animal, shaped like a hound, but larger than any hound that man’s eye has ever seen. As they looked, the thing tore the throat out of Hugo Baskerville. Then it turned its flaming eyes and bloody jaws towards them. The three cried out in fear and rode for their lives across the moor.

““That is the story, my sons, of the coming of the hound

which has troubled the family ever since. Since then, many of our family have been unhappy in their deaths, which have been sudden, violent, and mysterious. I urge you to trust in God, and warn you never to cross the moor during the hours of darkness, when the Powers of Evil are at their strongest.”

When Dr Mortimer had finished reading this strange story, he looked across at Mr Sherlock Holmes.

“Now, Mr Holmes, I will read you something more recent. This is a newspaper, the Devon County News for June 14th of this year. It gives a short account of the death of Sir Charles Baskerville, which happened a few days before that date.”

My friend leaned forward then, and his expression became eager. Our visitor began again:

“The recent sudden death of Sir Charles Baskerville has caused sadness in the area. Though Sir Charles had lived at Baskerville Hall for a fairly short time, his friendly and generous nature had won him the respect of all who had any dealings with him. Sir Charles, as is well known, made a great deal of money in business in South Africa. He had no children, and he openly expressed his desire that the whole area should profit from his good fortune. His generous gifts to good causes have often been recorded in this newspaper.

“The events connected with the death of Sir Charles were not fully explained at the inquiry, but at least enough has been done to end some of the stories told locally. Death was from natural causes.

“Sir Charles lived simply; a husband and wife, Mr and Mrs Barrymore, were his only servants. Their statements show that Sir Charles’s health had been bad for some time, probably because he was suffering from heart disease, which caused frequent changes of colour and difficulty in breathing. Dr James Mortimer, his doctor and friend, agreed.

“Sir Charles Baskerville had the habit of walking every night