



The Adventure of the Abbey Grange

B1 Version

Part 1: A Winter Murder

On a bitterly cold morning Holmes woke Watson before dawn with his familiar cry: 'The game is afoot.' A telegram from Inspector Hopkins had arrived in the small hours. They travelled by the first train to Abbey Grange, a large country house in Kent, arriving at first light.

Sir Eustace Brackenstall lay dead on the dining-room floor, his skull beaten in with his own fireplace poker, which had been bent almost into a curve by the force of the blow. Lady Brackenstall, his Australian wife — she had grown up in South Australia, where manners and social customs were more relaxed than in formal English society — sat on a couch with a severe bruise over one eye. Her maid, Theresa Wright, an older woman who had been with her since childhood, was attending to her.

Lady Brackenstall told her story clearly and calmly. She had been doing a late round of the house when three burglars entered through the French windows — the tall glass doors opening onto the garden. The eldest, a bearded man, had seized and struck her, and tied her to a heavy oaken chair using a piece of bell-rope torn from the wall. A bell-rope was the cord used to ring a bell in the kitchen to summon servants. Her husband had heard the disturbance and rushed in, only to be struck down with the poker before

he could defend himself. The three men had helped themselves to wine from a bottle on the sideboard, taken some silver plate, and left through the garden.

Hopkins was satisfied. He recognised the description of the burglars as the Randall gang — a father and two sons known to Scotland Yard — and expected to arrest them quickly. Holmes appeared to agree, and they left.

Part 2: Something Is Wrong

In the train back to London, Holmes abruptly pulled Watson off at a suburban station. He could not leave the case. His instincts told him something was deeply wrong, even though Lady Brackenstall's story had been clear and Theresa had confirmed it. He listed his doubts: burglars who had just done a job would not risk another so soon; they would not usually strike a woman to silence her when that would guarantee screaming; they would not commit murder when three against one gave them all the advantage they needed; they did not take very much when far more was available; and they would not stop to drink wine in a house where they had just killed someone.

But the most telling detail was the wine glasses. Three glasses on the sideboard had been used, all containing traces of wine — but only one had beeswing in it. Beeswing is the dark, film-like sediment that forms in old red wine. In a full bottle such sediment collects everywhere, so if the first glass was poured cleanly, the second and third should also have been clean — or all three should have had sediment equally. The only explanation that made sense was that only two glasses had actually been used, and the dregs of both had been poured into a third glass to create the false impression of three drinkers.

This meant the whole story was a fabrication. Lady Brackenstall and Theresa were lying. They were protecting someone.

Part 3: The Real Story

Holmes returned to Abbey Grange and spent two hours examining the room with minute care. He noted that the bell-rope had been cut near the top — not torn away, as one would expect if a burglar had pulled it down. The cut was too high for anyone of ordinary height to make without climbing; Holmes could only just reach it himself standing on the mantelpiece, meaning the person who cut it must have been at least three inches taller than Holmes himself. He also noticed a bloodstain on the seat of the chair to which Lady Brackenstall had supposedly been tied — but if she had been sitting there when her husband was killed, how was there blood on the seat? She must have been placed in the chair after the killing, not before.

Holmes sent for Lady Brackenstall and told her he knew the truth. Her courage held for a moment, then collapsed entirely. She told him everything.

She had been deeply unhappy in her marriage. Sir Eustace was a violent drunkard who had abused her repeatedly — the marks on her arms that Holmes had noticed were from a hatpin. On the voyage from Australia to England, she had met and fallen in love with a man named Jack Crocker, the first officer of the ship — a tall, powerful, honest sailor who adored her. They had met secretly after her arrival in England. On the night of the murder, Crocker had come through the French window to say farewell before

leaving on a new voyage. Sir Eustace found them together and attacked his wife with a stick, calling her by a vile name. Crocker seized the poker and struck him down in a fury of protective rage.

Theresa had helped them construct the burglary story. Crocker had cut the bell-rope from the bracket — he was tall enough to reach it — tied Lady Brackenstall to the chair to give her an alibi, and scattered a few pieces of silver to suggest robbery. He poured two glasses of wine to steady their nerves after the shock, and then the third glass was created artificially.

Part 4: Holmes as Judge

Holmes told Lady Brackenstall he needed to hear the same story from Crocker himself before he could decide what to do. He sent a telegram asking the captain to come to Baker Street that evening.

Crocker arrived — a magnificent physical specimen, golden-moustached, burned by tropical suns, barely containing his emotions. He told his story without excusing himself and without fear. He had killed a man who was beating the woman he loved, and he would do it again. But he would not allow Lady Brackenstall to face any consequences for his actions.

Holmes was satisfied. He turned to Watson and said: 'You are a British jury. Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty?' Watson answered: 'Not guilty.' Holmes announced the verdict aloud — a Latin phrase meaning the voice of the people — and told Crocker he was acquitted in his own informal court. The law might yet find another suspect; if not, Crocker was free. Holmes had given Hopkins the clue about the pond where the silver was hidden, but had deliberately withheld enough to keep the real story buried.

'Come back to this lady in a year,' Holmes said as Crocker left, 'and may her future and yours justify us in the judgment which we have pronounced this night.'