

Perhaps I will write a short letter. After that we shall drive back to the town and have lunch. Please walk to the carriage. I shall be with you again in ten minutes.'

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Ten minutes later, we were in the carriage, driving back to Ross. Holmes was still carrying with him the stone, found among the trees. 'You will be interested in this,' he said to Lestrade, holding it out.

'I see no marks on it.'

'There are none.'

'How do you know that it is important, then?'

'The grass was growing under it. Clearly it was lying there for only a day or two. I could not find the place that it came from: there are too many stones around. But it is the right shape to make the wounds in McCarthy's head.'

'And the murderer?'

'He is a tall man, left-handed, with a bad right leg. He wears thick shooting boots and a grey coat, smokes Indian cigars, uses a cigar-holder and carries a pocket-knife – not a very sharp one. There is more information that I can give you; but that will be enough for you to find him, I think.'

Lestrade laughed. 'I am afraid I find all this hard to believe,' he said. 'This information is all very well but it does not show that a person is guilty of murder.'

'We shall see,' said Holmes. 'You work in your way and I shall work in mine. I shall be busy this afternoon and I shall probably go back to London on the evening train.'

'And leave the case unfinished?'

'No, finished.'

'But the mystery?'

'Is a mystery no more.'

'Who was the guilty person then?'

'Oh, God help us! The person I have just described, of course.'

‘But who is he?’

‘That will not be difficult to find out. The number of people who live in this neighbourhood is not large.’

Lestrade had a hopeless look on his face. ‘I am a sensible man,’ he said slowly. ‘I really cannot run all over the place looking for a left-handed man with a bad leg. My friends at Scotland Yard will laugh at me.’

‘All right,’ said Holmes quietly. ‘I have given you the information. Now here we are at your address, I believe. Goodbye. I shall send you a few words before I leave.’

We dropped Lestrade at his hotel and then drove to ours, where we found lunch upon the table.

‘Look here, Watson,’ said my friend when the meal was over. ‘Just sit here in this chair and listen to me for a little. I am not sure what to do and your ideas will be useful. Light a cigar and I shall explain.’

‘Please do.’

‘Well, when we first learned about this case, there were two things that we both noticed immediately. They are both parts of young McCarthy’s story. To me they showed him to be innocent. To you they seemed to make him guilty. The first thing is that his father called “Cooee” to him before he saw him. The second is that he spoke of a rat as he lay dying. He said several other words, you remember, but that was the only word that his son understood. Now these two facts must be the start of our thinking. We shall also begin by believing that the boy’s story is perfectly true.’

‘What about this “Cooee”, then?’

‘Well, clearly the father was not calling to his son. The son, as far as he knew, was in Bristol. It was just luck that James heard his father’s call. The “Cooee” was for the person that old McCarthy was going to meet. But “Cooee” is a special call that Australians use. The person whom McCarthy

expected to meet at Boscombe Pool was probably someone who knew Australia.'

'What about the rat, in that case?'

Sherlock Holmes took a piece of paper from his pocket and put it on the table. 'This is a map of Australia,' he said. 'I sent for it last night.' He put his hand over part of the map. 'What do you read?' he asked.

'ARAT,' I read.

'And now?' He lifted his hand.

'BALLARAT.'

'Quite right. That was the word which the old man spoke; but his son only understood the last part of it. He was trying to give the name of his murderer: Mr Something of Ballarat.'

'That's most surprising!' I said.

'It is perfectly easy,' said Holmes. 'And now, you see, the number of possible people immediately becomes much smaller. Someone who has a grey coat or jacket: that is another thing we can be sure about, if we believe the son's story. We have already come from knowing nothing to a picture of an Australian from Ballarat with a grey coat.'

'Quite true.'

'And this person felt at home in the valley, because it is only possible to get to the pool across other people's land. Strangers cannot usually go there.'

'Again you are right.'

'Then there is our visit today. By looking carefully at the ground I was able to describe the wanted man still more fully to that stupid detective Lestrade.'

'But how did you find out those other facts?'

'You know my ways. It is the very small things that I always look for.'

'You knew that he was tall, because the space between the

footmarks showed a man with long legs. And the marks also told you what kind of boots he wore.'

'Yes, they were unusual boots.'

'But his bad leg?'

'The mark of his right foot was always less clear than the mark of his left. He stood more heavily on the left because his right leg hurt him.'

'But you also say that he is left-handed?'

'Ah, yes! It was you, dear Watson, who noticed the kind of head wound which the doctor described. The murderer hit McCarthy from behind but on the left side of the head. This shows that he was left-handed. Try to do it with your right hand, if you do not believe me. During the quarrel between the father and son, he stood behind that big tree. He was smoking at the time. I found the ash from a cigar, which I know to be an Indian cigar, at the foot of the tree. You remember that smoking is one of my favourite subjects and that I have written a paper on the ash from one hundred and forty different kinds of pipes, cigars and cigarettes. I looked around and soon found the cigar end lying among the leaves. It was an Indian cigar, from a shop in Rotterdam.'

'And the cigar-holder?'

'I could see that he did not put the cigar end in his mouth, so I know that he uses a cigar-holder. The end was cut off, not bitten off, but the cut was not a clean one. This showed me that he used an old pocket-knife.'

'Holmes,' I said, 'you have described this man perfectly. Now he cannot escape and you have saved an innocent man's life. Now I see where all these facts are pointing. The guilty man is...'



'Mr John Turner,' called out the hotel waiter, opening door of our sitting-room for a visitor.

The man who came in was strange and frightening to look at. He walked slowly and with difficulty. He looked sick; but his hard face, full of deep lines, and his heavy arms and legs showed that he was strong, both in body and in his feelings. His untidy beard, thick grey hair and dark eyes gave him a wild, proud look but his face was white as ash. I noticed the light blue colour of the skin around his nose and lips. As a doctor, I could see immediately that he was seriously ill.

‘Please sit down on the sofa,’ said Holmes softly. ‘So you got my letter?’

‘Yes, Moran brought it to me. It says that you want to see me here, because it will make things easier.’

‘I think that people will talk if they see me going to your house.’

‘And why do you want to see me?’ He looked at my friend with sad, tired eyes. He seemed already to know the answer to his question.

‘Yes,’ said Holmes, answering his look more than his words. ‘It is true. I know all about McCarthy.’

The old man hid his face in his hands. ‘God help me!’ he shouted. ‘I did not want the young man to get hurt. If the case goes against him, I promise you that I shall tell the police everything.’

‘I am glad to hear it,’ said Holmes in a serious voice.

‘I have not spoken yet only because of my dear girl. Maybe I – but no, it will break her heart if she hears that I am a prisoner.’

‘Perhaps that need not happen,’ said Holmes.

‘What?’

‘I am not a policeman. I understand that it was your daughter who asked me to come, so I am working for her. But,’ and here he looked hard at Turner, ‘you must save young McCarthy.’



Holmes sat down at the table with a pen and some paper. 'Just tell us the true story,' he said.

'I am a dying man,' said Turner. 'I have had diabetes for years. My doctor does not think that I have more than a month to live. But naturally I prefer to die under my own roof than in prison.'

Holmes stood up, crossed to the table and sat down at it with a pen in his hand and some paper in front of him. 'Just tell us the true story,' he said. 'I shall write it all down. You will put your name to it and Watson here will listen to everything. Then if I need to save young McCarthy's life, I can give it to the police. I promise you that I shall not use it until I must.'

'Very well,' said the old man. 'I do not think that I shall live until the case comes up, so it does not matter much to me. But I want to save Alice's feelings if I can. It is a terrible thing for her to live with. She is so young... And now I will explain everything to you. It has taken a long time to happen but it will not

take me a long time to tell. You did not know this dead man, McCarthy. He was a true criminal – bad in every possible way. I hope that you never fall into the hands of someone like him. He has sat on my back for twenty years and he has made my life impossible. I shall tell you first how I met him and became tied to him and his greedy ways.

'It was in the early '60s at the mines. I was a young man then, hot-blooded and ready to try anything new. I made some bad friends, began drinking, had no luck in finding gold. So I left the mines and became what you call here a gangster – a robber on the roads. There were six of us and we had a wild, free life, robbing a sheep station sometimes or stopping the carriages on the road to the mines. Black Jack of Ballarat was the name I took and in Australia people still remember our group as the Ballarat Boys. One day, a carriage was carrying gold from Ballarat to Melbourne, so we hid beside the road and took it by surprise. There were six guards on horses and six of us, so we nearly lost the fight. But we shot four of them within a few minutes. They killed three of our boys before we got our hands on the gold. I put my gun to the head of the driver, who was this same man, McCarthy. I meant to shoot him but decided to let him go. I still remember his greedy little eyes looking hard at my face. He planned to remember me. We rode away with the gold and became rich men. I left my old friends and made my way back to England. Here no one knew me or my past. I decided to stop travelling and live a good and quiet life. A family wanted to sell that big house at Boscombe, so I bought it. I began to put my money to good uses, unlike the way I first got it. I also got married. My wife died young but she left me dear little Alice. Alice is all the world to me. Even when she was still a baby, her little hand seemed to show me the right way to live. She is the first person who has ever done that. In a word, I changed my selfish ways and did everything I



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could to become a better person. All was going well until McCarthy came along.

‘I was in London on business one day and I met him by accident in Regent Street. He was almost without shoes on his feet or a coat on his back.

‘“Here we are at last, Jack,” he said, touching me on the arm. “We shall be like a family to you. There are two of us, me and my son, and you can look after us now. And if you do not – remember that this is England. There is always a policeman nearby to tell my story to.”

‘Well, they came down to the West Country and I could not shake them off. They lived without paying in the best farm that I had. There was no rest for me now, no forgetting. Everywhere I went, his greedy, smiling face was at my side. He asked for everything that he needed and I gave it to him without question: money, a house, a carriage. It got worse as Alice grew up. He soon realized that I was more afraid of her knowing my past than I was of the police. At last, he asked for the one thing I could not give. He asked for Alice. His son, you see, was a young man and Alice too was not a child any more. He thought it a wonderful idea for his son to have all my land and money, when he married Alice. But of course, I could not agree. I did not dislike the boy but his father’s blood is in him and that is enough. I told McCarthy no – never. McCarthy was ready to go to the police. I told him to do his worst. We finally agreed to meet at the pool, half-way between our two houses. We were going to talk about McCarthy’s plan one more time.

‘When I went down there, I saw him talking to his son. They were having a quarrel about Alice. I hid behind a tree and smoked a cigar, because I needed to talk to Charles alone. But as I listened to his words, everything inside me that was black and angry seemed to break out. He was pressing his son to