

‘God help us,’ said Holmes, after keeping silent for some time. ‘Why is life so hard on poor old men like him? Every time that I meet a case like this, I say to myself: “There but for the goodness of God goes Sherlock Holmes.”’

James McCarthy’s case came up some weeks later. The decision was: not guilty of murder. The few facts which Holmes gave to the police were enough to free him. Old Turner lived for seven months more but he is now dead. It seems that James and Alice will soon become husband and wife, knowing nothing of that great black cloud that rests over the past.

ACTIVITIES

Pages 1–10

Before you read

- 1 Look at the Word List at the back of this book. Then choose the correct word in *italics*.
 - a Prisons are for *innocent/guilty/left-handed* people.
 - b People put cigars between their *lips/carriages/magnifying* glasses.
 - c A *mine/neighbourhood/servant* is a person not a place.
 - d A *mark/quarrel/wound* breaks the skin.
- 2 Read the Introduction to this book and answer these questions.
Who:
 - a is the storyteller?
 - b is the dead man in this story?
 - c saw McCarthy with his son, James, by the lake?
 - d have the police put in prison for the murder?
 - e decided to 'kill' Sherlock Holmes but then changed his mind?
- 3 Look at the pictures on pages 2, 5 and 7. Answer these questions.
 - a Who are the two men in the carriage, do you think?
 - b What does the young girl see?
 - c What is happening on page 7, do you think?

While you read

- 4 Which things does Holmes know and which things is he not sure about? Write a tick (✓) or a question mark (?).
 - a The dead man was murdered.
 - b John Turner owns a lot of land in Boscombe Valley.
 - c Mr Turner knew Mr McCarthy in Australia and they are now living in the same neighbourhood in England.
 - d Turner and McCarthy are good friends.
 - e McCarthy has a son and Turner has a daughter.
 - f The wives of both Turner and McCarthy are dead.

5 What did these people see on the day that McCarthy was murdered? Circle the right answer.

- a William Crowder saw James McCarthy
 - following his father with a gun.
 - calling to his father.
- b Patience Moran saw James
 - angrily hit his father.
 - lift his arm.
- c Patience's parents saw the dead Charles McCarthy with
 - wounds in his head from his son's gun.
 - wounds made by something thick and heavy.
- d James saw his father near the pool after
 - someone called 'Cooee!'
 - a bird called 'Cooee!'
- e James first saw his father on the ground after
 - he returned to the pool with Mr and Mrs Moran.
 - he ran back to the pool.

After you read

6 Discuss with another student. What does Sherlock Holmes mean by this sentence? 'The facts are not always what they seem.'

7 What do you know about:

- a Miss Turner?
- b Detective Lestrade?
- c a rat?

8 Work with another student. Have this conversation.

Student A: You are James McCarthy and you are answering questions about your father's death at the police station.

Student B: You are a police officer and you are questioning the son of the dead man.

Pages 11–15

Before you read

9 What do you think about James's story? Discuss these questions.

- a Why doesn't he tell the police what he and his father were quarrelling about?
- b Why did his father say something about a rat?
- c Did James really see a piece of grey cloth on the ground?

10 Look at the picture on page 12. Who is the young woman, do you think? Why is she talking to Holmes?

While you read

11 Are these sentences right (✓) or wrong (✗)?

- a Holmes refuses to take a carriage to the place of the murder. He wants to walk because the weather is pleasant.
- b Lestrade believes that James murdered his father. At first, he thinks that Holmes does too.
- c Miss Turner believes that James is innocent. Holmes thinks that he probably is.
- d McCarthy wanted his son to marry Miss Turner. James was not ready, so they often quarrelled.
- e Mr Turner wants his daughter to marry James.
- f Mr Turner met Mr McCarthy in the goldmines in Australia, where Mr McCarthy made his money.
- g Soft-hearted Detective Lestrade thinks that Holmes should not give Miss Turner hope.
- h Holmes and Watson go to the prison to visit James.

After you read

12 How do these people feel about James McCarthy's story?

- a Miss Turner
- b Sherlock Holmes
- c Dr Watson

13 Do you think that Mr McCarthy and Mr Turner are really good friends? Why (not)?

Pages 17–26

Before you read

14 Watson is going to tell Holmes about McCarthy's head wounds.
Will this be important, do you think? Why (not)?

15 Look at the pictures on pages 21, 22, 24 and 25. What is Holmes doing? Why?

While you read

16 Finish sentences a–e. Write f–j.

- a Two years ago James secretly married a woman in Bristol so
- b When James's wife hears about the murder,
- c When Mr McCarthy goes down to the pool,
- d When McCarthy calls 'Cooee!',
- e To Holmes, it is strange that
- f) he can't marry Miss Turner.
- g) he does not want to meet his son.
- h) he does not expect his son to answer.
- i) she tells James about her real husband.
- j) McCarthy wants his son to marry Turner's daughter.

17 Put these in the correct order. Write 1–8.

- a The mystery becomes clearer when Holmes finds the footmarks from boots with square toes.
- b Holmes goes to Boscombe Pool and he excitedly studies the marks in the grass.
- c James receives a letter from his wife. He learns that they are not really married.
- d Holmes puts a small burned thing in an envelope. He also keeps a big rough stone that he finds.
- e Holmes goes to Hatherley Farm and studies the boots of McCarthy and his son.
- f Holmes takes out his magnifying glass to see the marks in the grass better.
- g Holmes decides to visit Mr Moran in his little house near the road where the footmarks disappear.

h Holmes finds another line of footmarks and he follows them to the road. There, they disappear.

After you read

18 Who says these sentences? Why?

- a 'Let us agree to disagree.'
- b 'Your thoughts always fly away from the real problems.'
- c 'This case was perfectly easy until a crowd of people came and stupidly walked all over the place.'
- d 'They come, they go, they come again – of course, that was for the coat.'
- e 'Please walk to the carriage. I shall be with you again in ten minutes.'

Pages 26–29

Before you read

19 Why do you think that Holmes wants to visit Mr Moran? What will he ask him?

20 Give your opinion of Lestrade's detective work. Why is Holmes's opinion different from Lestrade's? What will Holmes discover next?

While you read

21 Write the missing words from Holmes's description of the murderer.

He is tall, (a)-handed and has a (b)right leg. He wears thick shooting boots and a grey (c) He smokes Indian (d) and he carries a (e) – not a very sharp one.

22 Circle the correct word in *italics*.

- a 'Cooee' is a special call that *Austrians* / *Australians* use.
- b Ballarat, a place in Australia, was McCarthy's last word, but his son heard only the *first* / *last* part of it.
- c Holmes discovers that the murderer's right foot hurt him. He learns this from the *footmarks* / *spaces*.

- d McCarthy's head wounds are on the *left/right* side of the head.
This means that the murderer is left-handed.
- e The murderer has a pocket-knife that is not sharp. Holmes knows this because the end of the cigar was *bitten/cut* off.

After you read

- 23 Why are these discoveries important, do you think?
 - a a stone under the trees
 - b space between footmarks
 - c ash from a cigar under the tree
- 24 Discuss with another student who you think the murderer is. Is it James? Why (not)?

Pages 29–37

Before you read

- 25 Look at the pictures on pages 31 and 36. Who is the man with the beard, do you think? Why is Holmes writing? What is the old man writing?
- 26 Look at the picture on page 33. Where are these men, do you think? What is happening? Why is this important to the story?

While you read

- 27 What do you learn about John Turner? Write 'Yes' or 'No'.
 - a Is he a seriously ill old man now?
 - b Does he want Holmes to think that he is innocent?
 - c Did he find gold in the mines and become a rich young man?
 - d Was he known as Black Jack of Ballarat when he was a robber in Australia?
 - e Did he plan to shoot the driver of the carriage, Charles McCarthy, but then change his mind?
 - f Did he become rich from money that he stole?

g Did he give McCarthy a home because he liked him?
.....
h Did he plan to kill McCarthy?
.....

After you read

28 Who is worse, do you think, Turner or McCarthy? Think about their lives as young men. Think also about their lives as neighbours with their children.

29 Why does Holmes decide to keep the true story from the police? Give two reasons. Do you think he is right?

Writing

30 Imagine you are Dr Watson on the train and you have just read the newspaper report. You write notes about this case so you will remember everything later. Write the names of the people and any important information that you know about them.

31 Imagine you are Patience Moran. The police have asked you to write everything that you saw between Mr McCarthy and his son, James. Write your memories of that afternoon when you saw the two men.

32 Imagine you are Miss Turner. James is in prison and he is very worried. Write a letter to him. Tell him how you feel about his story. Tell him about your conversation with Holmes. Give him hope that he will be free soon.

33 Imagine you are Sherlock Holmes. Write a report for Scotland Yard. Explain how you discovered what happened on the day of the murder. Write about the footmarks in the grass and the importance of using a magnifying glass.

34 A detective's job is to find the guilty person. Compare the work of Detective Lestrade and Sherlock Holmes. Which man is the better detective? Why?

35 After searching the grass for information about McCarthy's death, Holmes visits Mr Moran at his house. There, Holmes writes a letter to John Turner, which Mr Moran takes to him. Write Holmes's letter.

36 Write a newspaper report about the attack on the carriage carrying gold from Ballarat to Melbourne. Write about the Ballarat Boys and Black Jack of Ballarat.

37 Imagine you are John Turner. You have given McCarthy money, a house, and a carriage. Now he wants your daughter. Write about your feelings in your personal notebook.

38 Write a conversation between Holmes and Watson after James McCarthy is found innocent. What do you think they said about James and Miss Turner? What will they do with Turner's signed story about the murder?

39 Write your opinion of this book. Did you enjoy this story? Why (not)? Would you like to read more stories by Arthur Conan Doyle?