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Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery of Boscombe Pool

One morning, I was having breakfast with my wife when a telegram arrived. It was from Sherlock Holmes. It read:

Are you free for a day or two? Must go to the west of England to help with the Boscombe Pool murder. Shall be glad if you can come with me. The change will be good for us. Leaving Paddington station on the 11.15 train.

'Will you go?' said my wife, looking across at me.

'I really don't know what to say,' I answered. 'I have a lot of sick people to visit.'

'Anstruther can do your work for you. You are looking tired and I think a change from your work will be good for you. You are always so interested in Mr Holmes's cases.'

'As always, you are right, my dear. But if I do go, I must get ready immediately, because the train leaves in half an hour.'

My early life as a soldier taught me to travel with very few things. In a few minutes, I was on my way to Paddington station. There I found my old friend in his long grey coat and his favourite hat. He was walking up and down the platform.

'It is really very good of you to come, Watson,' he said. 'I need a friend like you at times like this. No one can help me as you can. Please keep two corner places and I shall buy the tickets.'

We were alone during the train journey. Holmes had a large number of newspapers with him and for much of the time he wrote and thought. Finally, he made the papers



'Have you heard anything about this case?' he asked.

into a very large ball and threw them away, keeping only one.

'Have you heard anything about this case?' he asked.

'No, nothing. I have not seen a newspaper for some days.'

'The London papers have not written much about it. I have read them all because I need to know all the facts. It seems to be one of those cases which looks very clear. That is why I think it will be difficult.'

'Isn't that strange?'

'Oh no. Cases which seem very easy like this one are often the hardest, I find. But just now, things look very serious for the son of the murdered man.'

'So you are sure that it is a murder?'

'Not yet. It seems to be. But I must believe nothing until I have studied all the facts. Now I shall explain in a few words what I have read.'

'Boscombe Valley is near Ross in Herefordshire. A large part of the land there belongs to a Mr John Turner. He made a lot of money in Australia and returned to live in England some years ago. His neighbour, Mr Charles McCarthy, was also in Australia and lives at Hatherley, a farm which belongs to Turner. The two men first met in Australia and it is natural that they have chosen to live in the same neighbourhood. Turner is the richer man and it seems that McCarthy pays him for the use of his farm. They seem to be good friends and spend quite a lot of their time together. McCarthy has one son, who is eighteen years old, and Turner has a daughter who is about the same age. The wives of both men are dead. The two families lived quietly and did not mix much with other people. McCarthy had two servants but Turner in his big house has several more – about six. That is all I have been able to find out about these families.'

'What about the murder, then?' I asked.

'Don't hurry me, Watson. Just listen. I am coming to that.'

'Last Monday, 3 June, Charles McCarthy went to the town of Ross with his servant. This was in the morning. While he was there, he told his servant to hurry because he had an important meeting with someone at three o'clock that afternoon. They drove back quickly to his house at Hatherley. Just before three o'clock, McCarthy left the farmhouse and walked down alone to Boscombe Pool. He never came back.'

'It is a quarter of a mile from Hatherley Farm to Boscombe Pool and two different people saw him as he walked that way. One was an old woman but we do not know her name. The other was a manservant of Mr Turner, called William Crowder. Both people say that McCarthy was alone. The servant also says that, a few minutes after he saw McCarthy go past, he also saw his son, Mr James McCarthy, going the same way. He had a gun under his arm. The son could see his father and was following him. But Crowder, the servant, thought nothing of this until he heard of McCarthy's death later that evening.'

'You explain it all so clearly,' I said.

'I have told you to listen, dear doctor. When I have finished, you can say what you like. I shall continue.'

'Another person saw the two McCarthys after William Crowder. The land around Boscombe Pool is full of trees with a little grass in the open parts beside the water. A girl of fourteen, Patience Moran, was picking flowers among the trees that afternoon. She saw Mr McCarthy and his son close to the lake. They both seemed to be very angry. She heard Mr McCarthy using strong language to his son. She saw the young man lift up his arm. He seemed ready to hit his father. She felt so frightened that she ran away. When she got home, she told her mother about the quarrel. "When I saw them, they seemed to be going to have a fight," she said. Just as she was speaking, young



Patience Moran saw Mr McCarthy and his son close to the lake.

They both seemed to be very angry.

Mr McCarthy came running up to their house. "I have just found my father by the pool," he shouted. "He is dead. We must get help." He looked very excited, without either his hat or his gun. His right hand was red with blood. Immediately, Patience's parents went with him to the pool, where they found his father's dead body lying on the grass. There were many wounds in his head, made by something thick and heavy like the wooden part of the young man's gun. They found this gun lying on the grass not far from the dead man. The police soon came and immediately held the young man for questioning, then locked him up. His case will come up in a few weeks' time.'

'Everything points to the fact that the young man is guilty, does it not?' I said.

'The facts are not always what they seem,' answered Holmes. 'We think that they all point to the same thing but, if we look at them in another way, they can tell quite a different story. It is true that the case against the young man is very serious and maybe he is in fact guilty. But there are several people who believe that he is innocent. One of these is Miss Turner, the daughter of McCarthy's neighbour. She has asked Detective Lestrade to take on the case and now Lestrade, since he cannot really say no, has asked me to help him. That is why we are hurrying along in a train instead of having a quiet breakfast at home.'

'I am afraid that the case is so clear that no one will thank you for showing what happened,' I said.

'We shall see,' my friend answered. 'We both know that Lestrade is not as clever as he thinks and I am sure that I shall notice some things which he has missed. But there is something more to tell you. When the police came to Hatherley Farm and took young McCarthy prisoner, he said, "I am deeply sorry but I am not surprised. I was expecting this."'



James McCarthy came running up to the Moran family's house and said, 'I have just found my father by the pool. He is dead.'

'Of course, that shows that he is guilty,' I said.

'In no way. In fact, he has repeated many times that he is innocent.'

'But that is hard to believe, don't you think?'

'Of course not. He cannot be so stupid that he does not realize the danger which he is in. So he cannot be surprised that he is a prisoner. Clearly he is sorry that his father is dead and that they had a quarrel. His feelings are quite natural, I think.'

'So what story does this young man have to tell?'

'You can read it here in this newspaper,' said Holmes. He gave it to me and pointed to the right page. This is what I read:

Mr James McCarthy, the son of the dead man, gave the following story: 'I was away from home for three days because I had business in Bristol. I came back only last Monday in the morning. My father was not at home when I arrived. A servant told me that he was in Ross on business. After some time, I heard the wheels of his carriage coming back. I looked out of the window and saw him walking quickly away from the house. I did not know where he was going. I then took my gun and went for a walk. I wanted to shoot some birds in the trees on the other side of Boscombe Pool. On my way, I passed William Crowder, as he has told you. But he is wrong when he says that I was following my father. I had no idea that he was in front of me. When I was about a hundred yards from the pool, I heard someone call "Cooee!" My father and I often used this call. I hurried towards the pool and found him standing there. He seemed very surprised to see me and also quite angry. He asked, "What are you doing here?" I explained, we began to talk and more angry words followed. I became angry too. I felt ready to hit him but instead I decided to leave. I know that my father

gets angry very quickly, sometimes about things that are not important.

I then went back towards Hatherley Farm. After only one hundred and fifty yards, I heard a terrible scream, so I ran back to the pool again. I found my father on the ground. He was dying. There were terrible wounds on his head. I dropped my gun and held him in my arms but he died almost immediately. I stayed beside him for some minutes and then I made my way to the nearest house to ask for help. I saw no one near my father when I returned with Mr and Mrs Moran. I have no idea how he got those wounds. He was a cold man and not much liked in the neighbourhood; but I do not think that he had any enemies. That is all I know about this business.'

Questioner: Did your father say anything to you before he died?

McCarthy: His voice was very weak. He spoke a few words but I only understood something about a rat.

Questioner: What did that mean to you?

McCarthy: It meant nothing. I do not think he knew what he was saying.

Questioner: What were you talking about with your father that made him so angry?

McCarthy: I prefer not to answer.

Questioner: I must ask you to tell us.

McCarthy: It is not possible for me to tell you. Please understand that it has nothing to do with his murder.

Questioner: That is for us to decide. If you do not answer, you must realize that the case against you will be worse.

McCarthy: I do not want to speak about it.

Questioner: Is it true that the call of 'Cooee' was a call which you and your father used between you?

McCarthy: Yes, it is.

Questioner: Then why did he use it before he saw you – before he even knew of your return from Bristol?

McCarthy: I do not know.

Questioner: Did you see anything unusual when you ran back to find your father?

McCarthy: Nothing very clear.

Questioner: What do you mean?

McCarthy: I was so surprised and worried that I could think only of my father. But I remember that, as I ran towards him, I saw something on the ground to the left of me. It seemed to be a piece of grey cloth – a kind of coat, I think. When I got up, I looked for it again but it was gone.

Questioner: Do you mean that it disappeared before you went for help?

McCarthy: Yes, it was gone.

Questioner: You cannot say what it was?

McCarthy: No, I just had a feeling that there was something there.

Questioner: How far from the body?

McCarthy: About fifteen yards away.

Questioner: And how far was it from the trees?

McCarthy: About the same.

Questioner: So you think that someone took it while you were only fifteen yards away?

McCarthy: Yes, but I had my back towards it.

The questioning of McCarthy ended here.

Looking at the newspaper, I said, 'I see that the questioner has used hard words about young McCarthy. He gives importance to the fact that his father called to him before he saw him and also that he did not want to explain his quarrel with his father. He tells us to remember the strange words which the dying man spoke. All these things, he says, are very much against the son.'

Holmes laughed softly and made himself comfortable in his corner. 'Both you and the questioner have pointed to just those things which help the young man's case most. Don't you see that you believe him to be at the same time much too clever and not clever enough? He is not very clever if he cannot explain the quarrel in some way that makes us feel sorry for him. And too clever with his strange story of the rat, and the cloth which disappeared. No, Watson, I shall study this case with the idea that what the young man says is true. We shall see where that path takes us. And now I shall not speak another word about the case until we get to Ross. We shall have lunch at Swindon and that will be in twenty minutes.' Then Holmes took a book from his pocket and sat silently, reading.

It was nearly four o'clock when we arrived at last at the pretty little town of Ross. A thin man with an ugly face was waiting for us on the platform. I knew immediately that this was Lestrade, of Scotland Yard. We drove with him to an hotel, where we took rooms.

'I have asked for a carriage,' said Lestrade, as we sat drinking a cup of tea. 'I know, Mr Holmes, that you will not rest until you have visited the place of the murder.'

'A carriage? That was kind of you,' Holmes answered, 'but because of the weather I shall not need one.'

Lestrade looked surprised. 'I do not quite understand,' he said.

'There is no wind and not a cloud in the sky. I have a packet of cigarettes to smoke and the chairs in this hotel are unusually comfortable. I do not think that I shall need the carriage tonight.'

Lestrade gave a laugh. 'I am sure that you have decided how this case will end from your study of the newspapers. It is all quite clear and it becomes clearer with every new fact. Still, one