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\*\*\* START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE ADVENTURE OF WISTERIA LODGE \*\*\*

Produced by David Brannan

The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge

by

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

CONTENTS

1. The Singular Experience of Mr. John Scott Eccles

2. The Tiger of San Pedro

1. The Singular Experience of Mr. John Scott Eccles

I find it recorded in my notebook that it was a bleak and windy day

towards the end of March in the year 1892. Holmes had received a

telegram while we sat at our lunch, and he had scribbled a reply. He

made no remark, but the matter remained in his thoughts, for he stood

in front of the fire afterwards with a thoughtful face, smoking his

pipe, and casting an occasional glance at the message. Suddenly he

turned upon me with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

"I suppose, Watson, we must look upon you as a man of letters," said

he. "How do you define the word 'grotesque'?"

"Strange--remarkable," I suggested.

He shook his head at my definition.

"There is surely something more than that," said he; "some underlying

suggestion of the tragic and the terrible. If you cast your mind back

to some of those narratives with which you have afflicted a

long-suffering public, you will recognize how often the grotesque has

deepened into the criminal. Think of that little affair of the

red-headed men. That was grotesque enough in the outset, and yet it

ended in a desperate attempt at robbery. Or, again, there was that

most grotesque affair of the five orange pips, which led straight to a

murderous conspiracy. The word puts me on the alert."

"Have you it there?" I asked.

He read the telegram aloud.

"Have just had most incredible and grotesque experience. May I consult

you?

"Scott Eccles,

"Post Office, Charing Cross."

"Man or woman?" I asked.

"Oh, man, of course. No woman would ever send a reply-paid telegram.

She would have come."

"Will you see him?"

"My dear Watson, you know how bored I have been since we locked up

Colonel Carruthers. My mind is like a racing engine, tearing itself to

pieces because it is not connected up with the work for which it was

built. Life is commonplace, the papers are sterile; audacity and

romance seem to have passed forever from the criminal world. Can you

ask me, then, whether I am ready to look into any new problem, however

trivial it may prove? But here, unless I am mistaken, is our client."

A measured step was heard upon the stairs, and a moment later a stout,

tall, gray-whiskered and solemnly respectable person was ushered into

the room. His life history was written in his heavy features and

pompous manner. From his spats to his gold-rimmed spectacles he was a

Conservative, a churchman, a good citizen, orthodox and conventional to

the last degree. But some amazing experience had disturbed his native

composure and left its traces in his bristling hair, his flushed, angry

cheeks, and his flurried, excited manner. He plunged instantly into his

business.

"I have had a most singular and unpleasant experience, Mr. Holmes,"

said he. "Never in my life have I been placed in such a situation. It

is most improper--most outrageous. I must insist upon some

explanation." He swelled and puffed in his anger.

"Pray sit down, Mr. Scott Eccles," said Holmes in a soothing voice.

"May I ask, in the first place, why you came to me at all?"

"Well, sir, it did not appear to be a matter which concerned the

police, and yet, when you have heard the facts, you must admit that I

could not leave it where it was. Private detectives are a class with

whom I have absolutely no sympathy, but none the less, having heard

your name--"

"Quite so. But, in the second place, why did you not come at once?"

Holmes glanced at his watch.

"It is a quarter-past two," he said. "Your telegram was dispatched

about one. But no one can glance at your toilet and attire without

seeing that your disturbance dates from the moment of your waking."

Our client smoothed down his unbrushed hair and felt his unshaven chin.

"You are right, Mr. Holmes. I never gave a thought to my toilet. I was

only too glad to get out of such a house. But I have been running

round making inquiries before I came to you. I went to the house

agents, you know, and they said that Mr. Garcia's rent was paid up all

right and that everything was in order at Wisteria Lodge."

"Come, come, sir," said Holmes, laughing. "You are like my friend, Dr.

Watson, who has a bad habit of telling his stories wrong end foremost.

Please arrange your thoughts and let me know, in their due sequence,

exactly what those events are which have sent you out unbrushed and

unkempt, with dress boots and waistcoat buttoned awry, in search of

advice and assistance."

Our client looked down with a rueful face at his own unconventional

appearance.

"I'm sure it must look very bad, Mr. Holmes, and I am not aware that in

my whole life such a thing has ever happened before. But I will tell you

the whole queer business, and when I have done so you will admit, I am

sure, that there has been enough to excuse me."

But his narrative was nipped in the bud. There was a bustle outside,

and Mrs. Hudson opened the door to usher in two robust and

official-looking individuals, one of whom was well known to us as

Inspector Gregson of Scotland Yard, an energetic, gallant, and, within

his limitations, a capable officer. He shook hands with Holmes and

introduced his comrade as Inspector Baynes, of the Surrey Constabulary.

"We are hunting together, Mr. Holmes, and our trail lay in this

direction." He turned his bulldog eyes upon our visitor. "Are you Mr.

John Scott Eccles, of Popham House, Lee?"

"I am."

"We have been following you about all the morning."

"You traced him through the telegram, no doubt," said Holmes.

"Exactly, Mr. Holmes. We picked up the scent at Charing Cross

Post-Office and came on here."

"But why do you follow me? What do you want?"

"We wish a statement, Mr. Scott Eccles, as to the events which led up

to the death last night of Mr. Aloysius Garcia, of Wisteria Lodge, near

Esher."

Our client had sat up with staring eyes and every tinge of colour

struck from his astonished face.

"Dead? Did you say he was dead?"

"Yes, sir, he is dead."

"But how? An accident?"

"Murder, if ever there was one upon earth."

"Good God! This is awful! You don't mean--you don't mean that I am

suspected?"

"A letter of yours was found in the dead man's pocket, and we know by

it that you had planned to pass last night at his house."

"So I did."

"Oh, you did, did you?"

Out came the official notebook.

"Wait a bit, Gregson," said Sherlock Holmes. "All you desire is a

plain statement, is it not?"

"And it is my duty to warn Mr. Scott Eccles that it may be used against

him."

"Mr. Eccles was going to tell us about it when you entered the room. I

think, Watson, a brandy and soda would do him no harm. Now, sir, I

suggest that you take no notice of this addition to your audience, and

that you proceed with your narrative exactly as you would have done had

you never been interrupted."

Our visitor had gulped off the brandy and the colour had returned to

his face. With a dubious glance at the inspector's notebook, he

plunged at once into his extraordinary statement.

"I am a bachelor," said he, "and being of a sociable turn I cultivate a

large number of friends. Among these are the family of a retired

brewer called Melville, living at Abermarle Mansion, Kensington. It

was at his table that I met some weeks ago a young fellow named Garcia.

He was, I understood, of Spanish descent and connected in some way with

the embassy. He spoke perfect English, was pleasing in his manners,

and as good-looking a man as ever I saw in my life.

"In some way we struck up quite a friendship, this young fellow and I.

He seemed to take a fancy to me from the first, and within two days of

our meeting he came to see me at Lee. One thing led to another, and it

ended in his inviting me out to spend a few days at his house, Wisteria

Lodge, between Esher and Oxshott. Yesterday evening I went to Esher to

fulfil this engagement.

"He had described his household to me before I went there. He lived

with a faithful servant, a countryman of his own, who looked after all

his needs. This fellow could speak English and did his housekeeping

for him. Then there was a wonderful cook, he said, a half-breed whom

he had picked up in his travels, who could serve an excellent dinner.

I remember that he remarked what a queer household it was to find in

the heart of Surrey, and that I agreed with him, though it has proved a

good deal queerer than I thought.

"I drove to the place--about two miles on the south side of Esher. The

house was a fair-sized one, standing back from the road, with a curving

drive which was banked with high evergreen shrubs. It was an old,

tumbledown building in a crazy state of disrepair. When the trap

pulled up on the grass-grown drive in front of the blotched and

weather-stained door, I had doubts as to my wisdom in visiting a man

whom I knew so slightly. He opened the door himself, however, and

greeted me with a great show of cordiality. I was handed over to the

manservant, a melancholy, swarthy individual, who led the way, my bag

in his hand, to my bedroom. The whole place was depressing. Our

dinner was tete-a-tete, and though my host did his best to be

entertaining, his thoughts seemed to continually wander, and he talked

so vaguely and wildly that I could hardly understand him. He

continually drummed his fingers on the table, gnawed his nails, and

gave other signs of nervous impatience. The dinner itself was neither

well served nor well cooked, and the gloomy presence of the taciturn

servant did not help to enliven us. I can assure you that many times

in the course of the evening I wished that I could invent some excuse

which would take me back to Lee.

"One thing comes back to my memory which may have a bearing upon the

business that you two gentlemen are investigating. I thought nothing

of it at the time. Near the end of dinner a note was handed in by the

servant. I noticed that after my host had read it he seemed even more

distrait and strange than before. He gave up all pretence at

conversation and sat, smoking endless cigarettes, lost in his own

thoughts, but he made no remark as to the contents. About eleven I was

glad to go to bed. Some time later Garcia looked in at my door--the

room was dark at the time--and asked me if I had rung. I said that I

had not. He apologized for having disturbed me so late, saying that it

was nearly one o'clock. I dropped off after this and slept soundly all

night.

"And now I come to the amazing part of my tale. When I woke it was

broad daylight. I glanced at my watch, and the time was nearly nine.

I had particularly asked to be called at eight, so I was very much

astonished at this forgetfulness. I sprang up and rang for the

servant. There was no response. I rang again and again, with the same

result. Then I came to the conclusion that the bell was out of order.

I huddled on my clothes and hurried downstairs in an exceedingly bad

temper to order some hot water. You can imagine my surprise when I

found that there was no one there. I shouted in the hall. There was

no answer. Then I ran from room to room. All were deserted. My host

had shown me which was his bedroom the night before, so I knocked at

the door. No reply. I turned the handle and walked in. The room was

empty, and the bed had never been slept in. He had gone with the rest.

The foreign host, the foreign footman, the foreign cook, all had

vanished in the night! That was the end of my visit to Wisteria Lodge."

Sherlock Holmes was rubbing his hands and chuckling as he added this

bizarre incident to his collection of strange episodes.

"Your experience is, so far as I know, perfectly unique," said he.

"May I ask, sir, what you did then?"

"I was furious. My first idea was that I had been the victim of some

absurd practical joke. I packed my things, banged the hall door behind

me, and set off for Esher, with my bag in my hand. I called at Allan

Brothers', the chief land agents in the village, and found that it was

from this firm that the villa had been rented. It struck me that the

whole proceeding could hardly be for the purpose of making a fool of

me, and that the main object must be to get out of the rent. It is

late in March, so quarter-day is at hand. But this theory would not

work. The agent was obliged to me for my warning, but told me that the

rent had been paid in advance. Then I made my way to town and called

at the Spanish embassy. The man was unknown there. After this I went

to see Melville, at whose house I had first met Garcia, but I found

that he really knew rather less about him than I did. Finally when I

got your reply to my wire I came out to you, since I gather that you

are a person who gives advice in difficult cases. But now, Mr.

Inspector, I understand, from what you said when you entered the room,

that you can carry the story on, and that some tragedy had occurred. I

can assure you that every word I have said is the truth, and that,

outside of what I have told you, I know absolutely nothing about the

fate of this man. My only desire is to help the law in every possible

way."

"I am sure of it, Mr. Scott Eccles--I am sure of it," said Inspector

Gregson in a very amiable tone. "I am bound to say that everything

which you have said agrees very closely with the facts as they have

come to our notice. For example, there was that note which arrived

during dinner. Did you chance to observe what became of it?"

"Yes, I did. Garcia rolled it up and threw it into the fire."

"What do you say to that, Mr. Baynes?"

The country detective was a stout, puffy, red man, whose face was only

redeemed from grossness by two extraordinarily bright eyes, almost

hidden behind the heavy creases of cheek and brow. With a slow smile

he drew a folded and discoloured scrap of paper from his pocket.

"It was a dog-grate, Mr. Holmes, and he overpitched it. I picked this

out unburned from the back of it."

Holmes smiled his appreciation.

"You must have examined the house very carefully to find a single

pellet of paper."

"I did, Mr. Holmes. It's my way. Shall I read it, Mr. Gregson?"

The Londoner nodded.

"The note is written upon ordinary cream-laid paper without watermark.

It is a quarter-sheet. The paper is cut off in two snips with a

short-bladed scissors. It has been folded over three times and sealed

with purple wax, put on hurriedly and pressed down with some flat oval

object. It is addressed to Mr. Garcia, Wisteria Lodge. It says:

"Our own colours, green and white. Green open, white shut. Main

stair, first corridor, seventh right, green baize. Godspeed. D.

"It is a woman's writing, done with a sharp-pointed pen, but the

address is either done with another pen or by someone else. It is

thicker and bolder, as you see."

"A very remarkable note," said Holmes, glancing it over. "I must

compliment you, Mr. Baynes, upon your attention to detail in your

examination of it. A few trifling points might perhaps be added. The

oval seal is undoubtedly a plain sleeve-link--what else is of such a

shape? The scissors were bent nail scissors. Short as the two snips

are, you can distinctly see the same slight curve in each."

The country detective chuckled.

"I thought I had squeezed all the juice out of it, but I see there was

a little over," he said. "I'm bound to say that I make nothing of the

note except that there was something on hand, and that a woman, as

usual was at the bottom of it."

Mr. Scott Eccles had fidgeted in his seat during this conversation.

"I am glad you found the note, since it corroborates my story," said

he. "But I beg to point out that I have not yet heard what has

happened to Mr. Garcia, nor what has become of his household."

"As to Garcia," said Gregson, "that is easily answered. He was found

dead this morning upon Oxshott Common, nearly a mile from his home.

His head had been smashed to pulp by heavy blows of a sandbag or some

such instrument, which had crushed rather than wounded. It is a lonely

corner, and there is no house within a quarter of a mile of the spot.

He had apparently been struck down first from behind, but his assailant

had gone on beating him long after he was dead. It was a most furious

assault. There are no footsteps nor any clue to the criminals."

"Robbed?"

"No, there was no attempt at robbery."

"This is very painful--very painful and terrible," said Mr. Scott

Eccles in a querulous voice, "but it is really uncommonly hard on me.

I had nothing to do with my host going off upon a nocturnal excursion

and meeting so sad an end. How do I come to be mixed up with the case?"

"Very simply, sir," Inspector Baynes answered. "The only document

found in the pocket of the deceased was a letter from you saying that

you would be with him on the night of his death. It was the envelope of

this letter which gave us the dead man's name and address. It was

after nine this morning when we reached his house and found neither you

nor anyone else inside it. I wired to Mr. Gregson to run you down in

London while I examined Wisteria Lodge. Then I came into town, joined

Mr. Gregson, and here we are."

"I think now," said Gregson, rising, "we had best put this matter into

an official shape. You will come round with us to the station, Mr.

Scott Eccles, and let us have your statement in writing."

"Certainly, I will come at once. But I retain your services, Mr.

Holmes. I desire you to spare no expense and no pains to get at the

truth."

My friend turned to the country inspector.

"I suppose that you have no objection to my collaborating with you, Mr.

Baynes?"

"Highly honoured, sir, I am sure."

"You appear to have been very prompt and businesslike in all that you

have done. Was there any clue, may I ask, as to the exact hour that

the man met his death?"

"He had been there since one o'clock. There was rain about that time,

and his death had certainly been before the rain."

"But that is perfectly impossible, Mr. Baynes," cried our client. "His

voice is unmistakable. I could swear to it that it was he who

addressed me in my bedroom at that very hour."

"Remarkable, but by no means impossible," said Holmes, smiling.

"You have a clue?" asked Gregson.

"On the face of it the case is not a very complex one, though it

certainly presents some novel and interesting features. A further

knowledge of facts is necessary before I would venture to give a final

and definite opinion. By the way, Mr. Baynes, did you find anything

remarkable besides this note in your examination of the house?"

The detective looked at my friend in a singular way.

"There were," said he, "one or two \_very\_ remarkable things. Perhaps

when I have finished at the police-station you would care to come out

and give me your opinion of them."

"I am entirely at your service," said Sherlock Holmes, ringing the

bell. "You will show these gentlemen out, Mrs. Hudson, and kindly send

the boy with this telegram. He is to pay a five-shilling reply."

We sat for some time in silence after our visitors had left. Holmes

smoked hard, with his browns drawn down over his keen eyes, and his

head thrust forward in the eager way characteristic of the man.

"Well, Watson," he asked, turning suddenly upon me, "what do you make

of it?"

"I can make nothing of this mystification of Scott Eccles."

"But the crime?"

"Well, taken with the disappearance of the man's companions, I should

say that they were in some way concerned in the murder and had fled

from justice."

"That is certainly a possible point of view. On the face of it you

must admit, however, that it is very strange that his two servants

should have been in a conspiracy against him and should have attacked

him on the one night when he had a guest. They had him alone at their

mercy every other night in the week."

"Then why did they fly?"

"Quite so. Why did they fly? There is a big fact. Another big fact

is the remarkable experience of our client, Scott Eccles. Now, my dear

Watson, is it beyond the limits of human ingenuity to furnish an

explanation which would cover both of these big facts? If it were one

which would also admit of the mysterious note with its very curious

phraseology, why, then it would be worth accepting as a temporary

hypothesis. If the fresh facts which come to our knowledge all fit

themselves into the scheme, then our hypothesis may gradually become a

solution."

"But what is our hypothesis?"

Holmes leaned back in his chair with half-closed eyes.

"You must admit, my dear Watson, that the idea of a joke is impossible.

There were grave events afoot, as the sequel showed, and the coaxing of

Scott Eccles to Wisteria Lodge had some connection with them."

"But what possible connection?"

"Let us take it link by link. There is, on the face of it, something

unnatural about this strange and sudden friendship between the young

Spaniard and Scott Eccles. It was the former who forced the pace. He

called upon Eccles at the other end of London on the very day after he

first met him, and he kept in close touch with him until he got him

down to Esher. Now, what did he want with Eccles? What could Eccles

supply? I see no charm in the man. He is not particularly

intelligent--not a man likely to be congenial to a quick-witted Latin.

Why, then, was he picked out from all the other people whom Garcia met

as particularly suited to his purpose? Has he any one outstanding

quality? I say that he has. He is the very type of conventional

British respectability, and the very man as a witness to impress

another Briton. You saw yourself how neither of the inspectors dreamed

of questioning his statement, extraordinary as it was."

"But what was he to witness?"

"Nothing, as things turned out, but everything had they gone another

way. That is how I read the matter."

"I see, he might have proved an alibi."

"Exactly, my dear Watson; he might have proved an alibi. We will

suppose, for argument's sake, that the household of Wisteria Lodge are

confederates in some design. The attempt, whatever it may be, is to

come off, we will say, before one o'clock. By some juggling of the

clocks it is quite possible that they may have got Scott Eccles to bed

earlier than he thought, but in any case it is likely that when Garcia

went out of his way to tell him that it was one it was really not more

than twelve. If Garcia could do whatever he had to do and be back by

the hour mentioned he had evidently a powerful reply to any accusation.

Here was this irreproachable Englishman ready to swear in any court of

law that the accused was in the house all the time. It was an

insurance against the worst."

"Yes, yes, I see that. But how about the disappearance of the others?"

"I have not all my facts yet, but I do not think there are any

insuperable difficulties. Still, it is an error to argue in front of

your data. You find yourself insensibly twisting them round to fit

your theories."

"And the message?"

"How did it run? 'Our own colours, green and white.' Sounds like

racing. 'Green open, white shut.' That is clearly a signal. 'Main

stair, first corridor, seventh right, green baize.' This is an

assignation. We may find a jealous husband at the bottom of it all.

It was clearly a dangerous quest. She would not have said 'Godspeed'

had it not been so. 'D'--that should be a guide."

"The man was a Spaniard. I suggest that 'D' stands for Dolores, a

common female name in Spain."

"Good, Watson, very good--but quite inadmissable. A Spaniard would

write to a Spaniard in Spanish. The writer of this note is certainly

English. Well, we can only possess our soul in patience until this

excellent inspector come back for us. Meanwhile we can thank our lucky

fate which has rescued us for a few short hours from the insufferable

fatigues of idleness."

\* \* \*

An answer had arrived to Holmes's telegram before our Surrey officer

had returned. Holmes read it and was about to place it in his notebook

when he caught a glimpse of my expectant face. He tossed it across with

a laugh.

"We are moving in exalted circles," said he.

The telegram was a list of names and addresses:

Lord Harringby, The Dingle; Sir George Ffolliott, Oxshott Towers; Mr.

Hynes Hynes, J.P., Purdley Place; Mr. James Baker Williams, Forton Old

Hall; Mr. Henderson, High Gable; Rev. Joshua Stone, Nether Walsling.

"This is a very obvious way of limiting our field of operations," said

Holmes. "No doubt Baynes, with his methodical mind, has already

adopted some similar plan."

"I don't quite understand."

"Well, my dear fellow, we have already arrived at the conclusion that

the message received by Garcia at dinner was an appointment or an

assignation. Now, if the obvious reading of it is correct, and in

order to keep the tryst one has to ascend a main stair and seek the

seventh door in a corridor, it is perfectly clear that the house is a

very large one. It is equally certain that this house cannot be more

than a mile or two from Oxshott, since Garcia was walking in that

direction and hoped, according to my reading of the facts, to be back

in Wisteria Lodge in time to avail himself of an alibi, which would

only be valid up to one o'clock. As the number of large houses close

to Oxshott must be limited, I adopted the obvious method of sending to

the agents mentioned by Scott Eccles and obtaining a list of them.

Here they are in this telegram, and the other end of our tangled skein

must lie among them."

\* \* \*

It was nearly six o'clock before we found ourselves in the pretty

Surrey village of Esher, with Inspector Baynes as our companion.

Holmes and I had taken things for the night, and found comfortable

quarters at the Bull. Finally we set out in the company of the

detective on our visit to Wisteria Lodge. It was a cold, dark March

evening, with a sharp wind and a fine rain beating upon our faces, a

fit setting for the wild common over which our road passed and the

tragic goal to which it led us.

2. The Tiger of San Pedro

A cold and melancholy walk of a couple of miles brought us to a high

wooden gate, which opened into a gloomy avenue of chestnuts. The curved

and shadowed drive led us to a low, dark house, pitch-black against a

slate-coloured sky. From the front window upon the left of the door

there peeped a glimmer of a feeble light.

"There's a constable in possession," said Baynes. "I'll knock at the

window." He stepped across the grass plot and tapped with his hand on

the pane. Through the fogged glass I dimly saw a man spring up from a

chair beside the fire, and heard a sharp cry from within the room. An

instant later a white-faced, hard-breathing policeman had opened the

door, the candle wavering in his trembling hand.

"What's the matter, Walters?" asked Baynes sharply.

The man mopped his forehead with his handkerchief and gave a long sigh

of relief.

"I am glad you have come, sir. It has been a long evening, and I don't

think my nerve is as good as it was."

"Your nerve, Walters? I should not have thought you had a nerve in

your body."

"Well, sir, it's this lonely, silent house and the queer thing in the

kitchen. Then when you tapped at the window I thought it had come

again."

"That what had come again?"

"The devil, sir, for all I know. It was at the window."

"What was at the window, and when?"

"It was just about two hours ago. The light was just fading. I was

sitting reading in the chair. I don't know what made me look up, but

there was a face looking in at me through the lower pane. Lord, sir,

what a face it was! I'll see it in my dreams."

"Tut, tut, Walters. This is not talk for a police-constable."

"I know, sir, I know; but it shook me, sir, and there's no use to deny

it. It wasn't black, sir, nor was it white, nor any colour that I know

but a kind of queer shade like clay with a splash of milk in it. Then

there was the size of it--it was twice yours, sir. And the look of

it--the great staring goggle eyes, and the line of white teeth like a

hungry beast. I tell you, sir, I couldn't move a finger, nor get my

breath, till it whisked away and was gone. Out I ran and through the

shrubbery, but thank God there was no one there."

"If I didn't know you were a good man, Walters, I should put a black

mark against you for this. If it were the devil himself a constable on

duty should never thank God that he could not lay his hands upon him.

I suppose the whole thing is not a vision and a touch of nerves?"

"That, at least, is very easily settled," said Holmes, lighting his

little pocket lantern. "Yes," he reported, after a short examination

of the grass bed, "a number twelve shoe, I should say. If he was all

on the same scale as his foot he must certainly have been a giant."

"What became of him?"

"He seems to have broken through the shrubbery and made for the road."

"Well," said the inspector with a grave and thoughtful face, "whoever

he may have been, and whatever he may have wanted, he's gone for the

present, and we have more immediate things to attend to. Now, Mr.

Holmes, with your permission, I will show you round the house."

The various bedrooms and sitting-rooms had yielded nothing to a careful

search. Apparently the tenants had brought little or nothing with

them, and all the furniture down to the smallest details had been taken

over with the house. A good deal of clothing with the stamp of Marx

and Co., High Holborn, had been left behind. Telegraphic inquiries had

been already made which showed that Marx knew nothing of his customer

save that he was a good payer. Odds and ends, some pipes, a few

novels, two of them in Spanish, an old-fashioned pinfire revolver, and

a guitar were among the personal property.

"Nothing in all this," said Baynes, stalking, candle in hand, from room

to room. "But now, Mr. Holmes, I invite your attention to the kitchen."

It was a gloomy, high-ceilinged room at the back of the house, with a

straw litter in one corner, which served apparently as a bed for the

cook. The table was piled with half-eaten dishes and dirty plates, the

debris of last night's dinner.

"Look at this," said Baynes. "What do you make of it?"

He held up his candle before an extraordinary object which stood at the

back of the dresser. It was so wrinkled and shrunken and withered that

it was difficult to say what it might have been. One could but say that

it was black and leathery and that it bore some resemblance to a

dwarfish, human figure. At first, as I examined it, I thought that it

was a mummified negro baby, and then it seemed a very twisted and

ancient monkey. Finally I was left in doubt as to whether it was

animal or human. A double band of white shells were strung round the

centre of it.

"Very interesting--very interesting, indeed!" said Holmes, peering at

this sinister relic. "Anything more?"

In silence Baynes led the way to the sink and held forward his candle.

The limbs and body of some large, white bird, torn savagely to pieces

with the feathers still on, were littered all over it. Holmes pointed

to the wattles on the severed head.

"A white cock," said he. "Most interesting! It is really a very

curious case."

But Mr. Baynes had kept his most sinister exhibit to the last. From

under the sink he drew a zinc pail which contained a quantity of blood.

Then from the table he took a platter heaped with small pieces of

charred bone.

"Something has been killed and something has been burned. We raked all

these out of the fire. We had a doctor in this morning. He says that

they are not human."

Holmes smiled and rubbed his hands.

"I must congratulate you, Inspector, on handling so distinctive and

instructive a case. Your powers, if I may say so without offence, seem

superior to your opportunities."

Inspector Baynes's small eyes twinkled with pleasure.

"You're right, Mr. Holmes. We stagnate in the provinces. A case of

this sort gives a man a chance, and I hope that I shall take it. What

do you make of these bones?"

"A lamb, I should say, or a kid."

"And the white cock?"

"Curious, Mr. Baynes, very curious. I should say almost unique."

"Yes, sir, there must have been some very strange people with some very

strange ways in this house. One of them is dead. Did his companions

follow him and kill him? If they did we should have them, for every

port is watched. But my own views are different. Yes, sir, my own

views are very different."

"You have a theory then?"

"And I'll work it myself, Mr. Holmes. It's only due to my own credit

to do so. Your name is made, but I have still to make mine. I should

be glad to be able to say afterwards that I had solved it without your

help."

Holmes laughed good-humoredly.

"Well, well, Inspector," said he. "Do you follow your path and I will

follow mine. My results are always very much at your service if you

care to apply to me for them. I think that I have seen all that I wish

in this house, and that my time may be more profitably employed

elsewhere. Au revoir and good luck!"

I could tell by numerous subtle signs, which might have been lost upon

anyone but myself, that Holmes was on a hot scent. As impassive as

ever to the casual observer, there were none the less a subdued

eagerness and suggestion of tension in his brightened eyes and brisker

manner which assured me that the game was afoot. After his habit he

said nothing, and after mine I asked no questions. Sufficient for me

to share the sport and lend my humble help to the capture without

distracting that intent brain with needless interruption. All would

come round to me in due time.

I waited, therefore--but to my ever-deepening disappointment I waited

in vain. Day succeeded day, and my friend took no step forward. One

morning he spent in town, and I learned from a casual reference that he

had visited the British Museum. Save for this one excursion, he spent

his days in long and often solitary walks, or in chatting with a number

of village gossips whose acquaintance he had cultivated.

"I'm sure, Watson, a week in the country will be invaluable to you," he

remarked. "It is very pleasant to see the first green shoots upon the

hedges and the catkins on the hazels once again. With a spud, a tin

box, and an elementary book on botany, there are instructive days to be

spent." He prowled about with this equipment himself, but it was a

poor show of plants which he would bring back of an evening.

Occasionally in our rambles we came across Inspector Baynes. His fat,

red face wreathed itself in smiles and his small eyes glittered as he

greeted my companion. He said little about the case, but from that

little we gathered that he also was not dissatisfied at the course of

events. I must admit, however, that I was somewhat surprised when,

some five days after the crime, I opened my morning paper to find in

large letters:

THE OXSHOTT MYSTERY

A SOLUTION

ARREST OF SUPPOSED ASSASSIN

Holmes sprang in his chair as if he had been stung when I read the

headlines.

"By Jove!" he cried. "You don't mean that Baynes has got him?"

"Apparently," said I as I read the following report:

"Great excitement was caused in Esher and the neighbouring district

when it was learned late last night that an arrest had been effected in

connection with the Oxshott murder. It will be remembered that Mr.

Garcia, of Wisteria Lodge, was found dead on Oxshott Common, his body

showing signs of extreme violence, and that on the same night his

servant and his cook fled, which appeared to show their participation

in the crime. It was suggested, but never proved, that the deceased

gentleman may have had valuables in the house, and that their

abstraction was the motive of the crime. Every effort was made by

Inspector Baynes, who has the case in hand, to ascertain the hiding

place of the fugitives, and he had good reason to believe that they had

not gone far but were lurking in some retreat which had been already

prepared. It was certain from the first, however, that they would

eventually be detected, as the cook, from the evidence of one or two

tradespeople who have caught a glimpse of him through the window, was a

man of most remarkable appearance--being a huge and hideous mulatto,

with yellowish features of a pronounced negroid type. This man has

been seen since the crime, for he was detected and pursued by Constable

Walters on the same evening, when he had the audacity to revisit

Wisteria Lodge. Inspector Baynes, considering that such a visit must

have some purpose in view and was likely, therefore, to be repeated,

abandoned the house but left an ambuscade in the shrubbery. The man

walked into the trap and was captured last night after a struggle in

which Constable Downing was badly bitten by the savage. We understand

that when the prisoner is brought before the magistrates a remand will be

applied for by the police, and that great developments are hoped from

his capture."

"Really we must see Baynes at once," cried Holmes, picking up his hat.

"We will just catch him before he starts." We hurried down the village

street and found, as we had expected, that the inspector was just

leaving his lodgings.

"You've seen the paper, Mr. Holmes?" he asked, holding one out to us.

"Yes, Baynes, I've seen it. Pray don't think it a liberty if I give

you a word of friendly warning."

"Of warning, Mr. Holmes?"

"I have looked into this case with some care, and I am not convinced

that you are on the right lines. I don't want you to commit yourself

too far unless you are sure."

"You're very kind, Mr. Holmes."

"I assure you I speak for your good."

It seemed to me that something like a wink quivered for an instant over

one of Mr. Baynes's tiny eyes.

"We agreed to work on our own lines, Mr. Holmes. That's what I am

doing."

"Oh, very good," said Holmes. "Don't blame me."

"No, sir; I believe you mean well by me. But we all have our own

systems, Mr. Holmes. You have yours, and maybe I have mine."

"Let us say no more about it."

"You're welcome always to my news. This fellow is a perfect savage, as

strong as a cart-horse and as fierce as the devil. He chewed Downing's

thumb nearly off before they could master him. He hardly speaks a word

of English, and we can get nothing out of him but grunts."

"And you think you have evidence that he murdered his late master?"

"I didn't say so, Mr. Holmes; I didn't say so. We all have our little

ways. You try yours and I will try mine. That's the agreement."

Holmes shrugged his shoulders as we walked away together. "I can't

make the man out. He seems to be riding for a fall. Well, as he says,

we must each try our own way and see what comes of it. But there's

something in Inspector Baynes which I can't quite understand."

"Just sit down in that chair, Watson," said Sherlock Holmes when we had

returned to our apartment at the Bull. "I want to put you in touch

with the situation, as I may need your help to-night. Let me show you

the evolution of this case so far as I have been able to follow it.

Simple as it has been in its leading features, it has none the less

presented surprising difficulties in the way of an arrest. There are

gaps in that direction which we have still to fill.

"We will go back to the note which was handed in to Garcia upon the

evening of his death. We may put aside this idea of Baynes's that

Garcia's servants were concerned in the matter. The proof of this lies

in the fact that it was \_he\_ who had arranged for the presence of Scott

Eccles, which could only have been done for the purpose of an alibi.

It was Garcia, then, who had an enterprise, and apparently a criminal

enterprise, in hand that night in the course of which he met his death.

I say 'criminal' because only a man with a criminal enterprise desires

to establish an alibi. Who, then, is most likely to have taken his

life? Surely the person against whom the criminal enterprise was

directed. So far it seems to me that we are on safe ground.

"We can now see a reason for the disappearance of Garcia's household.

They were \_all\_ confederates in the same unknown crime. If it came off

when Garcia returned, any possible suspicion would be warded off by the

Englishman's evidence, and all would be well. But the attempt was a

dangerous one, and if Garcia did \_not\_ return by a certain hour it was

probable that his own life had been sacrificed. It had been arranged,

therefore, that in such a case his two subordinates were to make for

some prearranged spot where they could escape investigation and be in a

position afterwards to renew their attempt. That would fully explain

the facts, would it not?"

The whole inexplicable tangle seemed to straighten out before me. I

wondered, as I always did, how it had not been obvious to me before.

"But why should one servant return?"

"We can imagine that in the confusion of flight something precious,

something which he could not bear to part with, had been left behind.

That would explain his persistence, would it not?"

"Well, what is the next step?"

"The next step is the note received by Garcia at the dinner. It

indicates a confederate at the other end. Now, where was the other

end? I have already shown you that it could only lie in some large

house, and that the number of large houses is limited. My first days in

this village were devoted to a series of walks in which in the

intervals of my botanical researches I made a reconnaissance of all the

large houses and an examination of the family history of the occupants.

One house, and only one, riveted my attention. It is the famous old

Jacobean grange of High Gable, one mile on the farther side of Oxshott,

and less than half a mile from the scene of the tragedy. The other

mansions belonged to prosaic and respectable people who live far aloof

from romance. But Mr. Henderson, of High Gable, was by all accounts a

curious man to whom curious adventures might befall. I concentrated my

attention, therefore, upon him and his household.

"A singular set of people, Watson--the man himself the most singular of

them all. I managed to see him on a plausible pretext, but I seemed to

read in his dark, deepset, brooding eyes that he was perfectly aware of

my true business. He is a man of fifty, strong, active, with iron-gray

hair, great bunched black eyebrows, the step of a deer and the air of

an emperor--a fierce, masterful man, with a red-hot spirit behind his

parchment face. He is either a foreigner or has lived long in the

tropics, for he is yellow and sapless, but tough as whipcord. His

friend and secretary, Mr. Lucas, is undoubtedly a foreigner, chocolate

brown, wily, suave, and catlike, with a poisonous gentleness of speech.

You see, Watson, we have come already upon two sets of foreigners--one

at Wisteria Lodge and one at High Gable--so our gaps are beginning to

close.

"These two men, close and confidential friends, are the centre of the

household; but there is one other person who for our immediate purpose

may be even more important. Henderson has two children--girls of

eleven and thirteen. Their governess is a Miss Burnet, an Englishwoman

of forty or thereabouts. There is also one confidential manservant.

This little group forms the real family, for they travel about

together, and Henderson is a great traveller, always on the move. It

is only within the last weeks that he has returned, after a year's

absence, to High Gable. I may add that he is enormously rich, and

whatever his whims may be he can very easily satisfy them. For the

rest, his house is full of butlers, footmen, maidservants, and the

usual overfed, underworked staff of a large English country house.

"So much I learned partly from village gossip and partly from my own

observation. There are no better instruments than discharged servants

with a grievance, and I was lucky enough to find one. I call it luck,

but it would not have come my way had I not been looking out for it.

As Baynes remarks, we all have our systems. It was my system which

enabled me to find John Warner, late gardener of High Gable, sacked in

a moment of temper by his imperious employer. He in turn had friends

among the indoor servants who unite in their fear and dislike of their

master. So I had my key to the secrets of the establishment.

"Curious people, Watson! I don't pretend to understand it all yet, but

very curious people anyway. It's a double-winged house, and the

servants live on one side, the family on the other. There's no link

between the two save for Henderson's own servant, who serves the

family's meals. Everything is carried to a certain door, which forms

the one connection. Governess and children hardly go out at all,

except into the garden. Henderson never by any chance walks alone.

His dark secretary is like his shadow. The gossip among the servants

is that their master is terribly afraid of something. 'Sold his soul

to the devil in exchange for money,' says Warner, 'and expects his

creditor to come up and claim his own.' Where they came from, or who

they are, nobody has an idea. They are very violent. Twice Henderson

has lashed at folk with his dog-whip, and only his long purse and heavy

compensation have kept him out of the courts.

"Well, now, Watson, let us judge the situation by this new information.

We may take it that the letter came out of this strange household and

was an invitation to Garcia to carry out some attempt which had already

been planned. Who wrote the note? It was someone within the citadel,

and it was a woman. Who then but Miss Burnet, the governess? All our

reasoning seems to point that way. At any rate, we may take it as a

hypothesis and see what consequences it would entail. I may add that

Miss Burnet's age and character make it certain that my first idea that

there might be a love interest in our story is out of the question.

"If she wrote the note she was presumably the friend and confederate of

Garcia. What, then, might she be expected to do if she heard of his

death? If he met it in some nefarious enterprise her lips might be

sealed. Still, in her heart, she must retain bitterness and hatred

against those who had killed him and would presumably help so far as

she could to have revenge upon them. Could we see her, then and try to

use her? That was my first thought. But now we come to a sinister

fact. Miss Burnet has not been seen by any human eye since the night

of the murder. From that evening she has utterly vanished. Is she

alive? Has she perhaps met her end on the same night as the friend

whom she had summoned? Or is she merely a prisoner? There is the point

which we still have to decide.

"You will appreciate the difficulty of the situation, Watson. There is

nothing upon which we can apply for a warrant. Our whole scheme might

seem fantastic if laid before a magistrate. The woman's disappearance

counts for nothing, since in that extraordinary household any member of

it might be invisible for a week. And yet she may at the present

moment be in danger of her life. All I can do is to watch the house

and leave my agent, Warner, on guard at the gates. We can't let such a

situation continue. If the law can do nothing we must take the risk

ourselves."

"What do you suggest?"

"I know which is her room. It is accessible from the top of an

outhouse. My suggestion is that you and I go to-night and see if we

can strike at the very heart of the mystery."

It was not, I must confess, a very alluring prospect. The old house

with its atmosphere of murder, the singular and formidable inhabitants,

the unknown dangers of the approach, and the fact that we were putting

ourselves legally in a false position all combined to damp my ardour.

But there was something in the ice-cold reasoning of Holmes which made

it impossible to shrink from any adventure which he might recommend.

One knew that thus, and only thus, could a solution be found. I

clasped his hand in silence, and the die was cast.

But it was not destined that our investigation should have so

adventurous an ending. It was about five o'clock, and the shadows of

the March evening were beginning to fall, when an excited rustic rushed

into our room.

"They've gone, Mr. Holmes. They went by the last train. The lady

broke away, and I've got her in a cab downstairs."

"Excellent, Warner!" cried Holmes, springing to his feet. "Watson, the

gaps are closing rapidly."

In the cab was a woman, half-collapsed from nervous exhaustion. She

bore upon her aquiline and emaciated face the traces of some recent

tragedy. Her head hung listlessly upon her breast, but as she raised

it and turned her dull eyes upon us I saw that her pupils were dark

dots in the centre of the broad gray iris. She was drugged with opium.

"I watched at the gate, same as you advised, Mr. Holmes," said our

emissary, the discharged gardener. "When the carriage came out I

followed it to the station. She was like one walking in her sleep, but

when they tried to get her into the train she came to life and

struggled. They pushed her into the carriage. She fought her way out

again. I took her part, got her into a cab, and here we are. I shan't

forget the face at the carriage window as I led her away. I'd have a

short life if he had his way--the black-eyed, scowling, yellow devil."

We carried her upstairs, laid her on the sofa, and a couple of cups of

the strongest coffee soon cleared her brain from the mists of the drug.

Baynes had been summoned by Holmes, and the situation rapidly explained

to him.

"Why, sir, you've got me the very evidence I want," said the inspector

warmly, shaking my friend by the hand. "I was on the same scent as you

from the first."

"What! You were after Henderson?"

"Why, Mr. Holmes, when you were crawling in the shrubbery at High Gable

I was up one of the trees in the plantation and saw you down below. It

was just who would get his evidence first."

"Then why did you arrest the mulatto?"

Baynes chuckled.

"I was sure Henderson, as he calls himself, felt that he was suspected,

and that he would lie low and make no move so long as he thought he was

in any danger. I arrested the wrong man to make him believe that our

eyes were off him. I knew he would be likely to clear off then and

give us a chance of getting at Miss Burnet."

Holmes laid his hand upon the inspector's shoulder.

"You will rise high in your profession. You have instinct and

intuition," said he.

Baynes flushed with pleasure.

"I've had a plain-clothes man waiting at the station all the week.

Wherever the High Gable folk go he will keep them in sight. But he

must have been hard put to it when Miss Burnet broke away. However,

your man picked her up, and it all ends well. We can't arrest without

her evidence, that is clear, so the sooner we get a statement the

better."

"Every minute she gets stronger," said Holmes, glancing at the

governess. "But tell me, Baynes, who is this man Henderson?"

"Henderson," the inspector answered, "is Don Murillo, once called the

Tiger of San Pedro."

The Tiger of San Pedro! The whole history of the man came back to me

in a flash. He had made his name as the most lewd and bloodthirsty

tyrant that had ever governed any country with a pretence to

civilization. Strong, fearless, and energetic, he had sufficient

virtue to enable him to impose his odious vices upon a cowering people

for ten or twelve years. His name was a terror through all Central

America. At the end of that time there was a universal rising against

him. But he was as cunning as he was cruel, and at the first whisper

of coming trouble he had secretly conveyed his treasures aboard a ship

which was manned by devoted adherents. It was an empty palace which

was stormed by the insurgents next day. The dictator, his two

children, his secretary, and his wealth had all escaped them. From that

moment he had vanished from the world, and his identity had been a

frequent subject for comment in the European press.

"Yes, sir, Don Murillo, the Tiger of San Pedro," said Baynes. "If you

look it up you will find that the San Pedro colours are green and

white, same as in the note, Mr. Holmes. Henderson he called himself,

but I traced him back, Paris and Rome and Madrid to Barcelona, where

his ship came in in '86. They've been looking for him all the time for

their revenge, but it is only now that they have begun to find him out."

"They discovered him a year ago," said Miss Burnet, who had sat up and

was now intently following the conversation. "Once already his life

has been attempted, but some evil spirit shielded him. Now, again, it

is the noble, chivalrous Garcia who has fallen, while the monster goes

safe. But another will come, and yet another, until some day justice

will be done; that is as certain as the rise of to-morrow's sun." Her

thin hands clenched, and her worn face blanched with the passion of her

hatred.

"But how come you into this matter, Miss Burnet?" asked Holmes. "How

can an English lady join in such a murderous affair?"

"I join in it because there is no other way in the world by which

justice can be gained. What does the law of England care for the

rivers of blood shed years ago in San Pedro, or for the shipload of

treasure which this man has stolen? To you they are like crimes

committed in some other planet. But \_we\_ know. We have learned the

truth in sorrow and in suffering. To us there is no fiend in hell like

Juan Murillo, and no peace in life while his victims still cry for

vengeance."

"No doubt," said Holmes, "he was as you say. I have heard that he was

atrocious. But how are you affected?"

"I will tell you it all. This villain's policy was to murder, on one

pretext or another, every man who showed such promise that he might in

time come to be a dangerous rival. My husband--yes, my real name is

Signora Victor Durando--was the San Pedro minister in London. He met

me and married me there. A nobler man never lived upon earth.

Unhappily, Murillo heard of his excellence, recalled him on some

pretext, and had him shot. With a premonition of his fate he had

refused to take me with him. His estates were confiscated, and I was

left with a pittance and a broken heart.

"Then came the downfall of the tyrant. He escaped as you have just

described. But the many whose lives he had ruined, whose nearest and

dearest had suffered torture and death at his hands, would not let the

matter rest. They banded themselves into a society which should never

be dissolved until the work was done. It was my part after we had

discovered in the transformed Henderson the fallen despot, to attach

myself to his household and keep the others in touch with his

movements. This I was able to do by securing the position of governess

in his family. He little knew that the woman who faced him at every

meal was the woman whose husband he had hurried at an hour's notice

into eternity. I smiled on him, did my duty to his children, and bided

my time. An attempt was made in Paris and failed. We zig-zagged

swiftly here and there over Europe to throw off the pursuers and

finally returned to this house, which he had taken upon his first

arrival in England.

"But here also the ministers of justice were waiting. Knowing that he

would return there, Garcia, who is the son of the former highest

dignitary in San Pedro, was waiting with two trusty companions of

humble station, all three fired with the same reasons for revenge. He

could do little during the day, for Murillo took every precaution and

never went out save with his satellite Lucas, or Lopez as he was known

in the days of his greatness. At night, however, he slept alone, and

the avenger might find him. On a certain evening, which had been

prearranged, I sent my friend final instructions, for the man was

forever on the alert and continually changed his room. I was to see

that the doors were open and the signal of a green or white light in a

window which faced the drive was to give notice if all was safe or if

the attempt had better be postponed.

"But everything went wrong with us. In some way I had excited the

suspicion of Lopez, the secretary. He crept up behind me and sprang

upon me just as I had finished the note. He and his master dragged me

to my room and held judgment upon me as a convicted traitress. Then

and there they would have plunged their knives into me could they have

seen how to escape the consequences of the deed. Finally, after much

debate, they concluded that my murder was too dangerous. But they

determined to get rid forever of Garcia. They had gagged me, and

Murillo twisted my arm round until I gave him the address. I swear

that he might have twisted it off had I understood what it would mean

to Garcia. Lopez addressed the note which I had written, sealed it

with his sleeve-link, and sent it by the hand of the servant, Jose.

How they murdered him I do not know, save that it was Murillo's hand

who struck him down, for Lopez had remained to guard me. I believe he

must have waited among the gorse bushes through which the path winds

and struck him down as he passed. At first they were of a mind to let

him enter the house and to kill him as a detected burglar; but they

argued that if they were mixed up in an inquiry their own identity

would at once be publicly disclosed and they would be open to further

attacks. With the death of Garcia, the pursuit might cease, since such

a death might frighten others from the task.

"All would now have been well for them had it not been for my knowledge

of what they had done. I have no doubt that there were times when my

life hung in the balance. I was confined to my room, terrorized by the

most horrible threats, cruelly ill-used to break my spirit--see this

stab on my shoulder and the bruises from end to end of my arms--and a

gag was thrust into my mouth on the one occasion when I tried to call

from the window. For five days this cruel imprisonment continued, with

hardly enough food to hold body and soul together. This afternoon a

good lunch was brought me, but the moment after I took it I knew that I

had been drugged. In a sort of dream I remember being half-led,

half-carried to the carriage; in the same state I was conveyed to the

train. Only then, when the wheels were almost moving, did I suddenly

realize that my liberty lay in my own hands. I sprang out, they tried

to drag me back, and had it not been for the help of this good man, who

led me to the cab, I should never had broken away. Now, thank God, I

am beyond their power forever."

We had all listened intently to this remarkable statement. It was

Holmes who broke the silence.

"Our difficulties are not over," he remarked, shaking his head. "Our

police work ends, but our legal work begins."

"Exactly," said I. "A plausible lawyer could make it out as an act of

self-defence. There may be a hundred crimes in the background, but it

is only on this one that they can be tried."

"Come, come," said Baynes cheerily, "I think better of the law than

that. Self-defence is one thing. To entice a man in cold blood with

the object of murdering him is another, whatever danger you may fear

from him. No, no, we shall all be justified when we see the tenants of

High Gable at the next Guildford Assizes."

\* \* \*

It is a matter of history, however, that a little time was still to

elapse before the Tiger of San Pedro should meet with his deserts.

Wily and bold, he and his companion threw their pursuer off their track

by entering a lodging-house in Edmonton Street and leaving by the

back-gate into Curzon Square. From that day they were seen no more in

England. Some six months afterwards the Marquess of Montalva and

Signor Rulli, his secretary, were both murdered in their rooms at the

Hotel Escurial at Madrid. The crime was ascribed to Nihilism, and the

murderers were never arrested. Inspector Baynes visited us at Baker

Street with a printed description of the dark face of the secretary,

and of the masterful features, the magnetic black eyes, and the tufted

brows of his master. We could not doubt that justice, if belated, had

come at last.

"A chaotic case, my dear Watson," said Holmes over an evening pipe. "It

will not be possible for you to present in that compact form which is

dear to your heart. It covers two continents, concerns two groups of

mysterious persons, and is further complicated by the highly

respectable presence of our friend, Scott Eccles, whose inclusion shows

me that the deceased Garcia had a scheming mind and a well-developed

instinct of self-preservation. It is remarkable only for the fact that

amid a perfect jungle of possibilities we, with our worthy

collaborator, the inspector, have kept our close hold on the essentials

and so been guided along the crooked and winding path. Is there any

point which is not quite clear to you?"

"The object of the mulatto cook's return?"

"I think that the strange creature in the kitchen may account for it.

The man was a primitive savage from the backwoods of San Pedro, and

this was his fetish. When his companion and he had fled to some

prearranged retreat--already occupied, no doubt by a confederate--the

companion had persuaded him to leave so compromising an article of

furniture. But the mulatto's heart was with it, and he was driven back

to it next day, when, on reconnoitering through the window, he found

policeman Walters in possession. He waited three days longer, and then

his piety or his superstition drove him to try once more. Inspector

Baynes, who, with his usual astuteness, had minimized the incident

before me, had really recognized its importance and had left a trap

into which the creature walked. Any other point, Watson?"

"The torn bird, the pail of blood, the charred bones, all the mystery

of that weird kitchen?"

Holmes smiled as he turned up an entry in his note-book.

"I spent a morning in the British Museum reading up on that and other

points. Here is a quotation from Eckermann's Voodooism and the Negroid

Religions:

"'The true voodoo-worshipper attempts nothing of importance without

certain sacrifices which are intended to propitiate his unclean gods.

In extreme cases these rites take the form of human sacrifices followed

by cannibalism. The more usual victims are a white cock, which is

plucked in pieces alive, or a black goat, whose throat is cut and body

burned.'

"So you see our savage friend was very orthodox in his ritual. It is

grotesque, Watson," Holmes added, as he slowly fastened his notebook,

"but, as I have had occasion to remark, there is but one step from the

grotesque to the horrible."

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