



Arthur Conan Doyle

*The Adventures
of Sherlock Holmes
Volume IV*



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THE ADVENTURE OF WISTERIA LODGE

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 recognise 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, grey-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.”

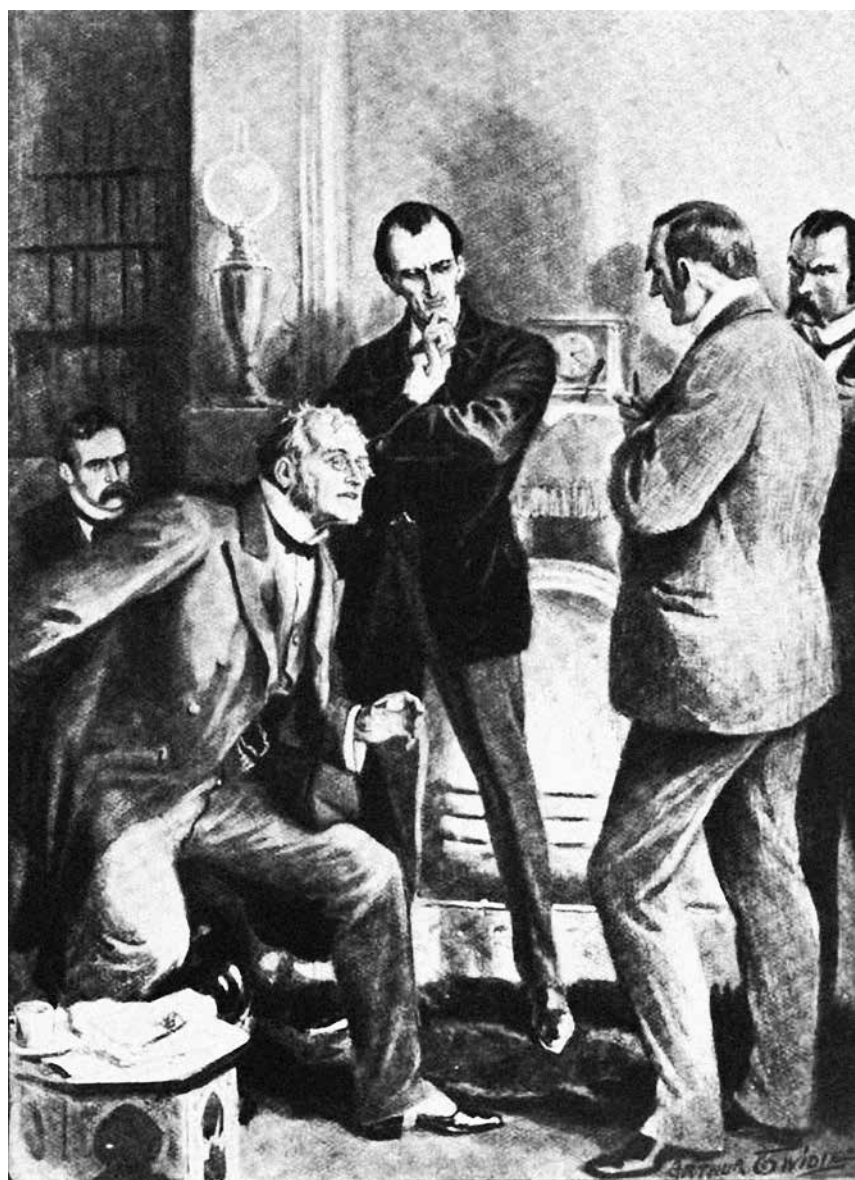
“We have been following you about all the morning.”

“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

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