



## The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes

### Adventure XX -- The Adventure of Musgrave Ritual

The story begins with a light-hearted description of Watson's despair at Holmes' untidiness, and who could blame him? writes Charlotte Anne Walters.

The letters fixed to the mantelpiece with a dagger, the tobacco in the Persian slipper, the VR shot into the wall; such untidiness reminds me of my old housemate who used to leave a bottle of milk out on the side for weeks, 'just to see what happens'.

Watson finally asks Holmes to tidy up his mass of paperwork and Holmes brings out a tin box full of old cases to sort them into. He pulls out various items originating from what is, in my opinion, his first real case. Though the Gloria Scott is generally regarded as the first, Holmes does not use his skills to solve it as the truth comes out without his intervention, but the conclusion of the Musgrave Ritual is entirely down to Holmes' brilliant deductions and follows the pattern more closely in terms of a client coming to visit and ask for help because the official police are baffled.

Retelling the case to Watson gives Holmes the perfect excuse to get out of the tidying up, just like when my old housemate said he couldn't possibly tidy the kitchen because to him, 'Hygiene is a tall woman from Bolton'. I know, it took me a while too...

Reginald Musgrave had been at the same college as Holmes and they had 'A slight acquaintance'. Like Victor Trevor, Musgrave was also a bit of a loner and quite unpopular. Clearly Holmes gravitated to such people and here again it leads to an adventure.



Holmes has newly arrived in London (pre Watson days) and takes rooms in Montague Street then sets about trying to make a name for himself in his chosen profession. Musgrave brings him a great opportunity to do so as no-one else has been able to solve the mystery of his missing butler and maid.

I love the description of Musgrave's wonderful old country pile, I'm right there with them stomping around between the oak and Elm in my tweeds. How lovely it must have been to have belonged to the gentry, inherit a sprawling country estate and spend your days managing it – no nine-to-five job, no daily commute to work, instead just passing time surrounded by the wonders of rural England. Reading this story on my train at 7.40am traveling into Birmingham to begin a long day's work at my desk, it makes me really sad that I can't spend all my days in the countryside which I love so much. I have long aspired to own an old country house and pootle around my estate all day riding my horses and walking my dogs (I do live in a barn conversion in a lovely rural town so don't feel too sorry for me) and felt a million miles from that dream as the train pulled into New Street station this morning. Perhaps if my novel becomes a best-seller, then a film etc... Ah, the power of dreams.

Anyway, back to poor Reginald Musgrave (isn't that just the best name of any of the clients?) and his vanishing household. Holmes cleverly works out that the strange ritual which each young man is required to say before inheriting the estate is actually the key to the whole mystery as it is basically the instructions in a treasure hunt leading to none other than a crown once owned by Charles the Second. The clever butler had worked this out and was trying to steal it with the help of the maid but got trapped in the cellar where the treasure was hidden and died. The maid fled, possibly because she was the one who trapped him there.

This is all fine except the fact that none of the many generations of Musgraves who had recited the ritual had ever figured out the truth behind it. The butler managed it, as did Holmes, with relative ease, so why not the people it affected most?

This last point aside, this is a fantastic story with Holmes at his energetic best. The logic and workings out are brilliant, but we still have Watson to remind us of his short-comings and eccentricities.

**Very enjoyable indeed – 9 out of 10. And husband agrees this time.**

**Charlotte Anne Walters**

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