

Sherlock Holmes and the Adventure of the Empty House

by Arthur Conan Doyle

Part 1

In the spring of 1894, everybody in London was interested in the murder Ronald Adair.

Ronald Adair was Australian. Adair's mother was in London for an operation. She was living with her son, Ronald, and her daughter, Hilda, at **427 Park Lane**¹, London. Ronald had no enemies and no vices. He was a young, quiet and easy-going aristocrat who died in a very strange way between the hours of 10 and 11:20 on the night of March 30th, 1894.

Ronald Adair liked playing cards. He was a member of 3 card clubs. On the day of his death, he had played a game of **whist**² after dinner. The other players were Mr Murray, Sir John Hardy and Colonel Moran. It was a well-balanced game and he lost 5 pounds at most. For such a wealthy man, this was not a lot. He was a cautious player, and he often won.

On the evening of his death, Ronald Adair returned from the club at exactly 10 o'clock. His mother and sister were absent. There was a fire in Adair's room and the window was open because of the smoke. No sound came from that room. The door was locked on the inside. When the door was forced open, the young man was found lying dead near the table. His head had been mutilated by a revolver bullet, but no weapon was found in the room. On the table, there were 2 banknotes for £10 each and £17 in silver and gold. There were some numbers on a sheet of paper with the names of some club friends opposite them.

Why was the door locked from the inside? What was the motive? Adair had no enemies and no valuables had been taken.

I, Dr Watson, was interested in the murder of Ronald Adair. After Sherlock Holmes's death, I tried to solve crimes with his methods.

¹Street next to Hyde Park with big expensive houses

²A classic English card game

Part 2

All day I tried to understand how and why Adair had been murdered. At about 6 o'clock, I left my work and I returned to my home in Kensington. I stopped to listen to a violin player but I knocked an old man carrying books. He was very angry.

I had been in my office for less than 5 minutes when my maid entered to say someone wanted to see me. It was the old man with a **dozen**³ books under his right arm. He wanted to apologize for being angry earlier.

When I realized that the man was Sherlock Holmes dressed up as a bookseller, I fainted.

When I woke up Holmes said "My dear Watson, I am sorry and I will explain everything, I didn't die, I hid for 3 years because I was in great danger. I had only one confidant – my brother Mycroft- who gave me money. I left Switzerland, spent 2 years in Tibet, where I met the **Dalai Llama**⁴. My name was Sigerson then. I then passed through **Persia**⁵, visited **Mecca**⁶, and paid a visit to the **Khalifa**⁷ in **Khartoum**⁸. I spent some months in France, in Montpellier. I decided to come back to London because I was very interested in the Park Lane mystery. I made a visit to my house in Baker Street at 2 o'clock. Mrs Hudson, my maid, was shocked to see me."

Part 3

"We have some work tonight at half-past nine, when we start the notable adventure of the empty house." said Holmes.

I had my revolver in my pocket. We entered a house. It was very dark, and the house was empty and dilapidated. We walked down the hall till a large square empty room. The window was dirty, but I could see we were on Baker Street, opposite Holmes's house. As I looked into Holmes's office I saw a man sitting in his chair. It was a perfect silhouette of Holmes. Holmes explained, "the credit for this marvellous wax model should be given to Monsieur Oscar Meunier, of Grenoble, who spent some days making it. I put the statue in my office this afternoon."

³A dozen = 12

⁴Head of state and spiritual leader of Tibet

⁵Old name for Iran

⁶Holy site of Islam, destination of the Hajj pilgrimage

⁷Head of an Islamic state

⁸Capital of Sudan

"But why?" I asked.

"Because, my dear Watson, I wanted my enemies to think I was in my office when in fact I wasn't."

The silhouette in the window was the bait. In silence and in darkness we watched and waited. Just before midnight I looked at the window: the silhouette had moved!

"Of course the statue has moved," he said. "We have been here 2 hours, and my maid, Mrs Hudson, has changed its position eight times in that time, every quarter of an hour."

Shortly after midnight someone entered the house. A door opened and closed. I could hear steps in the hall. I put my hand on my revolver. I saw a man come into the room. He was less than two metres from us but he didn't know we were in the room. He went to the window. He was an elderly man with a long thin nose, a bald head and a huge moustache. He was wearing a top hat, a black suit with a white shirt and bow-tie. In his hands he had an object that looked like a stick. He took the strange gun and took position at the window. He put it against his shoulder. I heard a strange **whizz**⁹ and a sound of glass breaking. At that moment Holmes jumped on the man. The man got up and tried to strangle Holmes. I hit him on the head with my revolver, and he fell unconscious. Outside there was the sound of running feet and two policemen in uniform, with one detective, came quickly into the room.

"Is that you, Lestrade?" said Holmes.

"Yes, Mr Holmes," the detective (=police officer) answered.

A policeman stood on each side of our prisoner. Lestrade had two candles and the policemen uncovered their lanterns. I could finally see the prisoner. His face was very virile and sinister. He looked intelligent. His eyes were fixed on Holmes's face with a look of **hatred**¹⁰.

⁹*Un sifflement*

¹⁰*haine*

"This is Colonel Sebastian Moran," Holmes said. The **fierce**¹¹ old man said nothing but **glared**¹² at Holmes with his savage eyes. The police took Colonel Moran away.

Holmes picked up the air-gun from the floor and examined it. "An admirable and unique weapon," he said. "Noiseless, but very **powerful**¹³, a marvellous invention by Von Herder, the blind German inventor.

Holmes turned to Lestrade, "What are you going to **charge this man with**¹⁴?"

"The attempted murder of Sherlock Holmes, of course."

"No, Lestrade. I do not want to appear in your account but I congratulate you. You have got him."

"Got him! Got who, Mr Holmes?"

"The man who shot Ronald Adair with a revolver bullet from an air-gun through the open window of the second floor of number 427 Park Lane, on the 30th of last month."

"Really? But what was the motive?"

"Colonel Moran cheated at cards. I believe that Adair discovered Moran was cheating. He probably spoke to him and said he would tell. The exclusion from his clubs would mean ruin for Moran, who lived by the money he got from cheating at cards, so he killed Adair. At the time Adair was calculating how much money he should give back to people because of his partner's cheating, and he locked the door so that his mother and sister wouldn't surprise him."

And every one of his conclusions were true. Thanks to the genius of London's most famous detective another case was solved, and a dangerous criminal was put behind bars.

¹¹*féroce*

¹²*lancer un regard furieux*

¹³*puissant*

¹⁴Charge somebody with = *inculper quelqu'un de*