

## Sherlock Holmes and the Adventure of the Empty House

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In the spring of 1894 everybody in London was interested in the murder of the Honourable Ronald Adair, murdered in unusual and inexplicable circumstances. The crime itself was interesting, but it was nothing compared to the events I will now tell you about.

You can imagine that after the years I spent with Sherlock Holmes I was interested in crime. After his disappearance I tried to solve crimes with his methods. Sometimes I succeeded, sometimes I didn't. No crime interested me more than the murder of Ronald Adair. As I read the evidence, I realised how much I missed Sherlock Holmes, the number one criminal agent in Europe. He would have been a great help to the police. I will tell you the facts the public knew at the conclusion of the trial.



Disappearance

Succeed



Trial

The Honourable Ronald Adair was the second son of the Earl of Maynooth, at that time governor of one of the Australian colonies. Adair's mother had returned from Australia for an operation on a cataract. She was living with her son, Ronald, and her daughter, Hilda, at 427 Park Lane<sup>1</sup>. Ronald had no enemies and no particular vices. He had been engaged to Miss Edith Woodley of Carstairs<sup>2</sup>, but they decided to end the relationship some months earlier, and both of them were happy with this arrangement.

Engaged

Ronald Adair was quiet and unemotional, yet death came to this easy-going young aristocrat in a very strange and unexpected way between the hours of ten and eleven-twenty on the night of March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1894.

Ronald Adair liked playing cards. He played very often, but never bet more money than he

Blind

<sup>1</sup>Street next to Hyde Park with big expensive houses

<sup>2</sup>Town in Scotland

could afford. He was a member of three card clubs. After dinner on the day of his death he had played a game of whist<sup>3</sup>. The other players were Mr Murray, Sir John Hardy, and Colonel Moran. It was a well-balanced game, and at most he lost five pounds. For such a wealthy man this was not a lot. He was a cautious player, and he often won. Once, in partnership with Colonel Moran, he had won £420 in one game.

On the evening of the crime he returned from the club at exactly ten o'clock. His mother and sister were visiting a relative. The servant had lit a fire in Adair's room, and had opened the window because of the smoke. No sound came from that room before eleven-twenty, when his mother returned, and tried to enter his room to say good night. The door was locked on the inside, and nobody answered. With some help she forced the door open. The unfortunate young man was lying dead near the table. His head had been mutilated by an expanded revolver bullet, but no weapon was found in the room. On the table there were two banknotes for £10 each and £17 in silver and gold. The money was arranged in little piles. There were some numbers on a sheet of paper with the names of some club friends opposite them. The police supposed that he was writing his winnings and losses at cards.

Bet



Balanced



Cautious



Locked



Revolver



Bullets

Weapons

A detailed examination of the circumstances only made the case more complex. Why had he locked the door from the inside? Had the murderer locked it and escaped through the window? This seemed unlikely- the drop was more than twenty feet<sup>4</sup>, and a bed of crocuses lay undisturbed under the window. Besides, nobody could have climbed up to the window without leaving traces; access to the window was extremely difficult- there was no drainpipe

<sup>3</sup>A classic English cardgame

<sup>4</sup>1 foot = 30cm

or anything similar to climb. So it seemed that the victim had locked the door. It also seemed too difficult to shoot through the window with a revolver. And besides, Park Lane is a busy street, and nobody had heard a shot. And what was the motive? Adair had no enemies, and no valuables had been taken.

All day I tried to find a theory that made sense. I made little progress. At about six o'clock I left my work and went for a walk along Oxford Street. I stopped to listen to a man playing the violin. I gave him some money and as I stepped back I knocked an elderly man and made him drop the books he was carrying. I remember the title of one of them, *The Origen of Tree Worship*, and I realised he must be a poor bibliophile who, as a trade or a hobby, collected obscure books. I apologized for the accident, and helped him pick up the books, but it was obvious that these books were very precious for the elderly man. He was quite angry, and turned quickly to walk away. I saw his curved back and white moustache as he disappeared in the crowd.

I returned to my home in Kensington. I had been in my office for less than five minutes when my maid entered to say a person desired to see me. To my surprise it was the old man I had seen earlier, with a dozen<sup>5</sup> books under his right arm.



Crocuses



Drainpipe



Valuables



Elderly



Apologize



Back

Crowd



Maid

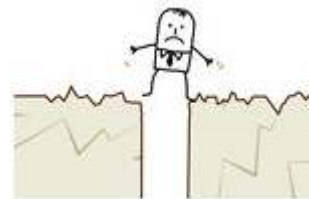
<sup>5</sup>A dozen = 12

"You're surprised to see me, sir," he said in a strange, croaking voice. I nodded. He continued, "Well, I have a conscience, sir, and when I saw you go into this house I followed you. I wanted to see this kind gentleman and apologize for being angry earlier. You were kind to help me pick up my books, and I am thankful for it."

"You are making a mountain out of a molehill<sup>6</sup>. It is no big deal... I've seen you around here before, haven't I?"

"Probably. I am a neighbour of yours. I have a little bookshop on the corner of Church Street. Maybe I have some books that will interest you, sir; I have here *British Birds*, and *The Twelve Labours of Hercules*, and *The Holy War* – every one a bargain<sup>7</sup>. With five books you could fill that gap on that second shelf. It looks untidy, does it not, sir?"

I moved my head to look at the bookshelf behind me. When I turned back Sherlock Holmes was standing smiling at me across the desk. I stood and looked at him, then fainted for the first and last time in my life.



Nod

Gap



<sup>6</sup>Faire une montagne d'une taupinière

<sup>7</sup>Bonne affaire

Bookshelf

Untidy

Faint

When I woke up Holmes was there. "My dear Watson," said a familiar voice, "a thousand apologies. I had no idea you would be affected this way by my appearance."

"Holmes," I cried. "Is it really you? Are you really alive? Is it possible that you climbed out of that terrible chasm? Sit down and tell me how you came out alive?"

He sat opposite me and started smoking a pipe in his usual manner. He was dressed in the dirty old coat of the book salesman, but the rest of that individual was in a pile of white hair and old books on my desk. Holmes looked even slimmer and more determined than before, and he had a white tinge in his face which showed his life recently had not been very healthy.

"I will explain everything," said Holmes, "I had no difficulty getting out of the chasm, because I was never really in it."

"You were never in it?"

"No, Watson, I wasn't. As you know Professor Moriarty<sup>8</sup> had followed us across Europe to the Reichenbach Falls<sup>9</sup>. I had little doubt I had come to the end of my career when I saw the sinister figure of Professor Moriarty standing on the narrow path that led to safety. He gave me permission to write the short note which I left for you with my cigarette-box and my stick. When I reached the end of the path Moriarty took no weapon, but ran towards me and put his arms around me. He wanted revenge. He pushed me near to the waterfall. However, I know some baritsu, a type of Japanese wrestling. I escaped from his grip, kicked him, and he fell. He hit a rock, then splashed into the water."



Pile (of books)



(Walking)



Wrestling

<sup>8</sup>Leader of a criminal gang, and enemy of Sherlock Holmes.

<sup>9</sup>Waterfall in Switzerland.

Stick



Grip

Kick

Splash

"But the tracks!" I cried. "I saw with my own eyes that two sets of tracks went down the path and none returned."

"This is what happened. When the professor disappeared I remembered Moriarty was not the only man who wanted to kill me. At least three of his men were still alive, and they would be angry that their leader was dead. I decided it would be a good idea if everyone thought I was dead. I examined the cliff behind me. In your account, which I read with great interest some months later, you said it was vertical, but this was not completely true; there were some small footholds. The climb was difficult, but I took the risk. I reached a ledge where I could hide. From there I watched you and the police officers investigate my death. After you had gone an enormous rock rolled past me from above and fell into the chasm. First, I thought it was an accident, but then I looked up and saw a man's head against the evening sky; another stone just missed me. One of Moriarty's men knew I was still alive. I climbed down onto a path, and ran for ten miles over the mountains. A week later I was in Florence, sure that nobody in the world knew what had happened to me.

"I had only one confidant – my brother Mycroft. I'm sorry, my dear Watson, but it was very important for you to think I was dead. You would not have written such a convincing account of my unhappy end if you hadn't believed it was true. I wanted to write to you, but I knew I couldn't- I was in great danger, and a look of surprise or emotion on your part could have drawn attention to my identity. As for Mycroft, I had to confide in him to obtain the money I needed. The trial in London didn't go as well as I had hoped- two of the most dangerous members of Moriarty's gang were set free. I had to disappear, so I travelled. I spent two years in Tibet, where I spent some days with the Dalai Llama<sup>10</sup>. You may have read of the remarkable explorations of a Norwegian named Sigerson, but I'm sure you never imagined you were receiving news from a friend.

<sup>10</sup>Head of state and spiritual leader of Tibet



Tracks

Cliff

Footholds

Ledge

Free

"I then passed through Persia<sup>11</sup>, visited Mecca<sup>12</sup>, and paid<sup>13</sup> a short but interesting visit to the Khalifa<sup>14</sup> in Khartoum<sup>15</sup>. Returning to France, I spent some months researching the effects of radioactivity in Montpellier. I learnt that only one of my enemies remained in London, and was encouraged to return by the news of this remarkable Park Lane mystery, which I not only found interesting, but it offered me some peculiar personal opportunities. I came to London immediately, made a visit to my house in Baker Street, where Mrs Hudson, my maid, was shocked to see me, and Mycroft had preserved my rooms and my papers as they were before I left. So it was, my dear Watson, that at two o'clock today I sat in my old armchair in my old room, only wishing to see my old friend Watson in the other chair."

This was the remarkable story I listened to on that April evening- a story I would not have believed if Holmes wasn't sitting in front of me telling it. "I have some work for us both tonight," said Holmes. I immediately asked to know more. "You will hear and see enough before morning," he answered. "We have three years of the past to discuss. That should occupy us until half-past nine, when we start the notable adventure of the empty house."

It was a lot like old times when, precisely three hours later, I was sitting beside my friend, Holmes, in a hansom, my revolver in my pocket, and the thrill of adventure in my heart. Holmes was cold, serious and silent. I didn't know yet what wild beast we were going to hunt down in the dark jungle of criminal London, but this master hunter made it clear it would be a grave adventure.

<sup>11</sup>Old name for Iran

<sup>12</sup>Holy site of Islam, destination of the Hajj pilgrimage

<sup>13</sup>To pay somebody a visit = *rendre visite à quelqu'un*

<sup>14</sup>Head of an Islamic state

<sup>15</sup>Capital of Sudan





*Armchair*

*Hansom (cab)*

*Wild Beast*

*Hunter*

I had imagined we were going to Baker Street, but Holmes stopped the cab on the corner of Cavendish Square. As he stepped out he looked carefully to the right and the left, and at every street corner he checked nobody was following us. Holmes' knowledge of London was extraordinary, and we passed through many small alleys I didn't know existed. Finally we arrived on a small street, lined with old, run-down houses. We turned up a narrow alley, went through a wooden gate into an empty yard and opened the back door of a house with a key. We entered together, and Holmes closed the door behind us.

It was very dark, and the house was empty. As we walked the floorboards creaked, and as I touched the walls I could feel strips of wallpaper falling off the walls. Holmes' cold, thin fingers closed around my wrist and led me forward down a long hall. At the end there was a large square empty room. The window was dirty, but I could see we were on Baker Street, opposite Holmes' house. Holmes told me to move near to the window. As I looked into Holmes' office I saw the shadow of 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 it in my office this afternoon."

"But why?" I asked.



"Because, my dear Watson, I had the strongest possible reason for wanting certain people to think I was there when in fact I wasn't."

"And you thought the rooms were watched?"



"I *knew* the rooms were watched."

"By who?"

Alley

Run-down

Gate



Yard

Wallpaper

Thin

Wrist

Hall

Shadow

"By my old enemies, Watson. By the charming society whose leader lies in the Reichenbach Falls. You must remember that they knew, and only they knew, that I was still alive. They believed I would come back to my house one day, so they watched it at all times, and this morning they saw me arrive."

"How do you know?"

"Because I saw their sentinel when I looked out of my window. His name is Parker, a strangler by trade and a remarkable player of the jews' harp. I wasn't scared of him, but I was scared of the person he was looking out for, a close friend of Moriarty, the man who dropped the rocks over the cliff at the Reichenbach Falls, and one of the cleverest and most dangerous criminals in London. That is the man who wants to kill me tonight, Watson, but he doesn't know we are here to catch *him*."

From this room the watchers were being watched. The silhouette in the window was the bait, and we were the hunters. In silence and in darkness we watched and waited. Many people passed in the street. Two men standing at the door of a house seemed familiar. I told Holmes, but he wasn't interested. As the night continued Holmes became impatient and agitated. Just before midnight I looked at the window- the silhouette had moved- I told Holmes, in a state of panic.

"Of course it has moved," he said. "We have been here two hours, and my maid, Mrs Hudson, has changed its position eight times in that time, once every quarter of an hour. She works from the front so we don't see her shadow. If she didn't do this we couldn't hope to trick<sup>16</sup> some of the most intelligent criminals in Europe."

Shortly after midnight he pulled me back into the blackest corner of the room and put his hand on my lips. His hand was shaking, but I could see nobody in the street.



Strangle

Jews' Harp

Clever

Bait

Lips

Suddenly I heard what Holmes had already heard. Someone had entered the back of the house in which we were hiding. A door opened and closed. I could hear steps in the hall. Holmes stood against the wall. I did the same and put my hand on my revolver. I saw a vague silhouette of a man coming through the door into the room. He was less than two metres from us. I was ready to defend myself and Holmes, but then I realised he didn't know we were in the room. He passed close to us and went to the window. He was an elderly man with a long thin nose, a bald head and a huge moustache. A top hat was pushed to the back of his head, and he was wearing a black suit with a white shirt and bow-tie. In his hands he had an object that looked like a stick. He put it down and it made a metallic noise. Then from a pocket in his jacket he took a large object and attached it to the metallic stick- there was a loud click as a spring fell into place. He took the object, which now looked like a strange gun, and took position at the window. He put it against his shoulder. I heard a strange whizz<sup>17</sup> and a sound of glass breaking. At that moment Holmes jumped on the man's back and put his face to the floor. He 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 plain-clothes<sup>18</sup> detective, came quickly through the front entrance and into the room.

<sup>16</sup> *Attraper, rouler*

<sup>17</sup> *Un sifflement*

<sup>18</sup> *Not in uniform*

"Is that you, Lestrade?" said Holmes.

"Yes, Mr Holmes. It's good to see you back in London, sir."

Bald

Top Hat

Suit



Bow-tie

Spring

Shoulder

"I think you want a little unofficial help. Three undetected murders in one year is not good enough, Lestrade. But you handled the Molesley Mystery with less than your usual... that is to say you handled it quite well."

A policeman stood on each side of our prisoner. Holmes closed the window and the curtains. 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- he no doubt always had the capacities to do great good or evil<sup>19</sup>. His eyes were fixed on Holmes' face with a look of hatred<sup>20</sup>.

"I have not introduced you yet," said Holmes. "This is Colonel Sebastian Moran, once of Her Majesty's Indian Army, and one of the best game<sup>21</sup> hunters our Eastern Empire has ever produced. I believe I am correct, colonel, in saying you have killed more tigers than any other man."

The fierce<sup>22</sup> old man said nothing, but glared<sup>23</sup> at my companion; with his savage eyes he was very much like a tiger himself.

"I'm surprised my plan worked," said Holmes. "Have you not used the same technique to catch tigers- you put a baby tiger under a tree, wait above it with your rifle for the adult tiger to come? This empty house is my tree and you are my tiger."

<sup>19</sup>*le mal*

<sup>20</sup>*haine*

<sup>21</sup>Wild animals hunted for sport, food or profit

<sup>22</sup>*féroce*

<sup>23</sup>*lancer un regard furieux*

Colonel Moran looked extremely angry, and tried unsuccessfully to escape the grip of the police officers.

"I confess that you had one small surprise for me," said Holmes. "I didn't expect you to use this empty house. I expected you to operate from the street."

"I don't know if you have just cause to arrest me," said Moran, "but please take me away from the comments of this man."

The police took him away.



Candles



Rifle

Holmes picked up the air-gun from the floor and examined it. "An admirable and unique weapon," he said. "Noiseless, but very powerful<sup>24</sup>. I knew Von Herder, the blind German inventor, who constructed it to the order of Professor Moriarty. For years I knew it existed, but this is the first time I have seen it. And look at the bullets. This air-gun is made to fire soft revolver bullets- a marvellous invention." Holmes turned to Lestrade, "What are you going to charge this man with<sup>25</sup>?"



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

"No, Lestrade. I do not want to appear in your account. To you, and you only, belongs the credit for this remarkable arrest. Yes, Lestrade, I congratulate you. With your usual cleverness and audacity you have got him."

"Got him! Got who, Mr Holmes?"

"The man who the entire police force has been looking for- Colonel Sebastian Moran, who shot the Honourable 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 30<sup>th</sup> of last month."

"Really? But what was the motive?"

<sup>24</sup>*puissant*

<sup>25</sup>Charge somebody with = *inculper quelqu'un de*

"I think that it is not difficult to explain the facts. Playing together, Colonel Moran and the young Adair had won a lot of money. There is no doubt that Colonel Moran cheated. I believe, that on the day of the murder, Adair discovered Moran was cheating. He probably spoke to him privately, and said he would expose him unless he voluntarily resigned from the club, and promised never to play cards again. The exclusion from his clubs would mean ruin for Moran, who lived by the money he got from cheating at cards, so he murdered 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 the ladies wouldn't surprise him and ask what he was doing with the names and the money on the table."

"I have no doubt that your conclusions are true, Mr Holmes."

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. Mr Sherlock Holmes was now free to devote his life to examining those interesting little problems which the complex life of London so plentifully presents.