



Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia

The Return of Sherlock Holmes Adventure XXVIII -- The Empty House

SUMMARY (Diogenes Club)

Watson is in practice and is a widower. Holmes has been presumed dead for 3 years, since the Reichenbach falls. Holmes reappears and tells Watson what really happened at the falls and of his adventures since.

Parker has seen Holmes enter Baker Street, which has been preserved for Holmes by Mycroft during Holmes' absence.

Holmes and Watson wait in an empty house (Camden house) across the street from 221B. In the window of 221B is a silhouette of Holmes against the blind. It is really the mannequin which Mrs. Hudson moves at intervals. Moran arrives and shoots the mannequin with the air rifle. He is captured by Lestrade (Holmes told Lestrade to be on hand) and charged with the murder of Adair.

Moran and Adair played as partners at whist. Moran was cheating and Adair had just figured it out. Moran killed him to avoid exposure.

As the story ends, Moran is awaiting trial, the air gun is in the Scotland Yard museum and Holmes is free to resume his practice.



SUMMARY (ACD Encyclopedia)

Ronald Adair was found murdered in his home on Park Lane. He's been shot in a closed room, with no possible exit through the windows. Adair was a quiet young man. His only hobby was playing cards, and just had won £240 with his new partner, Colonel Sebastian Moran.

The crime being very mysterious, Watson tries to apply Holmes's methods to get at the truth, but to no avail. One day, as he's examining the area around Adair's house, he bumps into an old man who eventually follows him to his office.

There, the old man drops his disguise, revealing himself to be Holmes. Watson is very shocked to see Holmes alive as he thought he was dead (see *The Adventure of the Final Problem*). Holmes then explains that he never fell at Reichenbach, but took advantage of his "official death" to track down Moriarty's accomplices around the world. He came back to London when he heard about the Adair case because Moran was Moriarty's lieutenant, and has been cunning enough to escape police thus far. The detective knows Moran is aware he came back and intends to kill him.

Holmes takes his friend to an empty house from where they can see the windows of 221B Baker Street. Watson wonders how he can see Holmes's profile through the window, and the detective explains it's a wax bust he is using as a decoy. While Holmes and Watson wait, Moran enters the room without seeing the two men hiding in the dark and shoots the bust. Watson knocks him down as Holmes calls Lestrade to arrest him. The detective explains to Lestrade that Moran also killed Adair, who had caught him cheating at card and threatened to denounce him.

SUMMARY (Wikipedia)

The story takes place in 1894, three years after the apparent death of Sherlock Holmes. On the night of March 30, an apparently unsolvable locked-room murder takes place in London: the killing of the Honourable Ronald Adair, son of the Earl of Maynooth, a colonial governor in Australia. Adair was in his sitting room, working on accounts of some kind, as indicated by the papers and money found by police. He liked playing whist and regularly did so at several clubs, but never for great sums of money. It does, however, come out that he won as much as £420 in partnership with Colonel Sebastian Moran. The motive does not appear to be robbery as nothing has been stolen, and it seems that Adair had not an enemy in the world. It seems odd that Adair's door was locked from the inside. The only other way out was the open window, and there was a 20-foot (about 6 m) drop below it onto a flower bed, which shows no sign of being disturbed. Adair was killed with a soft-nosed revolver bullet to the head. No one in the area at the time heard a shot.

In April, Dr. Watson (now a widower), having retained an interest in crime from his previous association with Holmes, visits the murder scene at 427 Park Lane. He sees a plainclothes detective there with police, and also runs into an elderly deformed book collector, knocking several of his books to the ground. The encounter ends with the man snarling in anger and going away. However, that is not the last that Watson sees

of him, for a short time later, the man comes to Watson's study in Kensington to apologize for his earlier behaviour. Once he manages to distract Watson's attention for a few seconds, he transforms himself into Sherlock Holmes, astonishing Watson so much that he faints to the ground "for the first and last time in my life."

Contrary to what Watson believed, Holmes won against Professor Moriarty at Reichenbach Falls, flinging him down the waterfall with the help of baritsu, the Japanese system of wrestling, and then climbing up the cliff beside the path to make it appear as though he, too, had fallen to his death. This was a plan that Holmes had just conceived to defend against Moriarty's confederates. However, at least one of them knew that he was still alive and tried to kill him by dropping rocks down on the ledge where he had taken refuge. Hurriedly climbing back down the cliff—and falling the last short distance to the path—Holmes ran for his life and, by the next week, he was in Florence. Holmes apologizes to Watson for the deception needed to outwit his enemies, and describes his three years' exploits, explaining that he spent the next few years traveling to various parts of the world. First, he went to Tibet and wandered for two years, even attaining entry to Lhasa and met the "head lama". Afterward, Holmes travelled incognito as a Norwegian explorer named Sigerson. Then, he went to Persia, with Holmes entering Mecca, and then to a brief stopover with the Khalifa in Khartoum. Finally, before returning, Holmes spent time doing chemical research on coal tar derivatives in Montpellier, France. However, Holmes was finally brought back to London by the news of Adair's murder. During all this time, the only people who knew that Holmes was alive were Moriarty's henchmen and Holmes's brother Mycroft, who provided him with the money he needed.

Holmes tells Watson that they are going to do some dangerous work that evening, and after a roundabout trip through the city they enter an empty house, an abandoned building known as Camden House whose front room overlooks—to Watson's great surprise—Baker Street. Holmes's room can be seen across the street, and more surprisingly still, Holmes can be seen silhouetted against the blind: it is a lifelike waxwork bust, moved regularly from below by Mrs. Hudson to simulate life. Holmes employs the dummy because he was seen by one of Moriarty's men, and thus he expects an attempt on his life that very night. Holmes and Watson wait two hours—until approximately midnight—in the abandoned Camden House. A sniper, who has taken the bait, fires a specialized air gun to assassinate his foe. Surprisingly, he chooses Camden House as his vantage point.

Once the ruffian shoots his air gun, scoring a direct hit on Holmes's dummy across the street, Holmes and Watson are on him, and he is soon disarmed and restrained. While Watson knocks down the enemy, Holmes summons the police by blowing a whistle. They are led by Inspector Lestrade, who arrests the gunman. It is none other than Colonel Moran, Adair's whist partner, and the same man who threw rocks down

on the ledge at Holmes at Reichenbach Falls. Holmes does not wish the police to press charges of attempted murder in connection with what Moran has just done. Instead, he tells Lestrade to charge him with actual murder, for Moran is the man who murdered Adair. The air gun, it turns out, has been specially designed to shoot revolver bullets, and a quick forensics check of the one that "killed" his dummy shows, as Holmes expected, that it matches the bullet used to kill Adair.

Holmes and Watson then go to their old apartment in Baker Street, where Holmes' rooms were kept as he had left them thanks to Mycroft's supervision. Moran's motive in killing Adair is a matter of speculation even for Holmes. Nonetheless, his theory is that Adair had caught Moran cheating at cards, and threatened to expose his dishonourable behaviour. Moran therefore got rid of the one man who could rob him of his livelihood, for he earned a living playing cards crookedly, and could ill afford to be barred from all his clubs.