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Артур Конан Дойл (1859 — 1930) — английский писатель, подаривший миру множество бессмертных произведений. Среди них и рассказы о знаменитом сыщике Шерлоке Холмсе, которые продолжают приковывать внимание читателей всего мира.

В данную книгу вошли рассказы из цикла «Возвращение Шерлока Холмса», в которых сыщик «оживает» и вновь берется расследовать преступления, раскрыть которые под силу лишь ему.

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Arthur Conan Doyle
THE RETURN
OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

THE ADVENTURE OF THE EMPTY HOUSE

It was in the spring of the year 1894. The **fashionable world**¹ was dismayed, by the murder of the Honourable **Ronald Adair**². The circumstances were inexplicable. The facts were hidden. Only now, at the end of nearly ten years, I can supply missing links to make up the whole of that remarkable chain. The crime was very interesting itself. Even now, after this long interval, I am thrilling as I think of it, and feeling once more strange joy, amazement, and incredulity. Let me say to that public, which showed some interest in those events, that they must not blame me if I did not share my knowledge with them.

Due to my close intimacy with Sherlock Holmes, I became interested deeply in crime, and after his disappearance I read with care the various problems which came before the public. And I even attempted sometimes, for my own private satisfaction, to employ his methods, though not so well. And this tragedy of Ronald Adair was one of the most exciting crimes. As I read the documents, which said that the criminal — or the criminals — remained unknown, I realized more clearly the loss which the community sustained by the death of Sherlock Holmes. I was sure, the trained observation and the alert mind of the first criminal agent in Europe could help the police. All day I was thinking about the case and found no explanation. I will recapitulate the facts to the public.

The Honourable Ronald Adair was the second son of the **Earl of Maynooth**³, at that time governor of one of the

¹ **fashionable world** — высший свет

² **Ronald Adair** — Роналд Адэр

³ **Earl of Maynooth** — граф Мэйнус

Australian colonies. Adair's mother returned from Australia to undergo the operation for cataract, and she, her son Ronald, and her daughter Hilda were living together at 427 Park Lane. The youth was in the best society — no enemies and no particular vices. He was engaged to Miss **Edith Woodley, of Carstairs**¹, but the engagement was broken off by mutual consent some months before. There was no sign that it left any profound feeling. The man's life moved in a narrow and conventional circle, his habits were quiet and his nature unemotional. And suddenly this young aristocrat met his death, in most strange and unexpected form, between the hours of ten and eleven-twenty on the night of March 30, 1894.

Ronald Adair was fond of² cards. He played continually, but big stakes did not hurt him. He was a member of the **Baldwin, the Cavendish, and the Bagatelle card clubs**³. After dinner on the day of his death he played cards at the latter club. He had also played there in the afternoon. The evidence of those who had played with him — **Mr. Murray, Sir John Hardy, and Colonel Moran**⁴ — showed that the game was whist. Maybe Adair lost five pounds, but not more. His fortune was a considerable one, and such a loss could not affect him. He played nearly every day at one club or another, but he was a cautious player, and usually won. The witnesses say that, in partnership with Colonel Moran, he had won four hundred and twenty pounds, some weeks before, from Godfrey Milner and Lord Balmoral.

On the evening of the crime, he returned from the club exactly at ten. His mother and sister were not at home. The servant said that she heard him. He entered the front room on the second floor, generally used as his sitting-room. She lit a fire there, and as it smoked she opened the window. There was no sound from the room until eleven-twenty, the hour of the return of Lady Maynooth and her daughter. She

¹ **Edith Woodley, of Carstairs** — Эдит Вудли из Карстерса

² **was fond of** — очень любил

³ **Baldwin, the Cavendish, and the Bagatelle card clubs** — карточные клубы Болдвин, Кавендиш и Багатель

⁴ **Mr. Murray, Sir John Hardy, and Colonel Moran** — мистер Мюррей, сэр Джон Харди и полковник Моран

wanted to say good-night, and attempted to enter her son's room. The door was locked **on the inside**¹. She was crying and knocking, but nobody answered. Help was obtained, and the door was open. The unfortunate young man was lying near the table. His head was horribly mutilated by a revolver bullet, but there was no weapon of any sort in the room. On the table lay two banknotes for ten pounds each and seventeen pounds ten in silver and gold. The money was arranged in little piles of varying amount. There were some figures also upon a sheet of paper, with the names of some club friends opposite to them. It was conjectured that before his death he was endeavouring to **make out**² his losses or winnings at cards.

A minute examination of the circumstances did not help. In the first place, why did young fastened the door upon the inside? There was the possibility that the murderer did this, and afterwards escaped by the window. But the drop was twenty feet, however, and a bed of crocuses lay beneath. Neither the flowers nor the earth showed any sign disturbing. There were no marks upon the narrow strip of grass which separated the house from the road. Apparently, therefore, it was the young man himself who fastened the door. But how did he die? No one could climb up to the window without traces. If someone fired through the window, it must be a remarkable shot who could with a revolver inflict that deadly wound. Again, Park Lane is usually full of people; there is a **cab stand**³ within a hundred yards of the house. No one heard a shot. And yet there was the dead man and there the revolver bullet, and a wound which caused instantaneous death, no doubt. Such were the circumstances of the Park Lane Mystery, which were very complicated. What was the motive? As I said, young Adair had no enemies, and nobody took the money or valuables in the room.

All day I was trying to link these facts. I was thinking about some theory which could reconcile them all, and to find that line of least resistance. My poor friend said it was the starting-point of every investigation. I confess that I made

¹ **on the inside** — изнутри

² **make out** — подсчитывать

³ **cab stand** — стоянка кэбов

little progress. In the evening I strolled across the Park, and **found myself**¹ about six o'clock at the Oxford Street end of Park Lane. A group of loafers upon the pavements was staring up at a particular window. They directed me to the house which I came to see. A tall, thin man with **coloured glasses**² looked like a detective. He was pointing out some theory of his own, while the others crowded round to listen to what he said. I came to him, but his observations were absurd, so I withdrew again in some disgust. I did push an elderly, deformed man, who was standing behind me, and several books which he was carrying fell down. When I was picking them up, I observed the title of one of them, *The Origin of Tree Worship*. The man was, I thought, a poor bibliophile, who was a collector of rare volumes. I apologized for the accident, but it was evident that these books were very precious objects in the eyes of their owner. With a snarl he turned upon his heel, and I saw only his back and **white side-whiskers**³. Then he went away very fast.

My observations of No. 427 Park Lane did not clear up the problem in which I was interested. The house was separated from the street by a low wall and railing. They were not more than five feet high. It was perfectly easy, therefore, for anyone to get into the garden, but the window was entirely inaccessible, since there was no waterpipe or anything which could help someone to climb it. I went to Kensington. I was in my study when the maid entered to say that a person desired to see me. To my astonishment it was my strange old book collector. His sharp face was peering out from a frame of white hair. He had a dozen of his precious volumes under his right arm.

"You're surprised to see me, sir," said he, in a strange, croaking voice.

I acknowledged that I was.

"Well, sir, when I saw you near this house, I came after you. I thought to myself, I'll just step in and tell that gentleman that I am much obliged to him for picking up my books."

¹ **found myself** — оказался

² **coloured glasses** — тёмные очки

³ **white side-whiskers** — седые бакенбарды

"Don't mention it," said I. "May I ask how you knew who I was?"

"Well, sir, I am your neighbour. You'll find my little bookshop at the corner of Church Street, and I am very happy to see you there. Maybe you collect books, too, sir. Here's *British Birds*, and *Catullus*, and *The Holy War* — a bargain, every one of them. With five volumes you could just fill that gap on that second shelf. It looks untidy, does it not, sir?"

I moved my head to look at the cabinet behind me. When I turned again, Sherlock Holmes was standing across my study table. He was smiling at me. I rose to my feet, stared at him for some seconds in utter amazement, and then I fainted for the first and the last time in my life. Certainly a gray mist swirled before my eyes, and when it cleared I found the tingling taste of brandy upon my lips. Holmes was bending over my chair. There was a flask in his hand.

"My dear Watson," said the well-remembered voice, "Thousand apologies. I had no idea that you were affectionate."

I gripped him by the arms.

"Holmes!" I cried. "Is it really you? Can it indeed be that you are alive? Is it possible that you climbed out of that awful abyss?"

"Wait a moment," said he. "Are you sure that you are really fit to discuss things? I gave you a serious shock by my dramatic reappearance."

"I am all right, but indeed, Holmes, I can hardly believe my eyes. Good heavens! To think that you stand in my study!"

Again I gripped him by the sleeve, and felt the thin, sinewy arm beneath it.

"Well, you're not a spirit anyhow," said I. "My dear Holmes, I'm overjoyed to see you. Sit down, and tell me how you came alive out of that dreadful chasm."

He sat opposite to me, and lit a cigarette. He was dressed in the seedy frockcoat of the book merchant. The rest lay in a pile on the table — white hair and old books. Holmes looked even thinner and keener than before, but there was a deadly tinge in his aquiline face which told me that his life was not a healthy one.

"I am glad to stretch myself, Watson," said he. "It is very hard for a tall man to bend. And stand like this for several hours. Now, my dear Watson, if I may ask for your cooperation, a hard and dangerous night's work in front of us. Perhaps it will be better if I give you an account of the whole situation when that work is over."

"But I am curious. I prefer to hear everything now."

"Will you come with me tonight?"

"When you like and where you like."

"So, we shall have time for a dinner before. Well, then, about that chasm. I had no serious problems. The very simple reason is that I never was in it."

"You never were in it?"

"No, Watson, I never was in it. My note to you was absolutely genuine. I had no doubt that I came to the end of my career when I saw the sinister figure of **the late Professor Moriarty**¹. He was standing upon the narrow pathway which led to safety. I read an inexorable purpose in his gray eyes. I exchanged some remarks with him, therefore, and obtained his courteous permission to write the short note. You received it afterwards. I left it with my cigarette-box and my stick, and I walked along the pathway, Moriarty followed me. When I reached the end I stopped. He drew no weapon, but he rushed at me and threw his long arms around me. He knew that his own game was over, and he wanted revenge. I have some knowledge, however, of **baritsu**², or the Japanese system of wrestling. I slipped through his grip, and he with a horrible scream kicked madly for a few seconds, and clawed the air with both his hands. But he could not get his balance, and over he went. He was falling down for a long time. Then he struck a rock, and splashed into the water."

I listened with amazement to this explanation.

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

"Listen. When the Professor disappeared, I understood what a really extraordinarily lucky chance Fate placed in my way. I knew that Moriarty was not the only man who

¹ **the late Professor Moriarty** — покойный профессор Мориарти

² **baritsu** — баритсу (*боевое искусство*)

wanted my death. There were at least three others. Their desire for vengeance upon me will only be increased by the death of their leader. They were all most dangerous men. On the other hand, if all the world is convinced that I am dead they will soon **lay themselves open**¹. And sooner or later I will destroy them. Then it will be time for me to announce that I am alive. The brain acts rapidly. Professor Moriarty did not reach the bottom of the **Reichenbach Fall**², but I knew what to do.

I stood up and examined the rocky wall behind me. In your picturesque report, which I read with great interest some months later, you assert that the wall was sheer. That was not literally true. A few small footholds presented themselves, and there was some indication of a ledge. The cliff is so high that to climb it all was an obvious impossibility, and it was equally impossible to make my way along the wet path without some tracks. So I decided to climb. It was not a pleasant business, Watson. The fall roared beneath me. I am not a fanciful person, but I it seemed to me that I heard Moriarty's voice out of the abyss. A mistake there is fatal! Many times my foot slipped in the wet notches of the rock. But I went upward, and at last I reached a ledge covered with soft green moss. I could lie there. I saw how you, my dear Watson, and all your companions were investigating the circumstances of my death.

At last, when you departed for the hotel, I was alone. I imagined that I reached the end of my adventures, but it was wrong. A huge rock boomed past me, struck the path, and bounded over into the chasm. I thought that it was an accident, but a moment later I saw a man's head against the sky, and another stone flew down within a foot of my head. Of course, the meaning of this was obvious. Moriarty was not alone. His confederate was there! One glance told me how dangerous that confederate was. From a distance, he was a witness of his friend's death and of my escape. Now he endeavoured to succeed where his comrade failed.

I had no time to think about it, Watson. Again I saw that grim face over the cliff, and I knew that it was the

¹ **lay themselves open** — выдадут себя

² **Reichenbach Fall** — Рейхенбахский водопад

precursor of another stone. I scrambled down on to the path. I don't think I can do it again. It was a hundred times more difficult. But I had no time to think of the danger, for another stone flew past me. Halfway down I slipped, but I landed upon the path. I took to my heels, did ten miles over the mountains in the darkness, and a week later I **found myself**¹ in Florence. I was sure that no one in the world knew that I was alive.

I had only one confidant — my brother **Mycroft**². I am very sorry, my dear Watson, but it was important. People must think that I am dead. Several times during the last three years I took my pen to write to you, but always I feared. For that reason I turned away from you this evening when you upset my books. The results can be the most deplorable and irreparable. As to Mycroft, I needed him in order to obtain the money which I needed. The course of events in London did not run so well as I hoped. The Moriarty gang left two of its most dangerous members alive. They are my own most vindictive enemies. I travelled for two years in Tibet, therefore, and visited Lhasa, and spent some days with Dalai Lama.

I then passed through Persia, visited Mecca, and paid a short but interesting visit to the **Khalifa at Khartoum**³. After that I spent some months in France. I was working in a laboratory at Montpellier, in the south of France. By that time only one of my enemies was left in London. I heard the news of this very remarkable Park Lane Mystery. I came to London, visited my room at Baker Street, threw **Mrs. Hudson**⁴ into hysterics, and found that Mycroft preserved my rooms and my papers in the same condition. So it was, my dear Watson, that at two o'clock today I found myself in my old armchair in my own old room. My only wish is to see my old friend Watson in the other chair which he so often adorned."

Such was the remarkable story to which I listened on that April evening — a story which was utterly incredible

¹ **found myself** — очутился

² **Mycroft** — Майкрофт

³ **Khalifa at Khartoum** — халиф в Хартуме

⁴ **Mrs. Hudson** — миссис Хадсон

to me. In some manner Holmes learned of my wife's death, and he showed his sympathy.

"Work is the best antidote to sorrow, my dear Watson," said he; "and I have some work for us both tonight."

In vain I begged him to tell me more.

"You will hear and see enough before morning," he answered. "We have three years of the past to discuss."

It was indeed like old times when I found myself beside him in a hansom. I had my revolver in my pocket. Holmes was cold and stern and silent. As the gleam of the street-lamps flashed upon his austere features, I saw that his thin lips are compressed. I did not know what wild beast we were going to hunt in the dark jungle of criminal London, but I was sure, that the adventure is very grave one.

I thought that we were going to Baker Street, but Holmes stopped the cab at the corner of Cavendish Square. As he stepped out he gave a glance to right and left to assure that nobody was following us. Our route was very strange. Holmes's knowledge of the byways of London was extraordinary. He passed rapidly through a network of mews and stables. We emerged at last into a small road with old, gloomy houses, which led us into Manchester Street, and so to Blandford Street. Here he turned swiftly down a narrow passage, passed through a wooden gate into a deserted yard, and then opened with a key the back door of a house. We entered together, and he closed it behind us.

The place was pitch dark, but it was evident to me that it was an empty house. Our feet creaked and crackled over the floor, and my outstretched hand touched a wall from which the paper was hanging in ribbons. Holmes's cold, thin fingers closed round my wrist and led me forward down a long hall. Soon I saw the murky window over the door. Here Holmes turned suddenly to the right and we found ourselves in a large, square, empty room. There was no lamp near, and the window was thick with dust. We could hardly discern each other's figures within. My companion put his hand upon my shoulder and his lips close to my ear.

"Do you know where we are?" he whispered.

"Surely that is Baker Street" I answered.

"Exactly. We are in Camden House, which stands opposite to our own old quarters."