

The Empty House

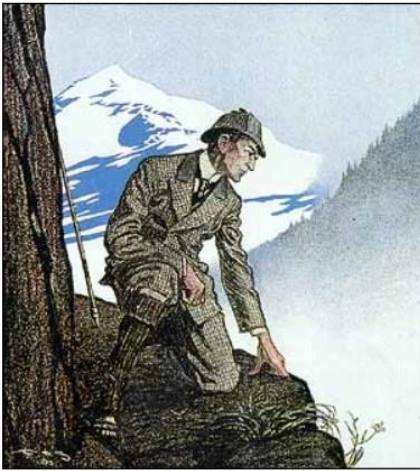
Script for Readers / Prepared by Jim Hawkins / Nashville Scholars Meeting – 09/17/22

Readers: (various characters)

Bill Mason, Shannon Carlisle, Billy Fields, Caryn Harris, Jeff Steward

Dean Richardson (**Presenter**)

FREDERIC DORR STEELE
Collier's Weekly, September 1903



COVER ILLUSTRATION

INTRODUCTION

PRESENTER: In the BSI Manuscript Series volume, **Out of the Abyss**, editor Phil Bergem shares this, *More has been written about The Empty House in the Baker Street Journal than any other of the stories. The tale ranks among the most fertile for research, scholarly discourse, and disputation.*

In his **New Annotated Sherlock Holmes** treatise on *The Empty House*, Leslie Klinger adds 14 pages of further discussion after the story concludes.

On April 6, 1893, Conan Doyle wrote to his mother.

READER ONE

My Dearest Mam,

All is very well down here. I am in the middle of the last Holmes story, after which the gentleman vanishes, never to reappear. I am weary of his name.

After I had done two series, I saw that I was in danger of having my hand forced and of being entirely identified with what I regarded as a lower stratum of literary achievement. Therefore as a sign of my resolution I determined to end the life of my hero. The idea was in my mind when I went with my wife for a short holiday in Switzerland, in the course of which we saw the wonderful falls of Reichenbach, a terrible place, and one that I thought would make a worthy tomb for poor Sherlock, even if I buried my banking account along with him.

PRESENTER: So, Conan Doyle did the unthinkable--he killed Sherlock Holmes, but ten years later, he resurrected him. I say resurrected--but as we find out, he never died.

Both *The Strand* magazine and *Collier's Weekly* did their best to explain what happened. This is from *Collier's Weekly*, September 19, 1903.

READER TWO:

Get this! In next week's issue of *Collier's*, Conan Doyle is bringing Sherlock Holmes back!

In next week's issue of Collier's will begin the most notable series of short stories of the year--'The Return of Sherlock Holmes,' by Sir A. Conan Doyle. Those familiar with the previous adventures of the famous detective--and are there any who are not?--will remember that the last heard of Mr. Holmes was the report that he had been hurled headlong over a precipitous cliff.

But Holmes did not die. He survived the deadly peril through which he passed, and of this and of the ensuing adventure Sir Conan Doyle tells us in the remarkable series which he has called 'The Return of Sherlock Holmes.'

The Adventure of the Empty House

SIDNEY PAGET
The Strand Magazine, October 1903



I KNOCKED DOWN SEVERAL BOOKS
WHICH HE WAS CARRYING.

PRESENTER: If you read the story today, you know that *The Empty House* is set three years after Holmes fell into the Reichenbach entangled with Professor Moriarty. Conan Doyle's fans were not as enthusiastic about his "more serious literature" as he had hoped; they wanted Holmes back, period. So, after negotiations with *Strand Magazine* and *Collier's Weekly* (American), he pledged to write more Sherlock Holmes tales.

The Empty House reveals what Holmes did during his hiatus and why he returned to London and 221B Baker Street. In this passage, Watson does his best to explain what happened when Holmes reappeared.

WATSON: "Only now, at the end of nearly ten years, am I allowed to supply those missing links which make up the whole of that remarkable chain. The crime was of interest in itself, but that interest was as nothing to me compared to the inconceivable sequel, which afforded me the greatest shock and surprise of any event in my adventurous life. Even now, after this long interval, I find myself thrilling as I think of it, and feeling once more that sudden flood of joy, amazement, and incredulity which utterly submerged my mind. Let me say to that public which has shown

some interest in those glimpses which I have occasionally given them of the thoughts and actions of a very remarkable man that they are not to blame me if I have not shared

my knowledge with them, for I should have considered it my first duty to have done so had I not been barred by a positive prohibition from his own lips, which was only withdrawn upon the third of last month."

PRESENTER: Here is the famous scene.

WATSON: "I had not been in my study five minutes when the maid entered to say that a person desired to see me. To my astonishment it was none other than my strange old book-collector, his sharp, wizened face peering out from a frame of white hair, and his precious volumes, a dozen of them at least, wedged under his right arm."

HOLMES: "You're surprised to see me, sir,"

WATSON: "I acknowledged that I was."

HOLMES: "Well, I've a conscience, sir, and when I chanced to see you go into this house, as I came hobbling after you, I thought to myself, I'll just step in and see that kind gentleman, and tell him that if I was a bit gruff in my manner there was not any harm meant, and that I am much obliged to him for picking up my books."

WATSON: "You make too much of a trifle. May I ask how you knew who I was?"

HOLMES: "Well, sir, if it isn't too great a liberty, I am a neighbour of yours, for you'll find my little bookshop at the corner of Church Street, and very happy to see you, I am sure. Maybe you collect yourself, 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?"

WATSON: "I moved my head to look at the cabinet behind me. When I turned again Sherlock Holmes was standing smiling at me across my study table. I rose to my feet, stared at him for some seconds in utter amazement, and then it appears that I must have fainted for the first and the last time in my life. Certainly a grey mist swirled before

SIDNEY PAGET
The Strand Magazine, October 1903



SHERLOCK HOLMES WAS STANDING AND SMILING AT ME ACROSS MY STUDY TABLE.

my eyes, and when it cleared I found my collar-ends undone and the tingling after-taste of brandy upon my lips. Holmes was bending over my chair, his flask in his hand."

HOLMES: "My dear Watson, I owe you a thousand apologies. I had no idea that you would be so affected."

(CUE: Sherlock clip)

PRESENTER: It's obvious that we are focusing on the story behind the story more than on the murder of Ronald Adair and how the case got solved. Reconciliation is the main event in *The Empty House*. After Holmes explains to Watson how he was able to defeat Moriarty, he recounts his travels across the globe, filling Watson in on all the places he traveled.

HOLMES: "Moriarty drew no weapon, but he rushed at me and threw his long arms around me. He knew that his own game was up and was only anxious to revenge himself upon me. We tottered together upon the brink of the fall. I have some knowledge, however, of baritsu, or the Japanese system of wrestling, which has more than once been very useful to me. 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 for all his efforts, he could not get his balance, and over he went. With my face over the brink, I saw him fall a long way. Then he struck a rock, bounded off, and splashed into the water."

HOLMES (continues): I travelled for two years in Tibet, therefore, and amused myself by visiting Lhasa and spending some days with the head Llama. You may have read of the remarkable explorations of a Norwegian named Sigerson, but I am sure that it never occurred to you that you were receiving news of your friend. I then passed through Persia, looked in at Mecca, and paid a short but interesting visit to the Khalifa at Khartoum, the results of which I have communicated to the Foreign Office. Returning to France, I spent some months in a research into the coal-tar derivatives, which I conducted in a laboratory at Montpellier, in the South of France. Having concluded this to my satisfaction and learning that only one of my enemies was now left in London, I was about to return when my movements were hastened by the news of this very remarkable Park Lane Mystery, which not only appealed to me by its own merits but which seemed to offer some most peculiar personal opportunities. I came over at once to London, called in my own person at Baker Street, threw Mrs. Hudson into violent hysterics, and found that Mycroft had preserved my rooms and my papers exactly as they had always been. So it was, my dear Watson, that at two o'clock today, I found myself in my old armchair in my own old room and only wishing that I could have seen my old friend Watson in the other chair which he has so often adorned."

PRESENTER: Let us now summarize the story and bring in the other characters. Holmes leads Watson through a “network of mews and stables, arriving at Camden House, ‘the empty house.’”

HOLMES: "Do you know where we are?"

WATSON: "Surely that is Baker Street."

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

SIDNEY PAGET
The Strand Magazine, October 1903



I CREPT FORWARD AND LOOKED ACROSS AT
THE FAMILIAR WINDOW.

WATSON: "But why are we here?"

HOLMES: "Because it commands so excellent a view of that picturesque pile. Might I trouble you, my dear Watson, to draw a little nearer to the window, taking every precaution not to show yourself, and then to look up at our old rooms -- the starting point of so many of our little adventures? We will see if my three years of absence have entirely taken away my power to surprise you."



HAWKINS: At this point, we shall let you, our enraptured audience, tell us the rest of the story.

What did Watson see from the window of Camden House?

(A bust of Holmes in the window at 221B across Baker Street from “the empty house.”)

What role did Mrs. Hudson play in making it look convincing?

(She moved it several times so that it threw a different shadow on the window shade.)

As Holmes and Watson wait in silence, what sounds are heard from the rear of the house?

(A door opens and shuts, and steps of someone creeping down the hall are heard.)

What does this man do when he reaches the window, unaware that he is not alone in the room?

(He assembles an air gun, raises the window just a bit, and fires a bullet across the street at the figure of Holmes.

What does Holmes do the instant the man fires the air gun?

PRESENTER: Listen as Watson tells the story.

WATSON: Holmes sprang like a tiger on to the marksman's back and hurled him flat upon his face. He was up again in a moment, and with convulsive strength he seized Holmes by the throat; but I struck him on the head with the butt of my revolver and he dropped again upon the floor. I fell upon him, and as I held him my comrade blew a shrill call upon a whistle. There was the clatter of running feet upon the pavement, and two policemen in uniform, with one plain-clothes detective, rushed through the front entrance and into the room.

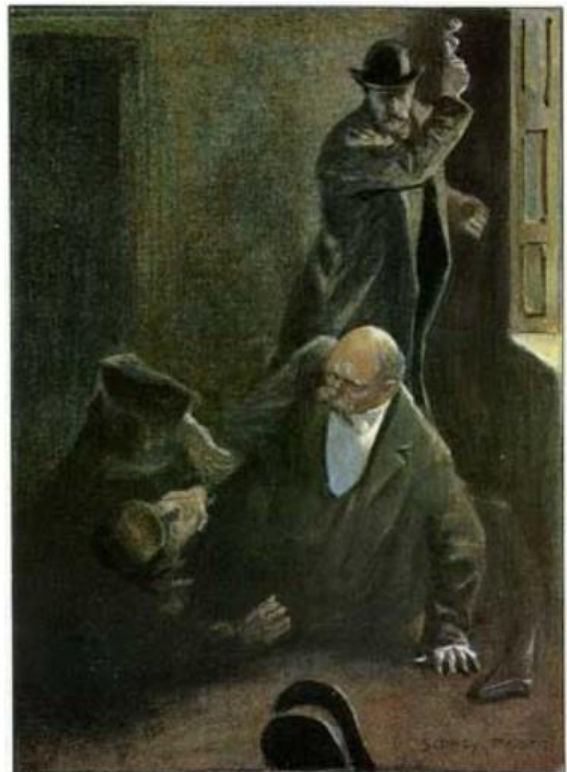
PRESENTER: Lestrade and two policemen run into the room, securing the suspect.

HOLMES: "This, gentlemen, is Colonel Sebastian Moran, once of Her Majesty's Indian Army, and the best heavy game shot that our Eastern Empire has ever produced. I believe I am correct, Colonel, in saying that your bag of tigers still remains unrivalled?"

MORAN: (surprise voice from the audience)
"You cunning, cunning fiend!"

HOLMES: "I wonder that my very simple stratagem could deceive so old a shikari. It must be very familiar to you. Have you not tethered a young kid under a tree, lain above it with your rifle, and waited for the bait to bring up your tiger? This empty house is my tree and you are my tiger. You have possibly had other guns in reserve in case there should be several tigers, or in the unlikely supposition of your own aim failing you. These are my other guns. The parallel is exact."

SIDNEY PAGET
The Strand Magazine, October 1903



HE SEIZED HOLMES BY THE THROAT.

PRESENTER: Back safely at 221B, Holmes fills Watson in on the sad demise of Colonel Sebastian Moran. He turns to Mrs. Hudson and commends her for her good work.

HOLMES: “I hope you observed all precautions, Mrs. Hudson?”

MRS. HUDSON: “I went to it on my knees, sir, just as you told me.”

HOLMES: “Excellent. You carried the thing out very well. Did you observe where the bullet went?”

MRS. HUDSON: “Yes, sir. I’m afraid it has spoilt your beautiful bust, for it passed right through the head and flattened itself on the wall. I picked it up from the carpet. Here it is.

PRESENTER: Holmes asks Watson if he had heard of Col. Moran—the second most dangerous man in London.

SIDNEY PAGET
The Strand Magazine, October 1903



“MY COLLECTION OF M’S IS A FINE ONE,” SAID HE.

WATSON: “No, I have not.”

HOLMES: “Well, well, such is fame! But then, if I remember right, you had not heard the name of Professor James Moriarty, who had one of the great brains of the century. Just give me down my index of biographies from the shelf.”

“My collection of M’s is a fine one. Moriarty himself is enough to make any letter illustrious, and here is Morgan the poisoner, and Merridew of abominable memory, and Mathews, who knocked out my left canine in the waiting-room at Charing Cross, and, finally, here is our friend of to-night.”

PRESENTER: As Holmes and Watson talk into the night, Holmes explains how Moran cheated at cards and ran afoul of the young Ronald Adair. Moran ends the squabble by killing Adair with his air gun and soft-nosed bullet, just as he planned to do away with Holmes. The story concludes with these final words of Holmes.

HOLMES: “It will be verified or disproved at the trial. Meanwhile, come what may, Colonel Moran will trouble us no more. The famous air-gun of Von Herder will embellish the Scotland Yard Museum, and once again Mr. Sherlock Holmes is free to devote his life to examining those interesting little problems which the complex life of London so plentifully presents.”



PRESENTER: Holmes is back! Fans are thrilled, and Conan Doyle's reputation is restored, not the outcome he was hoping for, but one that he seemed unable to distance himself from.

But Holmes had undergone a change. In his memoirs, Conan Doyle quotes a reader who judged the later stories inferior to the earlier ones, to the effect that *when Holmes went over the Reichenbach Falls, he may not have been killed, but he was never quite the same man after.*