

The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXX -- The Adventure of the Dancing Men

The Dancing Men is one of my favourite stories, writes Charlotte Anne Walters.

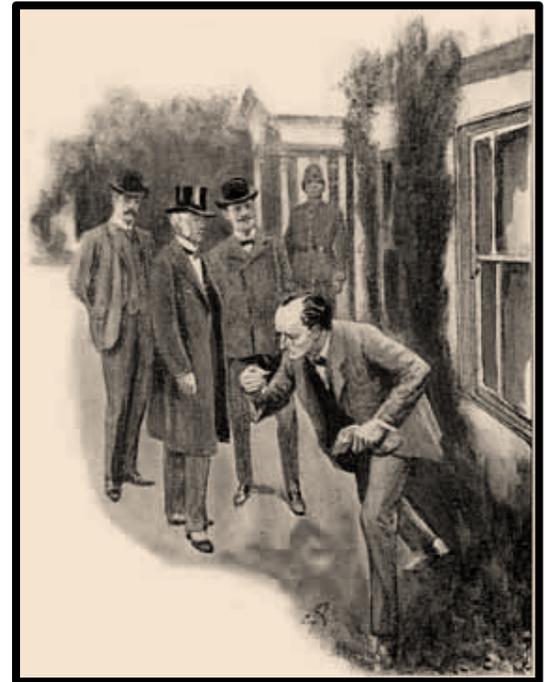
The story begins with Holmes demonstrating how well he knows his old friend by once again seeming to read his mind and remarking that it is clear Watson has decided not to invest in South African securities.

He explains his simple deductions to an astonished Watson and shows us once again the intimate knowledge he has of his housemate down to knowing who he plays billiards with and the fact that Holmes keeps Watson's 'check' book (note the curious spelling Doyle used) safely locked in his drawer because the good doctor can't be trusted to be sensible with it. What a lovely friendship they have come to share by this point.

Holmes has shown his hand by asking Watson to move back in with him and Watson has acknowledged the void in his life which he experienced after Holmes' 'death' in Switzerland.

There is inter-dependency between them which I think both have come to recognise and accept.

Holmes passes over to Watson a piece of paper with what appears to be a child's drawing on it comprising a set of matchstick figures who appear to be dancing. It is actually a cipher sent to the wife of a Norfolk squire by an old love from Chicago who has tracked her down to England in order to win her back. He was a member of a ruthless criminal gang and she was the boss' daughter who fled to escape his wrong-doings. The lover ends up shooting the new husband and the wife tries to shoot herself.



What starts out as quite light-hearted becomes rather dark. And yet again love and romance plays a major part in the drama as does the tried and tested formula of someone having a past from overseas (usually the colonies somewhere) which comes back to haunt them, often in the form of a past love.

This is why I find it so easy to get the stories confused with one another as there is such a thread of commonality which runs through them.

Anyway, Holmes is brought the mysterious drawings by his client, the lady's husband, but he delays in travelling to Norfolk and ultimately feels guilty that he may have been able to prevent the tragedy which followed if he had acted sooner.

This is the only fault he makes in an otherwise brilliant investigation – particularly the deciphering of the dancing men which is simply genius, though made to look so simple once he explains it.

**I have read this story many times but here again I
couldn't put it down – 9 out of 10.**

Charlotte Anne Walters

October 15, 2011