



The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXX – The Adventure of the Dancing Men

Hilton Cubitt was the huge and handsome scion of an old Norfolkshire family of landed gentry. He came to London for Queen Victoria’s second Jubilee in 1897, and there he met Elsie Patrick, an American with a veiled past whom he married within a month. The happy couple returned to his Norfolk estate, Riding Thorpe Manor, and settled into a loving domestic routine.

In June of the following year, Elsie Cubitt received a letter from America which seemed to terrify her and threatened the tranquility of her new life in England.

Within a month, her agitation increased as graffiti seemingly scrawled by children began appearing in various locations near their home. Hilton Cubitt finally sought Sherlock Holmes’ advice, but Holmes couldn’t act without additional information. That information was forthcoming but not in time to prevent the murder of Hilton Cubitt– apparently shot by his wife who then turned the gun on herself in an unsuccessful attempt at suicide.

I wanted to do the subject line in Dancing Men code, but there are no known symbols for “Q” and “U” in that code.



There is mention of Hilton Cubitt meeting Elsie Patrick during the Jubilee celebration, which must have been the one in 1897. In June of the following year Elsie, now happily (and quietly) married, received a letter at Riding Thorpe Manor which left her terrified. Who wrote the letter, and how did the sender know where to address it?

After Hilton Cubitt is killed, we learn that “The old hall...had been turned into a court of investigation.” Mrs. King, the cook, stated that she and Saunders, the housemaid, “had been aroused from their sleep by the sound of an explosion.” Following the interrogation of the servants, Holmes, Watson, Inspector Martin, and the country doctor left the hall and went into the study. There is no indication that the servants followed them into that room. After Holmes found evidence of a third shot having been fired, he says, “I should like to see Mrs. King, the cook, again. You said, Mrs. King, that you were awakened by a loud explosion.” [Emphasis Watson’s.] In the first place, Watson did not record that Mrs. King mentioned a **loud** explosion. How did Holmes know that the first report was louder than the second? Further, how did Mrs. King get into the study so quickly that Holmes could turn to her and ask her a question immediately after stating that he would like to see her again?

Revolvers do not automatically eject spent cartridge casings; some manual operation is required on the part of the user to accomplish this. Could we, therefore, infer that Abe Slaney was armed with a semi-automatic pistol? But, consider that for all practical purposes semi-automatic pistols, which do eject spent casings, were not available to the public until after 1900. Yet, if we conclude that Slaney was armed with a revolver, there is the picture of him standing calmly in the flower-bed ejecting a spent casing before exiting the scene of the crime, while the whole household has been alarmed. This does not agree with Slaney’s later statement that he “went away across the garden” and heard the window shut behind him. Slaney refers to his weapon only as a “gun.” What kind of gun was it?

In discussing his decipherment of the Dancing Men code, Holmes makes an unwarranted supposition that “* E * E *” was the word “never.” Could it not have been “seven” or “leper?” (There is support for this latter interpretation because the same symbol stands for “V” in one message and “P” in another.) What other anomalies can the Hounds find in the Dancing Men code as Holmes construed it?

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