



## The Return of Sherlock Holmes

### Adventure XXX – The Adventure of the Dancing Men

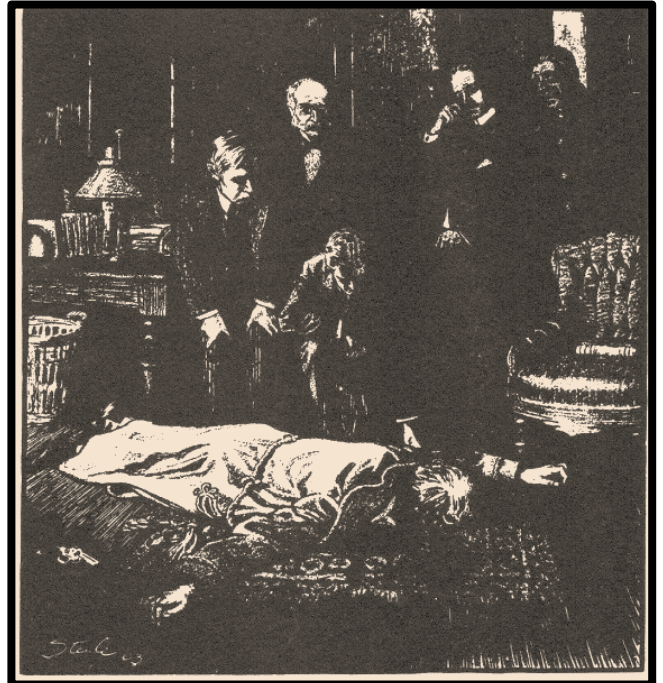
*The Dancing Men* is one of the canon's saddest accounts. The good guy dies and the bad guy lives. The damsel in distress is disagreeable. Holmes does not exactly shine. At the same time, it's also a story which has received a great deal of scholarly scrutiny and is a favorite of many Sherlockians. As we read it this weekend, here are a few questions and comments to kick off the discussion:

Elsie Patrick met Hilton Cubitt in a boarding house where she was staying in Russell Square. Another guest there was Parker, the vicar of Cubitt's parish. After a very brief courtship, Elsie and Hilton were married in a registry office. Why wasn't Parker asked to perform the ceremony?

A letter from America was the starting point of all the trouble. But does that necessarily mean the letter was posted in one of the states? Weren't American stamps also used in US territories and protectorates?

Abe Slaney is called the most dangerous crook in Chicago. That's pretty rarefied criminality, given Chicago's rough-edged image in the canon. Remember, that was Killer Evans' hometown (3GAR); it was a place where Irish spies could safely enter the country (LAST); and union thugs ruled there (VALL). How accurate is this characterization of Chicago's past?

The DANC code is a substitution cipher cryptograph. Codes are also used in REDC (flashing lights), VALL (book) and GLOR (open text), among other canonical tales. We see Holmes struggle with the substitution



cipher more than any of the others: “He would sit for long spells with a furrowed brow and a vacant eye” as he attempted to decipher the meaning of the dancing men. Is this the most difficult style of code? Confronted with one of these codes, which do you think you could solve with the least difficulty? (I’d opt for flashing lights myself!)

We never actually meet Elsie Cubitt, though we hear a lot of her from the men with whom she associates. The picture isn’t flattering. She flees to England rather than staying in America and solving her problems. She’s secretive. She rejects her husband’s help and refuses to confide in him. She sneaks out of bed for a midnight meeting with Abe. She attempts to bribe him. She’s a failed suicide. Yet by story’s end, she becomes a sort of Mother Teresa, devoting herself to charity. Recalling the yardstick Bert gave us, now **this** is a character who changes and grows!!

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