



The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXX – The Adventure of the Dancing Men

Publishing History

30 of the 60 stories

First published in *The Strand Magazine*, December, 1903

In the US *Collier's Weekly*, December 5, 1903

Part of *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* collection by

George Newnes, Ltd., London, 1905

McClure Phillip & Co., New York, 1905

British illustrator – Sidney Paget

American illustrator – Frederick Dorr Steele

Chronology

Baring-Gould placed the dating of the story at Wednesday, July 27 to Wednesday, August 10 and Sat, Aug 13, 1898, making it the 44th of the 60. This means that Holmes 44 and Watson 46.

Christopher Morley Says

“One of the most famous of the stories, introducing the bizarre cipher on the little acrobatic figures. Holmes’s expert study of all forms of secret writing (he was the author of a monograph *An analysis of 160 Ciphers*) enable him to read the threatening messages. His “knowledge of crooks of Chicago” convinced him that they meant what they said.”



Dummies Short Summary

“This story has it all: mysterious codes, gangsters, a love triangle, murder, and one of Holmes’s greatest crime-scene investigations.”

How Many Words

At 9,686 words DANC has the 46th most words (#1 is VEIL – 4,499, #56 if NAVL – 12,701)

Classifying This Case

This case is one where the case was solved but someone was killed. The killer is apprehended.

The Best Of Sherlock Holmes

- 1927 – Arthur Conan Doyle named it 3rd on his list of 12 favorites.
- 1944 – The Baker Street Irregulars voted it as #5 of their 12 favorite short stories.
- 1954 - The Baker Street Irregulars voted it as #10 of their 12 favorite short stories.
- 1999 – The Sherlock Holmes Society of London voted it 10th of 56 short stories.

What Else Happened That Year (1898)

- Battle of Omdurman in Sudan. Kitchner defeats Mahdi and Dervishes, avenges General Gordon's death
- Introduction of Imperial Penny Postage.
- British Goods given preferential tariff in Canada.
- Congo railway completed to Stanley Pools.
- Electrification of underground railway from Mansion House to Waterloo.
- First escalator at Harrods.
- USS Maine blows up in Havana Harbor, Spanish-American War begins, Spain defeated at Santiago and Manila. Treaty of Paris ends war, Cuba independent, U.S.A. acquires Philippines.
- Powers appoint Prince George of Greece as High Commissioner in Crete, under Turkish suzerainty.
- Workmen's Social Democratic Party formed in Russia.
- "Hundred Days of Reform" in China. Deposition of Kuang-Hsu and reinstatement of Dowager Empress, suppression of reform.
- U.S.A. annexes Hawaii.
- End of state of debtor nation for U.S.A., existing since 1783, \$500 million foreign investments.

- Work begins on Aswan Dam.
- German fleet seizes Kiachow, secures 99-year lease from China.
- Swiss railways nationalized.
- Severe food riots in Italy.
- Zola's *J'Accuse*.
- Wells' *War of the Worlds*.
- Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gaol*.
- Curies discover radium and polonium.
- Pickering, using photography, discovers nine of Saturn's moons.
- Rudolf Diesel demonstrates his engine, which requires no sparkplugs.
- M.J. Owens, U.S.A., designs automatic bottle-making machine.
- Konstantin Tsiolkovski states principles of rocket propulsion.

Holmes And Watson – Personal Information

The detective and his chronicler are living at 221B.

Dramatis Personae

- **Hilton Cubitt**, of Ridington Manor, Norfolk. "A fine creature of the old English soil."
- **Elsie Cubitt** nee **Patrick**, his wife
- **Abe Slaney**, killer of Hilton and childhood friend/admirer of Elsie
- **Inspector Martin**, of the Norfolk constabulary.
- **Saunders**, the Cubitts' maid.
- **Mrs. King**, the Cubitts' cook.

Quotable Sherlock

- "You see, my dear Watson"--he propped his test-tube in the rack, and began to lecture with the air of a professor addressing his class--"it is not really difficult to construct a series of inferences, each dependent upon its predecessor and each simple in itself. If, after doing so, one simply knocks out all the central inferences and presents one's audience with the starting-point and the conclusion, one may produce a startling, though possibly a meretricious, effect."

- “Every problem becomes very childish when once it is explained to you.”
- “I have no desire to make mysteries, but it is impossible at the moment of action to enter into long and complex explanations.”
- "What one man can invent another can discover," said Holmes.

Holmes’ Fee

There is no mention. Since his client was killed, it is assumed that Holmes made money.

Sherlock Holmes On The Big And The Little Screen

- 1923 *The Mystery of the Dancing Men* with Eille Norwood as Holmes. The National Film and Television Archive at the BFI has viewing copies of this film but it has not been released.
- 1968 *The Dancing Men* with Peter Cushing as an episode of *Sherlock Holmes* series. This is a lost episode.
- 1984 *The Dancing Men* with Jeremy Brett in his BBC *Sherlock Holmes* TV series
- 1999 *The Adventure of the Dancing Men* episode of *Sherlock Holmes in the 22nd Century* (Animated TV series)

Fainting In The Canon

In this tale Elsie Patrick Cubitt did actually faint – “She turned deadly white, read the letter, and threw it into the fire.”

Annotated Sherlock

- . . . “**ramping**” jumping up and down
 - . . . “**nitsky**” next to nothing
 - . . . “**Nihilist**” member of the Russian revolutionary party professing extreme anti-social
 - principals and destruction of political institutions
- . . . “**Furies**” three Greek goddesses who used secret strings to punish the crimes of those who escaped public justice

Holmes The Author

Holmes mentions that he has published a monograph on Cryptography

Weapons

Just a few limited weapons, but enough for a murder

- **Revolver** - Sherlock Holmes' and is mentioned in 8 cases. To clap to the head of Abe Slaney.
- **Pistol** - Which Hilton Cubitt used to shoot Abe Slaney. Afterwards it was used by Elsie Cubitt to attempt to kill herself.
- **Pistol** - Which Slaney used to kill Cubitt after the latter fired at him.

Frank Mentzel