

The Return of SHERLOCK HOLMES

By A. CONAN DOYLE,

Author of "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes," "The Hound of the Baskervilles," "The Sign of the Four," "A Study in Scarlet," Etc.



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The Adventure of the Dancing Men

No. 3 of the Series

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HOLMES had been seated for some hours in silence, with his long, thin back curved over a chemical vessel in which he was brewing a particularly malodorous product. His head was sunk upon his breast, and he looked from my point of view like a strange, lank bird with dull gray plumage and a black topknot.

"So, Watson," said he suddenly, "you do not propose to invest in South African securities?"

I gave a start of astonishment. As customary as I was to Holmes' curious faculties, this sudden intrusion into my most intimate thoughts was utterly inexplicable.

"How on earth do you know that?" I asked.

He wheeled round upon his stool with a steaming test tube in his hand and a gleam of amusement in his deep-set eyes.

"Now, Watson, confess yourself utterly taken aback," said he.

"I am."

"I ought to make you sign a paper to that effect."

"Why?"

"Because in five minutes you will say that it is all so absurdly simple."

"I am sure that I shall say nothing of the kind."

"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 wanders away and all the central inferences and premises one's attention with the starting point and the conditions, one may find a startling discovery in the result."

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"Very likely not, but I can only show you a few examples. Here are the missing links of the very simple chain. First, you had a quarrel with your left hand and then when you returned from the club last night you found your pocket empty when you put it in your coat."

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is a promise, but she never known an easy hour from that moment. There is always a look of fear upon her face—a look as if she were waiting and expecting. She would do better to trust me. She would find that I was her best friend. But until she speaks I can say nothing. Mind you, she is a truthful woman, Mr. Holmes, and whatever trouble there may have been in her past life it has been no fault of hers. I am only a simple Norfolk squire, but there is not a man in England who ranks his family honor more highly than I do. She knows it well, and she knew it well before she married me. She would never bring any stain upon it; of that I am sure.

"Well, now I come to the queer part of my story. About a week ago—it was the Tuesday of last week—I found on one of the window sills a number of absurd little dancing figures like these upon the paper. They were scrawled with chalk. I thought that it was the stable boy who had drawn them, but the lad swore he knew nothing about it. Anyhow, they had come there during the night. I had them washed out, and I only mentioned the matter to my wife afterward. To my surprise she took it very seriously and begged me if any more came to let her see them. None did come for a week, and then yesterday morning I found this paper lying on the sundial in the garden. I showed it to Elsie, and down she dropped in a dead faint. Since then she has looked like a woman in a dream, half dazed and with terror always lurking in her eyes. It was then that I wrote and sent the paper to you, Mr. Holmes. It was not a thing that I could take to the police, for they would have laughed at me, but you will tell me what to do. I am not a rich man, but if there is any danger threatening my little woman I would spend my last copper to shield her.

He was a fine creature, this man of the old English soil—simple, straight and gentle, with his great, earnest blue eyes and broad, comely face. His love for his wife and his trust in her shone in his features. Holmes had listened to his story with the utmost attention, and now he sat for some time in silent thought.

"Don't you think, Mr. Cubitt," said he at last, "that your best plan would be to make a direct appeal to your wife and to ask her to share her secret with you?"

Hilton Cubitt shook his massive head. "A promise is a promise, Mr. Holmes. If Elsie wished to tell me she would. If not, it is not for me to force her confidence. But I am justified in taking my own line—and I will."

"Then I will help you with all my heart. In the first place, have you heard of any strangers being seen in your neighborhood?"

"No."

"I presume that it is a very quiet place. Any fresh face would cause remark?"

"In the immediate neighborhood, yes. But we have several small watering places not very far away. And the farmers take in lodgers."

"These hieroglyphics have evidently a meaning. If it is a purely arbitrary one it may be impossible for us to solve it. If, on the other hand, it is systematic, I have no doubt that we shall get to the bottom of it. But this particular sample is so short that I can do nothing, and the facts which you have brought me are so indefinite that we have no basis for an investigation. I would suggest that you return to Norfolk, that you keep a keen lookout and that you take an exact copy of any fresh dancing men which may appear. It is a thousand pities that we have not a reproduction of those which were done in chalk upon the window sill. Make a discreet inquiry also as to any strangers in the neighborhood. When you have collected some fresh evidence come to me again. That is the best advice which I can give you, Mr. Hilton Cubitt. If there are any pressing fresh developments I shall be always ready to run down and see you in your Norfolk home."

The interview left Sherlock Holmes very thoughtful, and several times in the next few days I saw him take his slip of paper from his notebook and look long and earnestly at the curious figures inscribed upon it. He made no allusion to the affair, however, until one afternoon a fortnight or so later. I was going out when he called me back.

"You had better stay here, Watson."

"Why?"

"Because I had a wire from Hilton Cubitt this morning. You remember Hilton Cubitt of the dancing men? He was to reach Liverpool street at 1:20. He may be here at any moment. I gather from his wire that there have been some new incidents of importance."

We had not long to wait, for our Norfolk squire came straight from the station as fast as a hansom could bring him. He was looking worried and depressed, with tired eyes and a lined forehead.

"It's nothing on my nerves, this business, Mr. Holmes," said he as he sat down. "It's a worried man, but I don't know what it is."

"It's a worried man, but I don't know what it is."

"It's a worried man, but I don't know what it is."

"It's a worried man, but I don't know what it is."

(Continued on next page.)

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TIMBER LAND NOTICE

United States Land Office Lakeview, Oregon, July 3d, 1905. Notice is hereby given that in compliance with the provisions of the Act of June 3, 1878, entitled "An act for the sale of timber lands in the States of California, Oregon, Nevada and Washington Territory," as extended to all the Public Land States by act of August 4, 1892, the following persons have this day filed in this office their sworn statements, to-wit:

Mrs. Lizzie Mayer, of Portland, county of Multnomah, state of Oregon, Sworn Statement No. 2966, for the NW 1/4 Sec. 27, and W 1/2 NW 1/4, SE 1/4 NW 1/4 Sec. 34, Tp. 35, S., R. 17 E.

Margaret Ryan, of Marquet, state of Michigan, Sworn statement No. 2957, for the purchase of the NW 1/4 Sec. 28, Tp. 35, S., R. 17 E.

Martin Ryan, of Marquet, state of Mich. Sworn statement No. 2958, for the purchase of the E 1/2 NE 1/4, SW 1/4 NE 1/4, NW 1/4 SE 1/4, Sec. 27, Tp. 35 S., R. 17 E.

That they will offer proof to show that the land sought is more valuable for its timber or stone than for agricultural purposes and to establish their claim to said land before Geo. T. Baldwin, Co. Judge, at his office at Klamath Falls, on Tuesday the 12th day of Sept. 1905. They name as witnesses: Margaret Ryan, of Marquet, Mich., Oliver Siffer, of Woodland, Wash., Martin Ryan, of Marquet, Mich., C. W. Embury, of Portland, Oregon, C. E. Peterson, of Stevenson, Wash. and Albert Peterson, of Stevenson, Wash.

Any and all persons claiming adversely the above-described lands are requested to file their claims in this office on or before said 12th day of Sept., 1905.

J. N. Watson, Register.

FINAL PROOF

Land Office at Lakeview, Oregon, Aug. 7th, 1905. Notice is hereby given that the following-named settler has filed notice of his intention to make final proof in support of his claim, and that said proof will be made before Register and Receiver at Lakeview, Oregon, on the 11th day of Sept., 1905, viz: George Hankins one of the heirs of Huldah Reed Hd. 2152 for the N 1/2 NE 1/4 SW 1/4 NE 1/4, and NE 1/4 NW 1/4 Sec. 31, Tp. 40 S., R. 22 E. W. M. He names the following witnesses to prove his continuous residence upon and cultivation of said land, viz: L. A. Moss, J. S. Fields, F. M. Miller and Chas. Loveless, all of Lakeview, Oregon.

J. N. Watson, Register.

The Return of SHERLOCK HOLMES

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SOUTHERN PACIFIC



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"Well, Mr. Holmes, what do you make of these?"

play billiards to steady the cue; third, you never play billiards except with Thurston; fourth, you told me four weeks ago that Thurston had an option on some South African property which would expire in a month and which he desired you to share with him; fifth, your check book is locked in my drawer, and you have not asked for the key; sixth, you do not propose to invest your money in this manner."

"How absurdly simple!" I cried.

"Quite so," said he, a little nettled.

"Every problem becomes very childish when once it is explained to you. Here is an unexplained one. See what you can make of that friend Watson?" He tossed a sheet of paper upon the table and turned once more to his chemical analysis.

I looked with amazement at the absurd hieroglyphics upon the paper.

"Why, Holmes, it is a child's drawing," I cried.

"Oh, that's your idea?"

"What else should it be?"