

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.

ILLUSTRATED BY F. D. STEELE

The Adventure of the Dancing Men

No. 3 of the Series

(Continued from last week.)

"Has he been moved?" asked Holmes.

"We have moved nothing except the lady. We could not leave her lying wounded upon the floor."

"How long have you been here, doctor?"

"Since 4 o'clock."

"Any one else?"

"Yes, the constable here."

"And you have touched nothing?"

"Nothing."

"You have acted with great discretion. Who sent for you?"

"The housemaid, Saunders."

"Was it she who gave the alarm?"

"She and Mrs. King, the cook."

"Where are they now?"

"In the kitchen, I believe."

"Then I think we had better hear their story at once."

The old hall, oak paneled and high windowed, had been turned into a court of investigation. Holmes sat in a great, old-fashioned chair, his hazy eyes gleaming out of his haggard face. I could read in them a set purpose to devote his life to this quest until the client whom he had failed to save should at last be avenged. The trim Inspector Martin, the old, gray-headed country doctor, myself and a stolid village policeman made up the rest of that strange company.

The two women told their story clearly enough. They had been aroused from their sleep by the sound of an explosion, which had been followed a minute later by a second one. They slept in adjoining rooms, and Mrs. King had rushed in to Saunders. Together they had descended the stairs. The door of the study was open, and a candle was burning upon the table. Their master lay upon his face in the center of the room. He was quite dead. Near the window his wife was crouching, her head leaning against the wall. She was horribly wounded, and the side of her face was red with blood. She breathed heavily, but was incapable of saying anything. The passage as well as the room was full of smoke and the smell of powder. The window was certainly shut and fastened upon the inside. Both women were positive upon the point. They had at once sent for the doctor and for the constable. Then, with the aid of the groom and the stable boy, they had conveyed their injured mistress to her room. Both she and her husband had occupied the bed. She was clad in her dress, he in his dressing gown, over his night clothes. Nothing had been moved in the study. So far as they knew, there had never been any quarrel between husband and wife. They had always looked upon them as a very united couple.

These were the main points of the servants' evidence. In answer to Inspector Martin they were clear that every door was fastened upon the inside and that no one could have escaped from the house. In answer to Holmes they both remembered that they were conscious of the smell of powder from the moment that they ran out of their rooms upon the top floor. "I commend that fact very carefully to your attention," said Holmes to his professional colleague. "And now I think that we are in a position to undertake a thorough examination of the room."

The study proved to be a small chamber lined on three sides with books and with a writing table facing an ordinary window, which looked out upon the garden. Our first attention was given to the body of the unfortunate squire, whose huge frame lay stretched across the room. His disordered dress showed that he had been hastily aroused from sleep. The bullet had been fired at him from the front and had remained in his body after penetrating the heart. His death had certainly been instantaneous and painless. There was no powder marking either upon his dressing gown or on his hands. According to the country surgeon, the lady had staid upon her face, but none upon her hand.

"The absence of the latter means nothing, though its presence may mean everything," said Holmes. "Unless the powder from a badly fitting cartridge happens to spurt backward one may fire many shots without leaving a sign. I would suggest that Mr. Cubitt's body may now be removed. I suppose, doctor, you have not recovered the bullet which wounded the lady?"

"I'll go into that later. There are several points in this problem which I have not been able to explain to you yet. Now that I have got so far I had best proceed on my own lines and then clear the whole matter up once and for all."

"Just as you wish, Mr. Holmes, so long as we get our man."

"I have no desire to make mysteries, but it is impossible at the moment of action to enter into long and complex explanations. I have the threads of this affair all in my hand. Even if this lady should never recover consciousness we can still reconstruct the events of last night and insure that justice be done. First of all, I wish to know whether there is any fan in this neighborhood known as Elrige's?"

The servants were cross questioned, but none of them had heard of such a place. The stable boy threw a light upon the matter by remembering that a farmer of that name lived some miles off in the direction of East Ruston.

"Is it a lonely farm?"

"Very lonely, sir."

"Perhaps they have not heard yet of all that happened here during the night?"

"Maybe not, sir."

Holmes thought for a little, and then a curious smile played over his face.

"Saddle a horse, my lad," said he. "I shall wish you to take a note to Elrige's farm."

He took from his pocket the various slips of the dancing men. With these in front of him he worked for some time at the study table. Finally he handed a note to the boy, with directions to put it into the hands of the person to whom it was addressed, and especially to answer no questions of any sort which might be put to him. I saw the outside of the note, addressed in struggling, irregular characters, very unlike Holmes' usual precise hand. It was consigned to Mr. Abe Slaney, Elrige's farm, East Ruston, Norfolk.

"I think, Inspector," Holmes remarked, "that you would do well to telegraph for an escort, as, if my calculations prove to be correct, you may have a particularly dangerous prisoner to convey to the county jail. The boy who takes this note could no doubt forward your telegram. If there is an afternoon train to town, Watson, I think we should do well to take it, as I have a chemical analysis of some interest to finish, and this investigation draws rapidly to a close."

When the youth had been dispatched with the note, Sherlock Holmes gave his instructions to the servants. If any visitor were to call, asking for Mrs. Hilton Cubitt, no information should be given as to her condition, but he was to be shown at once into the drawing room. He impressed these points upon them with the utmost earnestness. Finally he led the way into the drawing room, with the remark that the business was now out of our hands and that we must while away the time as best we might until we could see what was in store for us. The doctor had departed to his patients, and only the inspector and myself remained.

"I think that I can help you to pass an hour in an interesting and profitable manner," said Holmes, drawing his chair up to the table and spreading out in front of him the various papers upon which were recorded the antics of the dancing men. "As to you, friend



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He sank with a deep groan on to the settee.

Watson, I owe you every atonement for having allowed your natural curiosity to remain so long unsatisfied. To you, Inspector, the whole incident may appear as a remarkable professional study. I must tell you, first of all, the interesting circumstances connected with the previous consultations which Mr. Hilton Cubitt has had with me in Baker street." He then shortly recapitulated the facts which have already been recorded. "I have here in front of me these singular productions, at which one might smile had they not proved themselves to be the forerunners of so terrible a tragedy. I am fairly familiar with all forms of secret writings and am myself the author of a trifling monograph upon the subject, in which I analyze 169 separate ciphers, but I confess that this is entirely new to me. The object of those who invented the system has obviously been to ensure that those characters convey a message and to give the idea that they are the mere random scribbles of a child."

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TIMBER LAND NOTICE

United States Land Office, Lakeview, Oregon, August 8th, 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:

Kate Barry, of Lakeview, county of Lake, state of Oregon. Sworn statement No. 3001, for the purchase of the NE¼, SE¼, SE¼, NE¼ and Lots 1 and 2 Sec. 6, Tp 40 S., R 22 E W M.

Nellie Barry, of Lakeview, county of Lake, state of Oregon. Sworn statement No. 3002, for the purchase of the NE¼, SE¼, SE¼, SE¼ and SW¼, NE¼ Sec. 6, Tp 40 S., R 22 E W M.

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 Register & Receiver at Lakeview, Or., on Monday the 23 day of October 1905.

They name as witnesses:

Thomas Lynch, Benjamin Daly and Dennis Sullivan of Lakeview, Oregon, and John Barry of Adel, Oregon.

Any and all persons claiming adversely the above-described lands are requested to file their claims in this office on or before said 23d day of October 1905.

J. N. Watson, Register.

Notice of Appointment of Administrator.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:—NOTICE is hereby given that, by an order of the County Court of Lake County, State of Oregon, duly made and entered on the 2nd day of September, 1905, the undersigned was duly appointed Administrator of the ESTATE of WILLIAM BAHNKA, deceased.

All persons having claims against said Estate are hereby required to present the same, with the proper vouchers, within six months from the date of this notice, to the undersigned Administrator, at the First National Bank of Lakeview, in Lakeview, Lake County, State of Oregon.

Dated this 7th day of September, 1905.

DICK J. WILCOX,
Administrator of the ESTATE of WILLIAM BAHNKA, Deceased.

The Return of SHERLOCK HOLMES

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