

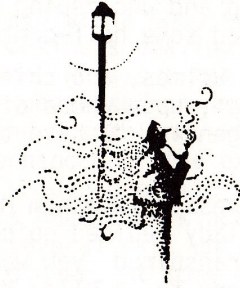
The Adventure of the WOLF'S HEAD STICK

by DUANE DAMON, P.P.of F.

&

A Sherlockian Excerpt from David Kahn's "THE CODEBREAKERS"





## The Adventure of the WOLF'S HEAD STICK

An Exciting Holmesian Pastiche  
by DUANE DAMON of the P.P. of F.

Among the many and varied problems put before Mr. Sherlock Holmes in those eventful years of 1887-8, some, such as the strange affair of Count de Rochefort and his yodeling titmouse, were singular, even extraordinary in nature. Others, as in the baffling matter of Mlle. Milano's obstinate liver, while more commonplace, nonetheless required the full measure of those peculiar powers so adroitly displayed by my friend and fellow-lodger. None of these cases, however, were set against a more bizarre backdrop of circumstances than that which intruded so abruptly upon our breakfast that raw spring morning of '87.

"A young lady to see you, sir," announced our landlady from the doorway.

"A case arrives with the eggs and rashers, Watson," said Holmes, his eyes gleaming as he let his napkin fall upon the table. "Show her in, Mrs. Hudson."

Ushered in and seated by the landlady was a woman whom, by her youthful figure and exquisite complexion, I judged to be about twenty. A crown of radiant ebony tresses framed a strong, yet well-formed face whose sharp nose and animated dark eyes did nothing to lessen

the impression of quiet beauty and strength of character. The nervous clasping and unclasping of her gloved hands was all that betrayed some half-controlled emotion.

"I am Sherlock Holmes, and this is my friend and confidant, Dr. Watson, upon whose discretion you may rely," said Holmes gently. "I have the honor of addressing . . ."

"Victoria Harkness of Wyndham Mere in Kent, Mr. Holmes," the young lady replied quickly. "When this dreadful business transpired, you were the only one I could think of to turn to. A Mile. Milano, a friend, once mentioned your name with regard to some past trouble of hers."

Holmes nodded. "An interesting affair, in which I was able to render some small assistance. But prey advise us as to your present difficulty, Miss Harkness."



"It is murder, Mr. Holmes. Last night at Wyndham Mere, a man, an American named Ralph Kincaid, was killed on the terrace. He had been clubbed to death, brutally. And now they suspect my poor Eliot of the murder!"

"Eliot - - ?" I prompted.

"Eliot Ormsby-Smythe, my fiancé, Dr. Watson," she replied, wringing her hands. With an effort, she regained something of her composure. "Perhaps I should begin at the beginning. For some years since my parents' deaths, I have lived with my mother's step-brother, Edgar Symington. My uncle, who is a wealthy and, perhaps somewhat a ruthless businessman, has been like a father, albeit a stern one, in providing for my needs. Three weeks ago, Eliot and I announced our engagement. Uncle Edgar did not receive the news well at first, although he now appears to have resigned himself to the state of things."

"And this Mr. Kincaid?" Holmes queried.

"Mr. Ralph Kincaid was a good friend of my uncle, dating back to some business dealings they shared in America many years ago. He was a man of middling size and features, yet he possessed an impressive mane of prematurely gray hair and a snarling, wolfish temper. That effect was further enhanced by the expensive walking stick he carried, a wooden one with a brass handle in the shape of a wolf's head. Mr. Kincaid had been a guest at Wyndham Mere for several days until last evening, when Eliot joined us for dinner. At some offhand reference to our engagement, Mr. Kincaid had the indelicacy to offer some unwelcome observations."

"I should hate to think," he said, "that the prospects of sudden wealth should obscure the obvious advantages of a relationship with such an attractive young woman as Miss Harkness," she related.

"Eliot flushed darkly. 'And what, sir, is the meaning of that remark?' he demanded."

"Nothing, I assure you, young man," Mr. Kincaid replied, raising his palms in a placating gesture. "I only implied that Miss Harkness would be quite a catch, even without a sizeable inheritance to 'sweeten the pot,' as we say in America. I'm sure - -"

"See here, sir!" Eliot snapped. "Perhaps in America it is the custom to make deprecatory insinuations, but here in England an insult is an insult!"

"Now calm yourself, boy," the American answered with a small, but annoying smile.

"Eliot leaped to his feet with an oath. 'You've gone too far, sir! I am plainly not a boy, as you shall see if you'll do me the honor of stepping out on the terrace.'

"Mr. Kincaid laughed heartily. 'I am not in the habit of accepting challenges from salvering young pups! Now if a man were to - -'

"At this point, Eliot would have flung himself across the table at the American, save for the intervention of my uncle, who ordered Eliot out of the house for a calming walk. Mr. Kincaid, meanwhile, was led, protesting, from the dining room by my uncle into his study.

"I hastily joined Eliot for his stroll. Although I

endeavored to soothe him, his mood was still black an hour later when we returned to the house.

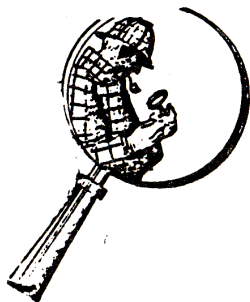
"'I'd like to show our Mr. Kincaid a measure of good English hospitality,' he muttered, rubbing his fists. My further efforts to calm him failed and a short time later we went to our separate rooms for bed."

"At what time was this?" asked Holmes.

"About a quarter to ten," Miss Harkness replied.

"Were your uncle and the disagreeable Mr. Kincaid still in the library?"

"Yes, I heard their voices from the hallway as I passed on my way to my room. They were engaged in some sort of loud dispute. It was a good forty-five minutes later that the alarm was raised from the library. The whole household rushed in to find Mr. Kincaid lying dead on the terrace. His wolf's head stick was lying near him. His head had been beaten in with it." Again the lady had to struggle against her emotions.



"Who found the body?" inquired my friend.

"Marie, our housekeeper. She had gone to the library to ask my uncle about breakfast arrangements and found Mr. Kincaid instead."

"Your uncle was not present?"

"He had retired shortly before. Mr. Kincaid had evidently returned to the library to smoke a last cigar."

"Yes, his very last," mused Holmes. "How was he dressed when discovered?"

"In night-clothes and a dressing gown borrowed from

my uncle. The police say he was smoking on the terrace when someone surprised him - - and attacked him with his own stick."

Holmes raised his eyebrows. "Did it not strike them as remarkable that a man dressed for bed should include his walking stick in his ensemble? Well, well. No doubt they assumed your Eliot burst in on him in a fit of rage over the earlier row and pummeled the American to death. Of course these astute officials have seen fit to call in Scotland Yard."

Miss Harkness shook her head. "The Chief Constable expresses the utmost confidence in the efficiency of his own force. Please, Mr. Holmes, won't you use your powers to save my Eliot?"

Holmes patted her arm soothingly and reached for the bookshelf. "Hmmm! My Bradshaw's tells us the next train for Kent leaves Charing Cross in an hour. If Dr. Watson can place his practice in other hands for the day, we should just make it."



Our train lumbered into Chislehurst Station shortly before eleven o'clock. A hired dogcart carried us eastward into a low, wet region where gloomy marshes stretched for several miles beneath a leaden March sky.

"Bleak, Watson," remarked Holmes, who had said little since our departure. "Both the countryside and the curious business at hand. But here, if I am not mistaken, is our destination."

Like the marshes for which it was named, Wyndham Mere stood somber and forbidding among the stand of dark oaks. A two-story gray-coloured building, it had no

remarkable features, save a three-columned portico in front and a low stone terrace at one end. It was upon the latter that the unfortunate American had met his fate.

Even as our vehicle neared the portico, the front door opened and two men emerged. One was a stout, middle-aged gentleman with great side whiskers and clad in a constable's uniform. The other, considerably younger and leaner, was being hustled along by the first.

"Mr. Holmes!" cried Miss Harkness, leaping down from the dogcart. "They're arresting Eliot!"

"Holmes?" repeated the older man sourly. "Mr. Sherlock Holmes, is it then? Chief Constable Phipps here. As you can see, we won't be requiring your services here, Mr. Holmes. We have our man in hand right at this moment."

"I have no doubt your constabulary has handled the case with the greatest energy," replied Holmes amiably. "Young Mr. Ormsby-Smythe has confessed, then?"

"Well, no," replied the official. "But that's hardly - -"

"Then some evidence linking him to the murder weapon has been uncovered?"

"No, but there's motive enough - -"

"P'shaw, man," retorted Holmes. "Motive is no proof. Logical, well-ordered evidence is proof. In the absence of such, might I beg your indulgence for an hour while I satisfy my self as to one or two troubling little points of this case?"

"Please, sir," implored Miss Harkness, clutching the arm of her fiancé.

Grumbling, the chief constable consented to delay the arrest. "But I'm keeping my eye on the lad, don't you worry."

"I don't know how to repay you for this, Mr. Holmes," said young Ormsby-Smythe earnestly as we entered the great house. We found ourselves in a huge marble-floored foyer with an ornate oaken staircase curving up to our left. From there I could see several other rooms, their polished hardwood floors gleaming through their doorways.

Just as Holmes was waving aside the young man's thanks, a sudden shout issued from the top of the stair-

case. An elderly gentleman in a black dressing gown came hobbling down the stairs in an obvious state of agitation.

"Victoria!" he cried as he approached. He was in his mid-sixties, gray-haired, with a sharp, hooked nose and piercing eyes. "Have you taken leave of your senses, allowing perfect strangers to intrude into our private family affairs?"

"Murder is never a private matter, Mr. Edgar Symington," declared my friend. "We are here at your niece's request. Have you some objection to the truth being brought to light?"

"Certainly not!" Symington snapped. "But the police are fully capable of dealing with it, I'm convinced."

"So they are," Holmes answered drily. "You were Kincaid's business associate - - what do you make of this murder?"

Symington gazed thoughtfully at the floor, then shook his head. "Ralph was a shrewd and aggressive businessman, and a good friend once. But as he grew more ruthless in his business dealings, so he grew in his personal ones as well. He made many enemies of both kinds."

"Yourself included? You were heard arguing with him shortly before his murder," rejoined Holmes.

"Yes, we argued, and often. But he clung to my friendship, even though it was fading. I rather pitied him at times."

I suddenly noticed that both Holmes and the chief constable were staring at Symington intently. Perhaps Eliot Ormsby-Smythe was not the only suspect, after all.

"Well," said Holmes. "I think I should like to see the terrace now."





"I grew up in this house, Mr. Holmes," remarked Miss Harkness, as we walked down the corridor. "My uncle moved in shortly after the death of my parents."

"It must take a considerable sum each year to keep it in such excellent repair," I commented, gazing in admiration at the carved oak wainscoting that adorned the walls.

"My uncle suffers no shortage of funds, I can assure you. Apart from the household expenses, he spends little of it and hoards the rest. He secretes his money here in the house, no one knows where."

"Indeed?" said Holmes with interest.

We entered the library. It was an impressive room, modest in size, but richly decorated with paintings, porcelain figurines and the ever-present oaken appointments. A single blue Persian rug covered nearly half of the shining hardwood floor. At the far end, a pair of French doors led outside. It was through these that we passed to reach the terrace.

"Mr. Kincaid was discovered over here," said the young lady, pointing to the stone-flagged terrace floor near the right-hand corner. "His stick was found next to him."

"Has anything on this terrace been touched, Constable Phipps?" asked Holmes.

"Absolutely not, sir," replied Phipps with some self-importance. "My men made a thorough examination of this area before the coroner removed the body."

"How was it situated?"

"Face down, legs spread, and arms akimbo. The back of his head was half caved-in. Blood all over the place."

"So I see," replied my friend, glancing at the stained floor and stone railing near where Miss Harkness stood. "Rather a frenzied assault, from the looks of it. See here on the floor, Watson, where these hand prints in the gore show a greater weight on the heel of the palm? They are obviously Kincaid's and indicate he was beaten to his hands and knees, then into a supine position."

Phipps emitted an exclamation of surprise, then

cleared his throat. "Why, of course we . . . er, surmised the same."

Holmes produced his magnifying lens and scrutinized the floor and railing of the terrace for some minutes more. "I've seen enough out here," he said at length. "With this carnage, the murderer must have carried some evidence of his bloody crime away with him."

Phipps shook his head. "My men found no trace of an escape across the lawn. The murderer," he added, glaring at Ormsby-Smythe, "must have entered and left the terrace through the house."

"I entirely agree," said Holmes, walking toward the French doors. "Ah, look! Just there, at the bottom of the door jamb - - a drop or two of dried blood. There's no doubt now as to the killer's exit route." He stepped into the library, then thrust his head into the corridor.

"Hmm. Aside from a few more drops on the rug, the bloodstains appear to go no farther than this room. Mmm. I'll speak to the housekeeper now, if you please."

"Yes, sir," said the woman in response to Holmes' first question. "I discovered poor Mr. Kincaid when I came in to ask about breakfast. I raised the alarm and everyone came rushing in."

"Now, Marie, can you possibly recall in what order the members of the household arrived?" Holmes queried.

"Let me see - - I believe Miss Victoria came in first, and in such a hurry that she clean forgot to put on her robe over her nightdress. Then Mr. Ormsby-Smythe ran in all shaken up, and then the butler entered. I think it was Mr. Symington who arrived last."

"I see." Holmes paced the carpet. Abruptly, he knelt beside a polished oaken bookcase and fingered a yellow gash in the wood about two feet from the bottom. "Dear me, it would seem the cleaning people have been inexcusably careless recently. This mark is fresh."

The housekeeper fumed. "Lord bless me, it wasn't there yesterday. It must be that new girl I just hired. Turned out to be a clumsy one, she did"

"I dare say. One other thing, Marie. Would you tell me exactly how many rooms have rugs on the floors?"

"Why, only this one, sir," she relied.

"Quite so. Thank you."

The chief constable smiled smugly at me and shook his head. "From murder to bookcases and carpets," he whispered. "Your Mr. Holmes seems to be drifting just a little." Privately I had to confess I was as puzzled by Holmes' line of questioning as was Phipps.

"This session has been most instructive," Holmes said, rubbing his hands. "It's clear now that young Ormsby-Smythe couldn't possibly - - -"

"This time I agree with you, Mr. Holmes," broke in the chief constable. He whispered to a subordinate constable who quickly left the room. "I'll admit I was on the wrong track at first," he continued with a bow towards Holmes. "But now I can say with complete surety who the real culprit is."

I saw a startled look cross Holmes' face, followed by one of disappointment. Could the local authorities have, for once, beaten the celebrated Sherlock Holmes?

The next moment, the junior constable returned. With him was Edgar Symington.

"What is the meaning of this outrageous conduct?" the elderly man demanded, casting his eyes around the room.

"Just this, Mr. Edgar Symington," replied Phipps, with a dramatic flourish. "You are under arr - - -"

"Tut tut, Constable Phipps!" Holmes interjected. "Before you proceed with yet another arrest, allow me to intrude a thought or two." He pressed on before Phipps could object. "The science of deduction is very much like a ship, if you will, with facts forming the sails, and imagination the rudder. Now the facts in this case suggest that Mr. Ormsby-Smythe could have murdered Kincaid. The same facts also point to Mr. Symington as the culprit. But what happens when we use imagination to steer the facts on a different course?"

"Watson, when you noticed me staring at Symington in the foyer earlier, I was not, as you may have thought, sizing him up as a suspect. Rather, I was struck by a certain crude resemblance he bore to someone else. Here is where we begin to employ imagination in tandem with the facts. Let us imagine the killer in the library approaching

Kincaid from behind. In the half-darkness of the terrace, clad in a borrowed dressing-gown, the gray-maned Ralph Kincaid could very well have appeared to be the master of the house . . . "

"Edgar Symington!" I cried.

"Now we may ask," Holmes went on, "'who wanted to kill Symington and why?' As to who, let us remember Symington hoards a great deal of money in an unknown cache in the house."

"And so it shall remain unknown!" exclaimed Symington defiantly.

"I fear not, sir," the detective returned. "My earlier inquiries regarding the bookcase and carpet did indeed have a purpose. Why should this room be carpeted and none of the rest? How was this recent gash on the bookcase made? This is why - - and how!"



Holmes dropped to his haunches and whipped aside one corner of the Persian rug. About two feet out from the bookcase a squared-shaped outline with a recessed metal ring was set in the wooden floor.

"A trap door!" ejaculated Ormsby-Smythe.

Holmes nodded. "The money-box which Symington keeps inside is not of immediate importance, however. Remember my remarking on the abrupt end to the trail of blood drops? If the perpetrator of a violent murder wanted to discard bloodstained clothing before continuing through the house, what better spot for their disposal than a trap door compartment known only to the killer and Edgar Symington?" With that, Holmes tugged the door open and plunged his hand into the opening. With an exclamation of

satisfaction he pulled up a yellow-flowered bundle, spotted and stained scarlet. The chief constable snatched up the bundle and opened it full length.

"Great heavens!" Symington cried. "It's a woman's dressing robe! Who - - -"

"Perhaps Miss Victoria Harkness can shed some light on that question," Holmes suggested.

I was startled to see the young lady's lovely countenance contort itself into a mask of savage rage. With a cry, she sprang forward toward the French doors behind me. As I moved instinctively to block her escape, she hissed and clawed viciously at my face like a raven-haired harpy. It took both Holmes and Phipps to pull her free. Her fierce energies spent at last, she ceased her struggles and sank into a chair.

"It is useless," she said wearily. "The act was mine, I confess it. But I swear I never meant to kill Kincaid. It was you, uncle, that I wanted!"

"But why, Victoria?" demanded the shaken Ormsby-Smythe.

"The money, don't you see, Eliot? Uncle Edgar left half of his state to me and half to that reprehensible American. By killing my uncle, I'd be eliminating both obstacles to receiving my full inheritance. After all their arguments, I knew Kincaid would likely get the blame, especially after I committed the deed with his walking stick. I removed it from his room just before dinner."

"It was the housekeeper's remarking on the absence of your robe that alerted me," Holmes explained. "As you returned from the terrace through the Library, you secreted your incriminating bloodstained robe in the hidden compartment, planning to retrieve it safely later. In your haste to open the trap door, you accidentally flung it back against the bookcase, leaving the gash. It is hardly surprising you would know the location of the compartment, having, by your own admission, grown up in this house. Then, when you rushed back in answer to the maid's alarm, Marie noticed the absence of the robe which you usually wore."

"To think that in her murderous excitement she killed the wrong man," I said.

Holmes nodded. "Imagine her shock also when Eliot's earlier argument with Kincaid that same evening made him a suspect of her crime. No doubt she called on my services to clear her fiancé, in hopes I would unwittingly help build a case against her uncle, her intended victim."

"Well, Mr. Holmes," said Phipps. "I must admit I was completely fooled on this one."

"A position not altogether unfamiliar to your counterparts at Scotland Yard," Holmes replied with a smile.

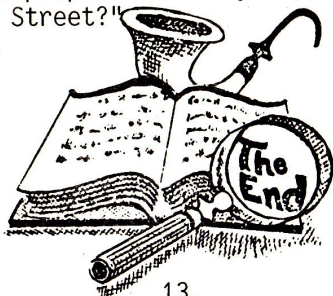
I could not help but steal a pitying glance at the dazed young Ormsby-Smythe as he watched his fiancée being led away. He was, after all, the greatest victim of Victoria Harkness's own passions.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Quite a pretty problem, Watson," remarked Holmes as we settled into our train seats. "No doubt you will see fit to favor the public with an exceedingly imaginative account of it."

"It does have all the elements of a good tale," I admitted. "including the moment when Phipps prepared to announce his second arrest, and I thought you'd finally been beaten."

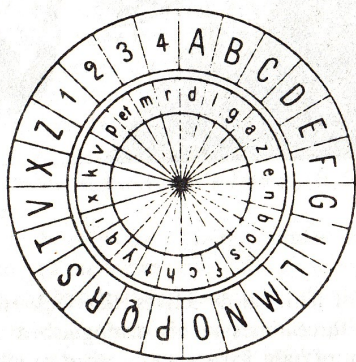
"Perhaps with more time," Holmes answered wryly, "Phipps would have caught the right person before he ran out of suspects. To return to my metaphor of deduction and the ship, I fear that while the constable's sails were billowing, the helmsman, unfortunately, was asleep. And now, Watson, since we've missed our lunch, do you suppose we might prevail upon our ever-dependable Mrs. Hudson to prepare an early supper when we arrive back at Baker Street?"



# THE CODEBREAKERS

The Story of Secret Writing

By DAVID KAHN



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The most famous of fictional detectives, Sherlock Holmes, encountered ciphers not once but three times in his distinguished career (excluding a simple signaling system of light flashes and a word puzzle). In "The 'Gloria Scott,'" the great detective soon discovers that a secret message is hidden within an open-code text as every third word. In "The Valley of Fear," given a numerical code message from an accomplice of his arch rival, Professor Moriarty, he reasons his way brilliantly not only to the conclusion that it is a book code, but to the very volume used. The book must be both readily available and standardized as to format. This excludes the Bible, which meets the requirement of availability to perfection but that of standardization of pages not at all—and also because "I could hardly name any volume which would be less likely to lie at the elbow of one of Moriarty's associates." The only volume which fits both requirements is *Whitaker's Almanac*. The current edition yields the senseless *Mahratta government pig's bristles*, but last year's gives perfect sense. Thus Holmes solves the cryptogram purely by use of his famed deductive powers and without really needing to know cryptanalysis.



But his thorough knowledge of that subject, as of all others needed in his chosen profession, becomes manifest in his "Adventure of the Dancing Men." The dancing men—little stick figures with their arms and legs in various positions—constitute the cipher symbols. An American gangster, Abe Slaney, "the most dangerous crook in Chicago," writes threatening notes in them to a former childhood sweetheart, Elsie, who has married an English squire. The squire copies the messages, which are chalked on window sills and tool houses, and brings them to Holmes. Holmes solves them, but the squire is killed by Slaney in an exchange of shots before Holmes can prevent the tragedy. Slaney escapes. Holmes, who knows where he is from the solved



*A message in the Dancing Men cipher, solved by Sherlock Holmes*

cryptograms, carefully composes a message out of cipher symbols that he has recovered and sends him a note urging him to *Come here at once*. (Holmes perhaps borrowed this scheme from Thomas Phelippes, who, Holmes knew, had in 1587 forged a cipher postscript to a letter of Mary, Queen of Scots, to learn the names of the intended murderers in the Babington plot against Elizabeth.) Slaney, naïvely believing that only Elsie and others of his Chicago gang at the Joint could read the cipher and that the note must therefore have come from her, returns to the squire's home. He is at once arrested and, naturally, confesses.

Holmes is, as he himself says, "fairly familiar with all forms of secret writings, and am myself the author of a trifling monograph upon the subject, in which I analyse one hundred and sixty separate ciphers, but I confess that this is entirely new to me." He referred, of course, to the use of the dancers "to give the idea that they are the mere random sketches of children," and not to their nature as a monalphabetic substitution. That he promptly recognized that they belonged to this class of ciphers is proved by his embarking at once upon a solution without any false starts. His task was considerably more difficult than that of any other fictional cryptanalyst, because his text was exceedingly short, disconnected, and elliptical and loaded with proper names. It eventually consisted of five messages in telegraphic English: (1) *Am here Abe Slaney*, (2) *At Elriges*, (3) *Come Elsie*, (4) *Never*, (5) *Elsie prepare to meet thy God*. But to begin with Holmes had only the first message, on which he made his start, and he broke the cipher only with that message plus the next three. They total only 38 letters, eight of them occurring but once; out of the nine words, four are proper names, and of the other five none is among the ten most frequent words in English, which normally make up a quarter of English text.

The difficulty of such a solution demonstrates the power and flexibility of the great detective's mind. Holmes would quite evidently have preferred to solve the cryptogram with his usual rigorous deductions, which means by frequency analysis. He began that way. The first message contained 15 dancing men, of which four are in an ecstatic spread-eagle position and three have their left leg bent. Holmes at once marked down the four spread-eagle dancers as *e*. Now, neither letter frequencies nor any other statistical phenomena are reliable in small samples; it was quite possible that the three bent-left-leg dancers represented *e*, or that one of the single dancers did, or even that no *e* at all occurred in the first message. It is inconceivable that Holmes did not know this. Nevertheless, he fixed the symbol for *e* "with some confidence." He was right, of course, but why? No doubt Holmes, having recognized that the figures holding flags marked the ends of words, noticed that two of the four spread-eagle dancers carried flags, and instantly connected this with the well-known fact that *e* is the most frequent terminal letter in English. His swift mind may also have observed the variety of the *e* dancers' contacts. But all this flashed through his great brain just below the threshold of his consciousness—this perhaps helps explain the characteristic rapidity of his deductions—and consequently he did not articulate it in his explanation to Watson. Or perhaps he did not want to burden Watson with all those details.



He did realize, however, that neither frequency analysis nor anything else could go further in the first message, and so he awaited more text. Upon the arrival of the next three messages, he saw that frequency analysis would not serve with so short a text. Unable to progress with his beloved deductions, he deftly switched to induction. He performed brilliantly, guessing first that a five-letter word with *e* as the second and fourth letters and comprising a message in itself must be *never*, and then conjecturing that the name *Elsie* might occur in the messages and finding it. With these values he was fairly on his way, and with further arduous labor completed the solution.

Some cryptologists have affected to sneer at Holmes's taking two hours to solve these cryptograms, covering "sheet after sheet of paper with figures and letters" as he did so. With so short and difficult a text, however, the time is not only understandable, but admirable. Moreover, the dancers caper in no recognizable pattern when placed in alphabetical order, and when they pose in a graduated order of choreography, no regularity appears in the letters. In other words, the cipher of the dancing man is purely arbitrary. Some members of the Sherlock Holmes fan club, the Baker Street Irregulars, which included Alexander Woolcott, Christopher Morley, and Franklin D. Roosevelt, have kept their gaslights burning late in attempts to discover a regular basis of construction. It is wasted energy. The fact that Holmes limited himself to already recovered letters in his "Come here at once" message to Slaney suggests that he did not discover any regularity which would have permitted him slightly more latitude in composing that message. And surely had there been such a key pattern, Holmes would have discovered it. The inventor of the cipher, Elsie's father, Patrick, "the boss of the Joint," may have gotten the idea for the dancing men from a cipher based on human figures in the semi-official *Manual of Signals* by Albert Myers, the founder of the U.S. Army Signal Corps, or from the same unknown place as the inventor of a slightly later United States patent that uses manikins for cipher symbols, or from the ubiquitous Carbonari, whose call-sign is made by extending the arms horizontally in the form of a cross and the reply by pressing two fists one above the other on the breast. Holmes may well have known of these possible sources. But even if Patrick did borrow the idea from one of them, he has altered the arrangement so thoroughly that cryptanalysis is left as the only way of resolving the problem.

A final point remains to be cleared up in the case of the dancing men: the source of the cryptographic errors that appear in all printed accounts. In the very first publication of "The Adventure of the Dancing Men," the cryptograms use the same dancer for the *v* in *Never* and the *p*'s in *prepare*, and use an identical dancer for the *b* in *Abe* and for the *r* in *Never*. The Baker Street Irregulars have expended a great deal of energy on this problem. It is in their attempts to find the "correct" version that they have falsely assumed a regularity in the cipher alphabet, constructing tables of arm and leg positions and extrapolating the ciphertext symbols for the eight letters (*f, j, k, q, u, w, x, z*) that do not occur in the messages. They have also sought to determine the cause of the errors. Their efforts, however, have served only to show why they are the disciples and Holmes the master. All of them engage in armchair thinking without investigating the facts. There has been a suggestion that the errors "are in the messages of the villain of the story and may be laid, if one so wishes, to the poor devil's confusion and despair," but no one has raised the equally likely possibility that the squire may have made the mistakes while copying the messages to bring them to Holmes. In fact, however, the errors are neither Slaney's nor the squire's, for the errors were not present when Holmes solved the cryptograms. If the same symbol had been used for *v* and *p* in the originals, Holmes would have produced the partial plaintext *vrevare* in the fifth message after guessing *Never* instead of the *?re?are* that he shows,

with the two *p*'s as unknowns. Similarly, if the *r* and *b* had been confounded in the original, he would have shown a partial solution *?re* (for the correct *Abe*) after guessing *Never*, but in fact he shows a partial solution *??e* with the *b* still unknown. Holmes' own account thus proves that the errors did not exist in the original messages—and it is fortunate that they did not, for they occur at junctures crucial to the analysis and, coupled with the other difficulties, might have rendered the cryptograms almost impossible to read, even for Holmes.—The errors must therefore have been made by Dr. Watson in transmitting the canon to the world. Later publications have compounded Watson's original errors, but these have passed through the hands of literary and journalistic types, notoriously frivolous and unreliable as to facts, and need not be considered.

After Holmes' feat, all other solutions look pale.





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