The Adventure
of the Dancing Men

A short story by
Arthur Conan Doyle

Adapted by
Al Rodin

Performance Rights

It is an infringement of the federal copyright law to copy or reproduce this script in any manner or to perform this play without royalty payment. All rights are controlled by Eldridge Publishing Co. Inc. Call the publisher for additional scripts and further licensing information. The author's name must appear on all programs and advertising with the notice: "Produced by special arrangement with Eldridge Publishing Co. Inc."

PUBLISHED BY
ELDRIDGE PUBLISHING
www.hiStage.com
© 1993 Alvin E. Rodin

Download your complete script from Eldridge Publishing
https://histage.com/adventure-of-the-dancing-men

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(7m, 2w, doubling possible)

SHERLOCK HOLMES: Austere, at times haughty, with occasional humor shown as a wry smile. Intolerant of sham and dull-wittedness. Not overly enamored of the opposite sex, but exhibits gentlemanly behavior. Has so deeply repressed his romantic nature that he no longer is aware of its existence. Prides himself on his remarkable ability to make conclusions which are based on observations and are always correct, yet completely mystifying to others, including Doctor Watson.

DOCTOR WATSON: Prosaic, somewhat stodgy, and at times thick-headed. Faithful and obedient to Holmes, being often used as his foil. Unable to unravel a mystery until Holmes' concise denouement. A lady's man, but always proper in his relationship with them, and shocked at any impropriety on their part. At Holmes' beck and call, being quite willing to leave his practice (and his wife) immediately whenever asked.

HILTON CUBITT: Master of a country estate, Ridling Thorpe Manor, in Norfolk. Honest, practical, and straight-forward. He became enamored of and married an American, Elsie Patrick, of whose past he knew nothing.

ELSIE PATRICK: An American who had some mysterious unpleasantness in her past, which did not stop her from marrying Cubitt and remaining faithful to him even under marked duress.

INSPECTOR MARTIN: Of the Norfolk Constabulary. He is more than pleased to allow Holmes to do things in his own inimitable and successful fashion.

MRS. KING: The cook who is loyal to and protective of her mistress, Mrs. Cubitt.

ABE SLANEY: An American gangster who was so in love with Mrs. Elsie Patrick that he had followed her to England.

STATION MASTER: Talkative.

DOCTOR: Undistinguished.

STORY THE PLAY

Hilton Cubitt, a squire, has come to Sherlock Holmes for help in solving a disturbing mystery. Cubitt has found several messages of coded letters drawn in the form of dancing men. The messages are undecipherable to him but extremely disturbing to his American wife, Elsie. With his typical brilliance Sherlock Holmes quickly realizes the danger the messages convey, and he and Watson travel by rail to the Cubitt estate. But it is too late. Cubitt has been found killed and it is believed that Elsie shot him, although it cannot be proved because she herself is unconscious, near death's door. Working with the local Inspector, Holmes sets a trap for an American man renting a room at a nearby farm. Holmes must find the truth or Elsie may pay the consequences … if she lives.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

While originally written as a Reader's Theatre presentation, this play can easily be performed with simple stage action and minimal set pieces.

Scenes

Scene 1: 221 B Baker St., July, 1898.
Scene 2: Same, about a week later.
Scene 3: Railway station, the next morning.
Scene 4: Drawing room of Ridling Thorpe Manor, later.
Scene 5: Garden of Ridling Thorpe Manor, minutes later.
Scene 6: Drawing room, later that day.

THE CODED MESSAGES

The mysterious messages composed of dancing figures mentioned in the text of the play were taken from the original illustrations in the actual novel by Conan Doyle. They are the actual codes themselves in cryptic form. The actors can simply look at the messages themselves or, if a director wishes to share with the audience, the actors can draw on a blackboard or the tech booth can run a PowerPoint presentation. Please see the end of the script for the code.

SCENE 1

(AT RISE: The main room of the Sherlock Holmes' suite at 221B Baker Street. HOLMES enters, sits DS, removes hat. Looks intensely at table while pouring liquid from a test tube.)

WATSON: *(Enters left with hat on.)* 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 grey plumage and a black top-knot. *(Sits and removes hat.)*

HOLMES: *(Looking up abruptly.)* So, Watson, you do not propose to invest in South African securities?

WATSON: *(Startled.)* This intrusion into my most intimate thoughts is utterly inexplicable. How on earth did you know that?

HOLMES: *(Amused.)* Now, Watson, confess yourself utterly taken back.

WATSON: I am!

HOLMES: *(Smugly.)* I ought to make you sign a paper to that effect.

WATSON: *(Puzzled.)* Why?

HOLMES: Because in five minutes you will say that it is so absurdly simple.

WATSON: *(Miffed.)* I am sure that I will say nothing of the kind.

HOLMES: You see, my dear Watson, 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.

HOLMES: *(Cont'd.)* Now, it was not really difficult, by an inspection of the groove between your left forefinger and thumb, to feel sure that you did not propose to invest your small capital in the gold fields.

WATSON: *(Puzzled.)* I see no connection.

HOLMES: Very likely not. But I can quickly show you a close connection. Here are the missing links of the very simple chain. 1. You had the chalk between your left finger and thumb when you returned from the club last night. 2. You put chalk there when you played billiards to steady the cue. 3. You never play billiards except with Thurston. 4. 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. 5. Your checkbook is locked in the drawer, and you have not asked for the key. 6. You do not propose to invest your money in this manner.

WATSON: *(Crying out.)* How absurdly simple.

HOLMES: *(Nettled.)* Quite so! 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. *(Gives a sheet of paper to Watson, and goes back to his chemical analysis.)*

WATSON: *(Amazed.)* Why, Holmes, it is a child's drawing!

HOLMES: *(Peevish.)* Oh, that's your idea.

WATSON: What else should it be?

HOLMES: That is what Mr. Hilton Cubitt of Ridling Thorpe Manor, Norfolk, is very anxious to know. This little conundrum came by the first post, and he was to follow by the next train. *(A KNOCK on door.)* There's a knock at the bell, Watson. I should not be very much surprised if this were he. *(CUBITT appears at door.)* Mr. Cubitt, I presume. Please enter and be seated.

CUBITT: *(Hat off and sits as he notices his paper on the table.)* Well, Mr. Holmes, what do you make of these I sent you?! They told me that you were fond of queer mysteries, and I don't think you can find a queerer one than that. I sent the paper on ahead so that you might have time to study it before I came.

[Message 1 may be shown.]

HOLMES: It is certainly rather a curious production. At first sight it would appear to be some childish prank. It consists of a number of absurd little figures dancing across the paper upon which they are drawn. Why should you attribute any importance to so grotesque an object?

CUBITT: I never should, Mr. Holmes. But my wife does. It is frightening her to death. She says nothing, but I can see terror in her eyes. That's why I want to sift the matter to the bottom.

HOLMES: *(Examining paper for some time, then folding and putting it in his pocket.) [Message 1 off.]* This promises to be a most interesting and unusual case. You gave me a few particulars in your letter, Mr. Cubitt, but I should be very much obliged if you would kindly go over it all again for the benefit of my friend, Dr. Watson. *(WATSON is pleased.)*

CUBITT: *(Nervously clasping and unclasping hands.)* I'm not much of a storyteller. Just ask me anything that I don't make clear. I'll begin at the time of my marriage last year; *(Proudly.)* but I want to say first of all that, though I'm not a rich man, my people have been at Ridling Thorpe for a matter of five centuries, and there is no better-known family in the county of Norfolk. Last year I came up to London for the Jubilee, and I stopped at a boardinghouse in Russell Square, because Parker, the vicar of our parish, was staying in it. There was an American young lady there — Patrick was the name — Elsie Patrick. In some way we became friends, until before my month was up I was as much in love as a man could be. We were quietly married at a registry office, and we returned to Norfolk a wedded couple.

HOLMES: Have you had any prior dealings with Americans?

CUBITT: None, Mr. Holmes. You'll think it very mad that a man of a good old family should marry a wife in this fashion, knowing nothing of her past or of her people;

End of Freeview

Download your complete script from Eldridge Publishing
https://histage.com/adventure-of-the-dancing-men

Eldridge Publishing, a leading drama play publisher since 1906, offers more than a thousand full-length plays, one-act plays, melodramas, holiday plays, religious plays, children's theatre plays and musicals of all kinds.

For more than a hundred years, our family-owned business has had the privilege of publishing some of the finest playwrights, allowing their work to come alive on stages worldwide.

We look forward to being a part of your next theatrical production.

Eldridge Publishing... for the start of your theatre experience!