

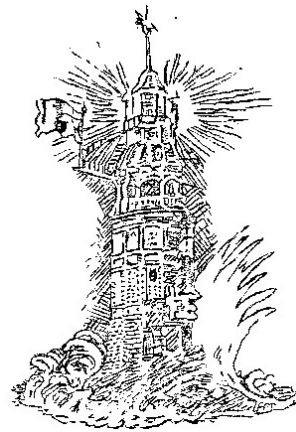
**Student
Perspectives on
Sherlock Holmes**

**The 2024
Nancy Springer
Creative Writing Contest
Prize Winner**

**Administered by
The Beacon Society, a scion society of the
Baker Street Irregulars**

Student Perspectives on Sherlock Holmes

The 2024 Nancy Springer Creative Writing Contest Prize Winners



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**Compiled by Stephen Mason,
Communications Committee, The Beacon Society**

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With thanks and gratitude to the Creative Writing reading team:

Ann Brauer Andriacco -- Chair, Awards Committee

Nancy Springer

Nancy Springer is an American author of fantasy, young adult literature, mystery, and science fiction. She has received numerous awards for her writing, including an Edgar Award from the Mystery Writers of America. She has written more than fifty books over a career that has spanned four decades.



Her novels and stories for middle-grade and young adults range from contemporary realism, mystery/crime, and fantasy to her critically acclaimed novels based on the Arthurian legend and times.

She released her first Enola Holmes book in 2006, with there now being 8 books in the series, including:

The Case of the Missing Marquess (2006)
The Case of the Left-Handed Lady (2007)
The Case of the Bizarre Bouquets (2008)
The Case of the Peculiar Pink Fan (2008)
The Case of the Cryptic Crinoline (2009)
The Case of the Gypsy Goodbye (2010)
Enola Holmes and the Black Barouche (2021)
Enola Holmes and the Elegant Escapade (2022)

Two feature films have been released involving Enola Holmes, based on the series.

And as Nancy is fond of saying, "every day is a new story."

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle, best known today as the creator of Sherlock Holmes, was born on May 22, 1859 in Edinburgh, Scotland. In addition to his stories about the world's most famous detective, Conan Doyle was a prolific writer whose other works include science fiction stories, historical novels, plays, romances, poetry, non-fiction, and writings on spiritualism.

He originally set out to be a doctor. From 1876 to 1881, he studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh. In 1882, Doyle established his own medical practice in the community of Southsea, a suburb of Portsmouth, England.

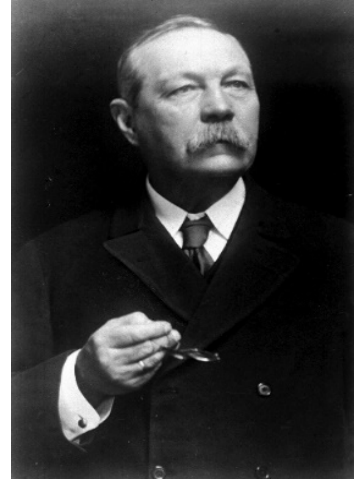
However, his early medical practice was not very successful, so he wrote fiction to supplement his income. His first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*, was published in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* for 1887.

Conan Doyle modeled the character of Holmes in part on one of his former medical school professors, Dr. Joseph Bell. Dr. Bell had the ability to identify a patient's occupation, background, and many other details just by looking at him or her.

The second Sherlock Holmes novel, *The Sign of Four*, followed in 1890. But Holmes really took off when Conan Doyle hit upon the idea of a series of stories about the same character to run each month in a magazine. This had never been done before.

Conan Doyle pitched the idea to a new publication, *The Strand Magazine*, shortly after it began in 1891. *The Strand* initially published the first twelve Sherlock Holmes, which later appeared in book form as *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892). They were an immediate hit with the public. *The Strand* ordered more stories – and then wanted still more.

At the end of the second set of stories, published as *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (1893), Holmes's friend, Dr. John H. Watson, related in "The Final Problem" how the detective appeared to have died at the hands of a criminal mastermind, Professor Moriarty. Holmes came back, however, in perhaps his most famous adventure of all – *The Hound of the Baskervilles* that ran in *The Strand* from 1901-1902. Three more books followed. In all, Conan Doyle wrote fifty-six short stories and four novels featuring Sherlock Holmes over a forty-year period ending in 1927. Conan Doyle wrote nearly 200 novels, short stories, poems, historical books and pamphlets, including *The Lost World* (1912) and *The White Company* (1891). He was knighted by Queen Victoria of England in 1902.

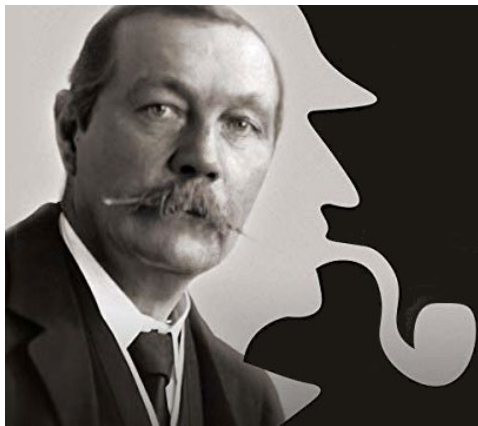


Sir Arthur Conan Doyle died of a heart attack in 1930, at age of 71. He is buried in the churchyard at Minstead in the New Forest, Hampshire, England, beneath a tombstone that reads in part:

***STEEL TRUE
BLADE STRAIGHT
ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE
KNIGHT
PATRIOT, PHYSICIAN, & MAN OF LETTERS***

A detailed biography of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle can be found on The Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Literary Society's website:

<https://www.arthurconandoyle.com/biography.html>



The Adventure of the White Canary

Avery Piatt, 1st Prize
10th – 12th Grade



It was a grey, thundering morning in the middle of March, and I was sitting in the parlor in Baker Street, reading a book. My good friend, Sherlock Holmes, in one of those fits of energy which so often consumed him, was pacing up and down the hall, mulling over the details of one of his recent cases.

It was the type of morning when no man should have left his house, unless under the direst of circumstances, and yet, at that moment, the bell rang.

“Were you expecting someone?” I asked Holmes, “Or is it a client?”

“You know my habits well enough to be well aware that I seldom invite company,” Holmes said, with a dry smile, “And it would be a desperate client that would venture out in such a deluge as this.” We both stared at the door in keen interest. A few moments later, the door swung open, and a man was conducted inside.

He was a tall, thin man, perhaps in his late twenties, and dressed in a large, oversized shirt and a fur coat, though his clothing was completely drenched from the rain. He walked in, and shook each of our hands in turn, introducing himself as Mr. Nikolai Abramov. His voice had a faint accent. He was carrying what appeared to be a bird cage, covered with a cloth, so that we could not see the inside.

“Please, come in Mr. Abramov,” Holmes said, with an easy smile so readily brought to his face. “Have a seat and tell me what it is that is so concerning to you.”

Abramov sat down in a chair, close to the fire, and started to warm himself from the dreadful weather outside. Holmes sat back in his chair, and I sat nearby, watching the man curiously.

“Mr. Holmes,” Abramov said, eventually, “I have heard from several good sources that you are the very best detective a man can find, and I have a puzzling series of events. If you could explain them to me, I would be willing to pay handsomely for them.”

“Of course,” said Holmes, his expression growing more interested, “It has to do with your wife’s recently-deceased bird, I believe?”

“Why, yes,” the man said, staring at Holmes in astonishment, “You’ve heard of the case then?”

“Oh no,” Holmes laughed, “But it is rather obvious. See, the cage you hold in your hand.” The man, in surprise, glanced down at the cage in his hands.

“But, how did you know the bird was dead? Or that it was my wife’s?” the man asked in bewilderment.

“Simple deduction,” Holmes replied, easily. “I can’t believe any bird would take kindly to being jostled about and soaked from the rain, even if the cloth protected it partially, yet it is

completely silent. Hence, the bird that once resided in the cage is now dead. This must be related to the case, or else you would not have brought it along. Also, the red ribbon tied at the top of the cage is a certain feminine touch that indicates the bird belongs to a woman - I assume your wife."

"You are perfectly right in your observations, Mr. Holmes," Abramov said, again. "I see I was right in coming to you, because the events I have to relate are strange indeed. I hope you will be able to piece them together, as my wife and I cannot wrap our minds around them at all."

Holmes leaned back in his armchair comfortably.

"Please, tell me everything, Mr. Abramov," he said, "Leave nothing out - small details, so easy to omit, are often just the things I require in my line of work."

"Very well, sir," the lean man said, putting his feet up next to the fire, and taking a breath. "I will do my best to tell things just as they happened, but it is all so strange I may become muddled."

"I suppose I should start with the death of my wife's great-aunt, one Miss Catherine Knight. This aunt, an ancient woman, sir, was a widow with no children, and held a great deal of property after the death of her husband. She lived a lonely life, and Margaret, my wife, went to visit her often. This aunt had a particular bird - an albino canary, perfectly white - that she was very fond of. When the doctors warned us that she was going to die, Miss Knight insisted that we take her little canary. So, the little bird came to our house to live. This was only a few weeks ago, though it feels like an eternity."

"And who inherited the rest of the property?" Holmes asked, his eyes watching Mr. Abramov's face, attentively.

"My wife's cousin, Mr. Holmes, one Henry Walker. He moved into the house not long after his great-aunt passed."

"Have you seen much of him?"

"No, I've never met him, but I'm told he lived in London even before his aunt's passing."

"Alright then," Holmes said, obviously mulling over this new information, "Please continue."

"Well, then, about a week after we took in the bird,, a man came to our door early one morning. He seemed respectable enough, and asked if could come inside. Once he was seated and my wife had brought in some tea, he said he had some business to discuss with me. I assumed he was some sort of banking official or businessman."

"As soon as he entered the parlour, however, his eyes fastened on the canary's cage in the corner of the room, and he asked to see it. I showed him the little white canary, and he immediately exclaimed over what a beautiful bird it was, and offered to buy it from me right then, at a price of four pounds."

"Well, Mr. Holmes, you can imagine I was very confused at the gentleman's behavior, and told him my wife would never be willing to part with the bird.. He immediately bumped up his offer to six pounds. I began to suspect there was something strange going on, and asked him what business had brought him here in the first place, to which he replied that he'd come for the sole purpose of acquiring my bird. He became very angry when I told him, once again, that I would not sell, and stomped out of the house. As you can imagine, Mr. Holmes, this whole thing was very confusing, but I would have forgotten about it quickly, if it hadn't been for the events of the next few days."

“The very next day, a letter arrived in the post, offering me ten pounds for the bird. It was unsigned, but I can only assume it is the same man who sent it. Now, I had the bird checked by an expert, Mr. Holmes, and it is indeed an excellent specimen, and valuable, but the estimated value was four to five pounds at most, nowhere near ten pounds. I never replied to the letter, but after a day or two, I assumed the whole matter was over, and the mysterious man had moved on.”

“About a week after the letter, the robbery took place. I woke up late one night to the sound of a crash in the parlour. I rushed out, and found a man standing in the living room, fiddling with the canary’s cage. I ran at him, and tried to pull the cage away from him, and we ended up struggling with it. Somehow, we managed to unlatch the cage, and, since it was on its side, the half-asleep bird fluttered his way to the ground. When the assailant lost his footing a moment later, he fell to the ground, crushing the poor creature.”

“The man hopped to his feet, and, trying one more time to grab the cage from me, he fled the house, running back through the door of the house, which he had forced open.”

“You mean to say,” said Holmes, very curious, “That the man was still trying to reach the cage from you, after the bird had been crushed underneath him?”

“Yes, sir,” the man said. “That’s what puzzles me. After all the fuss made over the bird, I don’t know why he seemed not to care that it had died. He never even tried to grab the dead bird, and he couldn’t have missed the fact that the cage was empty - it wasn’t dark enough for that.”

“Do you know if the cage itself is valuable?” Holmes asked.

“I thought of that too, sir, but I had it examined as well - it isn’t worth much at all, sir. It certainly isn’t worth breaking into someone’s home for. Still, I have it here, for you to examine if you wish” Nikolai Abramov sighed, and began to warm his hands by the fire again.

“That’s my whole tale, Mr. Holmes. I did not get a good glimpse of the robber’s face. I cannot be sure if he is the same man that offered to buy the canary or not, but it seems to me it must be the same man, or at least someone he is associated with, don’t you think?”

“It seems very probable,” Holmes replied, leaning back in his chair, and folding his fingers together. “May I examine your cage?”

The man nodded. He removed the cloth from the birdcage, and passed it to us. He also handed us a little white feather from the bird.

“I am sorry,” he said, “But my wife would not hear of me bringing the body of her little canary along. She insisted on burying him like any other cherished pet.”

“Of course,” said Holmes. He picked up the birdcage, and turned it over, once in his hand.

After a moment, he said, “This is quite the little puzzle, Mr. Abramov, but I am eager to crack it. Once you are warm enough, sir, I believe you should get back to your wife before she gets too worried. If you don’t mind, I will keep the cage for the time being, and examine it as best I can.”

“Thank you so much, Mr. Holmes,” Mr. Abramov said. “My wife and I will sleep better at night once these men are in the hands of the police.” With that, the man departed, walking back out into the pouring rain.

Holmes glanced at me from his chair, and asked, “Well, what do you make of it, Watson?”

“It is certainly a strange case,” I said. “What could the man have wanted with that little bird?”

“Not the bird, Watson,” Holmes said. “The cage. The bird was only an excuse.”

“But, Holmes, the cage was worthless.”

“I am aware of that,” Holmes replied. “But I am certain the man would have been more careful if the bird had any value. He would have grabbed the dead bird, at least, if that was what he was after. No, it was the cage. But what secret characteristics does it possess that make it the object of this clever thief?”

I watched Holmes’ attention shift back to the cage in his hands. It certainly was a pretty thing, gilt with small glimmering stones embedded here and there as decoration.

“Was Abramov certain these gems are fake?” I asked. “It would certainly be worthwhile if they were real. Or perhaps the thief only believed them to be real.”

“No, Watson, any thief who knew anything could tell these gems were fake. No, they wanted the cage for another reason. What that is, though, I am not sure.”

I remained silent - I had absolutely no idea what interest a man would have in an inexpensive bird cage, yet Holmes’ reasoning certainly made sense. Holmes sat in silence for a quarter of an hour, thinking and drumming his fingers on the arm of the chair.

All at once, he jumped to his feet, and said, “Watson, if you are unengaged, would you care to accompany me to visit the late Miss Catherine Knight’s house?”

“The aunt?” I asked, puzzled.

“Although, it is now the cousin - Mr. Henry Walker - who is in possession of the house.”

“But my dear Holmes - just look outside,” I protested. “Only a mad man would go out in such a torrential downpour. Just to get inside a cab would half drown a man.”

“There’s no sign of it letting up,” Holmes remarked, “And I intend to pursue this case before the trail gets too cold. You may join me if you wish. I will call a cab as soon as I have found Miss Catherine Knight’s address in the directory.”

Once Holmes had found the address, the two of us went out into the rain and called the first cab we saw. It was not long before the pair of us had arrived at Charlotte Street, in front of the old woman’s house. Holmes asked the driver to make a circle around the block, then come back for us, as we wouldn’t be here for very long.

“Come, Watson,” he told me. “I think I have an idea of how these pieces all fit together in the puzzle, but I must first see if this Mr. Walker is the type of person I believe him to be.”

Holmes lifted his fist, and knocked on the ornate door. I heard several shuffling noises, as though whoever was inside was startled by the doorbell. After a few moments, the door opened just a crack.

“Who is it and what do you want?” a deep, gruff voice asked us.

“Mr. Walker, I presume? I have a mutually beneficial business offer for you. I’ve heard from a very reputable source, that you might be interested in purchasing a particular bird cage.”

“A bird cage?” The man opened the door quickly. He was a short, wide man, with a large, round face, rather like a melon, and small, beady eyes. “I don’t know at all what you mean.”

“I think you do,” said Holmes, adopting a smug, confident expression that made him look almost criminal. “I managed to acquire it from a man named Abramov. Quite the fool. He sold it to me for a pittance after his poor little bird was crushed.” The man glanced around at the street, making sure no one was looking, and then glanced back at Holmes.

“Aren’t you going to let us in?” Holmes asked him. “We’re practically drenched, Mr. Walker.”

“Do you have the cage with you?” the man hissed, ignoring Holmes’ request.

“Of course not,” Holmes replied. “We must discuss the details first.”

“How much are you asking?” Walker grunted, obviously displeased.

“I’ve heard that you offered Mr. Abramov ten pounds for both the bird and the cage, Mr. Walker. I, who knows how valuable the cage is to you, would like double that price.”

Walker let out a low growl, like an angry dog.

“Twenty pounds? That’s absolutely ridiculous. You said it yourself, you got the cage for a pittance.”

“Twenty pounds includes the additional fees for complete silence on this matter,” Holmes replied. “You would not wish for word of this to get around, I am sure.”

The man stared at Holmes for a full minute, before giving a small nod.

“Tell me which address I will find you at, and I will meet you there at seven o’clock tonight to collect what is mine,” Walker said.

“And the money?” Holmes was playing the part of a criminal wonderfully, and yet I had no idea what he was about.

“You’ll get it when I’ve inspected the goods,” he said.

“Very well. Come to 221b Baker Street,” said Holmes. “You’ll find me there.”

We departed as quickly as we had arrived. The cab had appeared, and as soon as we were inside, Holmes gave the orders to pay a visit to Scotland Yard.

“We’ll require Lestrade’s assistance tonight, Watson,” he told me, assuming his normal, brisk manner. “There is much more going on here than I originally anticipated, though I’m still not entirely certain what it is.”

I knew better than to ask Holmes to explain his train of thought to me, but I was puzzled. How had Holmes known to visit Henry Walker, and what was it about the bird cage that made it worth twenty pounds to the man.

In a short time, Holmes had paid a short visit to Lestrade, and then, surprisingly, to a pawn shop. He emerged, carrying a large, gilt bird cage, similar in appearance to Mr. Abramov’s cage. We then returned to Baker Street.

“Everything is ready, Watson. Now we just have to sit until the fish takes the bait,” he said.

When seven o’clock came, there was a knock on the door. Holmes rose from his chair, and let Mr. Walker inside.

“Please, come in,” he said, “Would you care for some supper?”

“No,” Walker said abruptly, “Let’s get our business finished, and then I will be on my way.”

“Very well,” Holmes replied, smiling pleasantly. “Your bird cage is here, by the window.”

Walker walked quickly over to the cage. He examined it carefully, and opened the door of the cage, running his finger around the base. Without warning, he threw the cage to the ground, and said, “This isn’t it. You tried to trick me, but ”

The man reached into his coat, and started to draw a weapon, but at that moment, the doors burst open, and Lestrade and several policemen rushed in, aiming their pistols at Walker.

“What is this?” he asked, furiously raising his hands away from his belt.

“You’ve been found out, Mr. Walker,” Holmes replied. He pulled the real cage out from behind his chair, where it had been concealed, and began to run his hand around the base of it.

Lestrade watched Holmes for a moment, his thin face twisting in confusion.

“I would also like some details, Holmes,” he said. “You promised me a criminal, and convicting evidence.”

“And this is it,” said Holmes, with a triumphant laugh. He held up the cage, and showed us, with a quick tug, how a false bottom had been placed inside of the ornate cage. With the bottom panel dislodged, several official-looking papers were revealed. Henry Walker shouted, but did not dare to move with the several pistols pointed directly at him.

Holmes picked them up, and, after a moment of examination, said, “Just as I thought. Here is your evidence, Lestrade. These papers are Walker’s business documents for an illegal smuggling operation, as well as a list of confederates.”

Lestrade eagerly snatched the documents, and after looking them up and down with his sly eyes, he nodded at Holmes.

“These will be very useful,” he said. “I’ll hear the explanation for how you figured this out another time - right now I must get this man dealt with, and scoop up as many of the others on this list before they figure out what’s happened.”

With that, Lestrade departed, and the other officers with him, leaving Holmes and I to put the pieces together.

“How did you figure it out, Holmes,” I asked. “After all, it could have been anyone who wanted the cage.”

“Not anyone, Watson,” Holmes corrected, with relish, settling himself down in his chair. “It occurred to me very early on that the cage must have something concealed inside of it, that would make it worth so much to the one trying to steal it. It must be either a stashing point for stolen goods, or else something compromising for the aforesaid person. But, for this to be true, someone would have had to come into contact with the cage, and have reason to stash this compromising object inside of it. For this to be the case, the person must have believed they would acquire the cage again. Hence, the cousin, Henry Walker. He inherited his aunt’s entire estate, and he had no reason to believe she would give away her canary and its cage in her final few days. It was genius, really. No one would ever think to look in the canary cage for evidence of criminal behavior, nor would they think to check at his aunt’s house.”

“I see. So, Walker needed a place to store his documents, where they wouldn’t be found, and assumed they would be safe at his aunt’s house, until he inherited it?” I asked, feeling I was catching on at last.

“Precisely. Of course, this was only a theory, and I had to see for myself what sort of a man he was. Anyone could see from his manner that he was hiding something, since he wouldn’t even open the door entirely, let alone allow us into the house. I knew at once, just from his face, that he was a criminal. Then, there was only the matter of luring him to the house, and finding out exactly where in the cage the papers were hidden. You observed the man running his finger along the base of the cage? I realized, once I had seen this, that it must be a cleverly-disguised mechanism to open up the bottom of the cage. It was an excellent hiding place, though from his conduct, it is clear that the rest of his operation was not nearly as well thought-out.”

“So, then, Walker was the man who robbed the Abramovs?”

“No, I believe that the man who robbed them and the man who came to visit was one of Walker’s associates. Mr. Abramov had never seen Henry Walker, but Mrs. Abramov had, and Walker couldn’t risk being recognized.”

The pieces of the puzzle had finally fit together, and the whole thing was clear.

“I suppose now we must inform the Abramovs of their cousin’s arrest. They will be relieved, I suppose, to learn how the whole ordeal happened,” I said.

“Yes, that will be the course to take, but I would rather wait until this loathsome rain pauses. Until then, I should like to play the violin. I’m in the mood for something German. Would Mendelssohn be agreeable to you?”

I agreed, and settled down in my chair while Holmes pulled out his violin, and began to play.