

# The case of the locked house

## The unfinished mystery

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*After the death in 2012 of Dr. Robert Joynt, who served Neurology as CPC Section Editor (in addition to his great contributions to the field), this unfinished manuscript was found on his computer. It would have been his sixth Sherlock Holmes pastiche.*

*Intrigued by the story but deflated at the lack of an ending, the Editors have decided to publish the case and request that readers finish it. A panel of Editors will review all submissions, and the top 3 will be posted on WriteClick. Readers will vote on the winner via email to kpieper@neurology.org. The proposed winning entry will be reviewed by the Conan Doyle Estate, Ltd. Please go to the end of this article for rules of eligibility, process, and other contest terms.*

*The final case with ending will be published, and the winner will be listed as co-author with Dr. Joynt. Please keep in mind that the previous cases, which submitters are encouraged to read, all had a neurologic solution:*

*The silent witness and Charcot's hat. Neurology April 12, 2011; 76:1358-1361*

*The case of the misguided squire. Neurology July 14, 2009; 73:154-156*

*The case of the collapsing man. Neurology August 26, 2008; 71:690-693*

*The case of the colorless crystals. Neurology August 28, 2007; 69:931-935*

*The case of the reed in the breeze. Neurology June 13, 2006; 66:1782-1784*

It was a mid-August day and the stifling heat that had settled over London seemed to stop all activity. I was sitting at my desk preparing to write, and Holmes was lying languidly on a couch, lightly strumming his violin. Mrs. Hudson had opened all the windows, but there was not a trace of a breeze. All we could hear were the newsboys shouting their headlines and the clatter of horses' hooves as the carriages went by.

Many of our adventures ended on a happy note with the perpetrator in the hands of the police, the mistakenly accused freed, and the jewels or treasures recovered. This new adventure, however, was different. Neither Holmes nor I was in a joyous mood, and Holmes was particularly somber that evening.

Two weeks before, sensational headlines had reported the murder by strangulation of a young woman born to a wealthy family in a small village about 50 miles from Oxford. Details in the newspapers were scanty, but it was evident that the perpetrator was unknown, and the local constabulary had called in Scotland Yard to help them with their inquiries.

A day or so later a telegram arrived from Inspector White of Scotland Yard, requesting the help of Holmes. It was a plea that Holmes had often answered before, but as he passed me the telegram he mumbled his usual derogatory remarks about the criminal investigation system. However, I knew he would respond as he always did, and the next morning we found ourselves on a train from Paddington headed to Oxford, from whence we transferred on a branch line to Burnt Crossing. This quaint, well-kempt village contained the usual few shops, a bank, and a rustic inn with a tavern.

Holmes and I settled in to acceptable rooms at the inn and waited in the tavern for Inspector White. As good as his word, he appeared promptly at 2 o'clock. After introducing himself, he ordered a round of drinks for us and began his narrative.

"Mr. Holmes, I have been on several peculiar cases in my life but never one as mystifying as this one. As you know, the victim, Sally Wareham, was strangled in her sleep 3 nights ago. There is no clue as to how the murderer got into or left the house; neither is there any good reason that we know of that she should have been treated in such ill fashion."

The inspector went on to provide the background of the Wareham family. Squire Wareham had made a great deal of money in South Africa in the gold trade, and he and Mrs. Wareham bought the manor house some time ago. They had 2 children, George and Sally. George was older than Sally by 10 years. He went off to Sandhurst for his military training and was then sent overseas to India. Sally was sent away to school and spent very little time in the village. Two years ago, both parents died of the typhoid within 6 weeks. George resigned his commission as captain, Sally had finished her school, and they both came to live in the manor house.

"They were a kind and lively brother and sister. No one was turned off his farm while George owned the land. When one of the croppers fell upon hard times, Sally was there with baskets of food. They attended most of the parties and Sally was the last to leave the dance floor."

"She was so beautiful and fun-loving that she attracted many suitors. Three in particular became very enamored of her, and here is the worry. Richard Symonds has a large

†Deceased.

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plot of land next to the Warehams and keeps riding horses. Colby Calkins owns the ironmongery and has done very well financially. The third is Mortimer Penny, the local banker and a wonderful athlete who plays cricket for the County.”

“At one time or another, Sally had shown special affection for each of the 3. Unfortunately, they all have temperaments with a violent strain. Symonds, the horse-man, is said to beat his workers with a whip when he is angered. Calkins, the ironmonger, has been known to throw customers bodily out of the store when money was not forthcoming promptly. Penny, the banker, a pugilist of note, apparently knocked some of his opponents down when in the Pavilion after a losing a match.”

“They all hate each other and all have said or implied that if they cannot have Sally for themselves no one else can have her. Now this may be the spirits talking, as they each drink too much, but the villagers that have heard them do not regard these outbursts as drunken threats.”

“We have no evidence on any of them the night of the strangling, and all have lame excuses as to where they were.”

Holmes held up his hand. “Inspector, do you know how anyone could get into the manor house?”

“That is the problem, and one that makes this more mysterious,” replied the inspector. “George, the current squire, during his time in India lived in a cantonment outside of Mathura, where, as I understand it, thievery was common and several things were stolen. Upon his return to England, he installed double locks in the house and made the rounds each night, even after Sally came home late, to ensure that everything was secured, including the windows and doors. Two servants, who are retainers from their parents, have a small cottage about a furlong from the manor, so they do not have access to the big house at night.”

“Inspector,” said Holmes, “is there any place in the house where someone might secrete themselves before the house was secured at night?”

The Inspector said, “If there is, Mr. Holmes, I cannot find it, and I have gone over the house very thoroughly. But you know these old houses may have secret passages, and, of course, hiding places such as a priest hole, built during the dissolution of the monasteries.”

“Inspector, is there any sign of anyone being outside the house during the night?”

The Inspector sighed, “Alas, no. We had 2 days of heavy rain, which turned most of the outside ground into mud.”

“Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson, I told the squire I agreed to take tea with him at the manse; obviously, he is very distraught about Sally. I have a dogcart outside that will take us to the manor house.”

The journey took only 20 minutes until we came to a tree-lined drive. This led up to an imposing brick structure which probably dated from the time of Henry VIII, as the inspector had suggested.

The butler opened the door and was very downcast. He took us into the large drawing room and George rose in greeting. He said, “Thank you, gentlemen, for coming down to help in this dreadful situation. This has been a major blow to me, as Sally and I were very close and our lives were so very pleasant before her horrible murder.”

Holmes uttered the necessary words of condolence, and we sat down for questioning. Holmes said, “I know this is dreadfully painful for you, but please recite the circumstances of the evening so I can get an idea of the run of events.”

Wareham said, “It was rather a routine evening. Sally and I had supper and she went out for the evening to visit some friends. The 2 servants had cleared away, and I saw them out the door. Sally returned about that time as it was raining heavily and the outdoor party was postponed. She went up to her room on the second floor, and I secured the locks. As the inspector may have told you, I have a fetish about security, and I have routine which never varies.”

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Use of the Sherlock Holmes characters courtesy of Conan Doyle Estate Ltd.

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### Rules of eligibility:

Submit an ending of 1,500 words or less by November 11, 2013.

One answer per person.

No employees of AAN or its publisher (or their respective affiliates) are eligible to win.

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### To enter:

- Access the unfinished mystery at [www.neurology.org](http://www.neurology.org).
- Click “Respond Now” in the WriteClick area.
- Proposed endings will be held and reviewed by a select panel of *Neurology* Editors.
- Top 3 endings will be posted on WriteClick.
- Readers will vote for winning entry via email to [kpieper@neurology.org](mailto:kpieper@neurology.org). One vote per person.
- Conan Doyle Estate, Ltd. will review the winning entry.
- Final case with ending will be published in a print issue of *Neurology*, and the winner will be listed as co-author with Dr. Joynt

### Other contest terms:

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