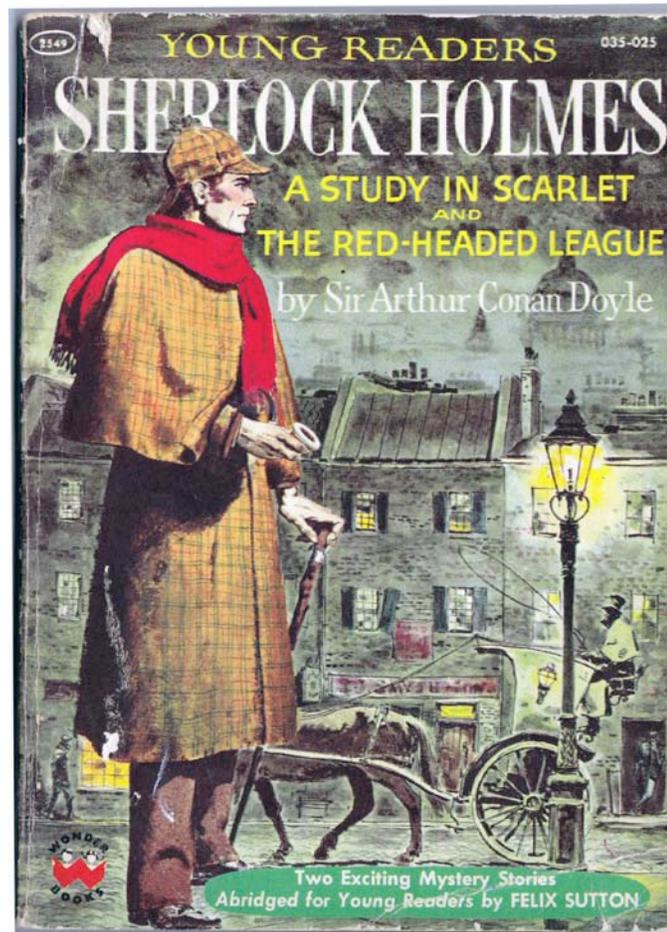


## **Sherlock Holmes According to Betty**

I've planned on writing a book called *Mysteries According to Humphrey* for a long time. For years, I was an inveterate mystery reader. I read fewer mysteries now. Maybe I just exhausted myself.

I also knew that if I were writing a book with "Mysteries" in the title, Sherlock Holmes would have to be in it. And it all started with this book.

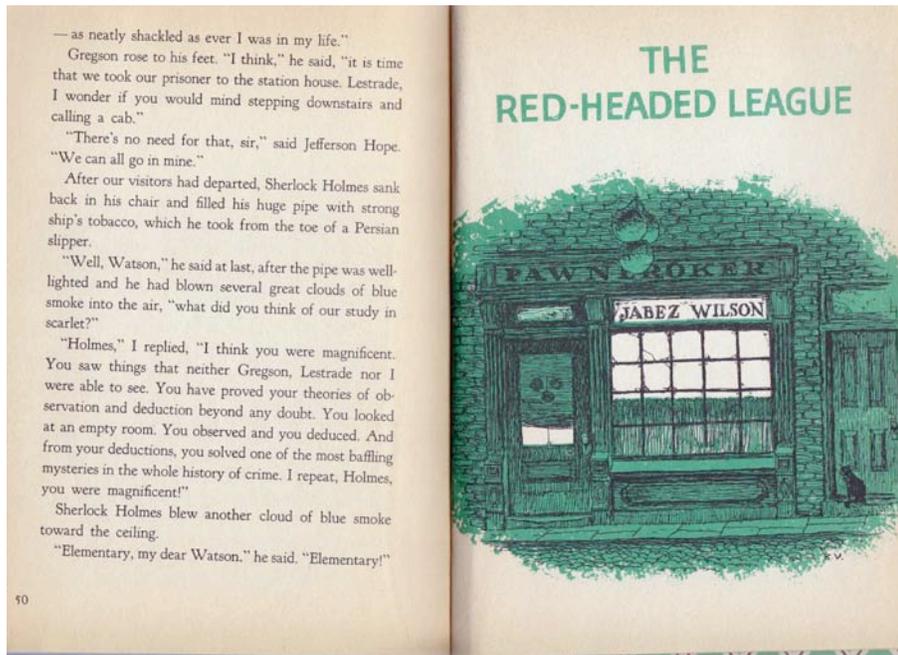


From the publication date inside, I must have been ten when I first connected with the great detective, Sherlock Holmes. I'm sure I'd already heard of him. After all, he's possibly the most recognizable character in fiction of all time. *The Guinness Book of Records* calls Sherlock Holmes the most portrayed movie character, but there have also been countless stage, television and book spin-offs

of this “consulting detective.” From the film versions starring Basil Rathbone and later, Robert Downey, to Disney’s *The Great Mouse Detective*, to the recent PBS update, Sherlock Holmes is truly immortal.

Even when his creator, Scottish author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle killed his hero off at the Reichenbach Falls (at the hands of his nemesis, Moriarity), he could not die. The fan reaction was so overpowering, Doyle had to bring Sherlock back.

When I received this little magazine-style book as a child, I was curious to know more about this man in the deerstalker hat, a hunting cap that is always associated with Holmes.



The illustrations are in a lurid shade of green (four-color printing was difficult back then – but I think black-and-white would have been better). The stories are “abridged,” which means they are simplified for younger readers.



I don't remember what I thought about *A Study in Scarlet*. That was the novel that introduced Holmes and Watson but it leaves out a very strange segment about the Mormons in Utah and the American wild west, which always seemed a bit out of place but I assume that in 1887 England, it seemed exotic.

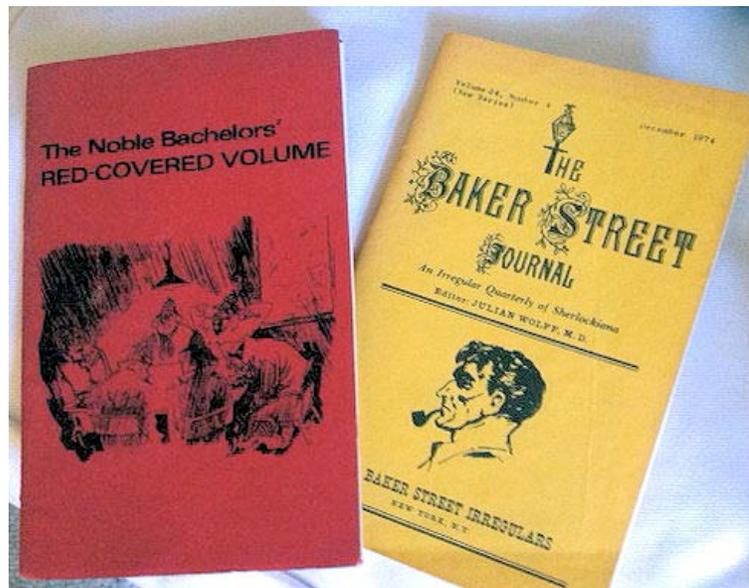
I read it with interest, but I have to say from the title to the end, it was the second story, *The Red-Headed League*, that grabbed me and got me started as a Sherlock Holmes fan.

It intrigued me so much, I've included it as part of the plot in *Mysteries According to Humphrey*. It's an odd story, a simple but ingenious solution and not a drop of blood is shed.

All in all, there are four Holmes novels, including *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and five, thick volumes of short stories. I prefer the short stories, and for younger readers, I think *The Red-Headed League* and *The Dancing Men* are the

most intriguing. *The Five Orange Pips* and *The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle* might entertain as well.

My fascination with Holmes increased in the 1970s when my sister asked me if I wanted to sign up for a class on Sherlock Holmes. I loved it and we both ended up joining the local (St. Louis) chapter of the Sherlock Holmes society. The parent group is the Baker Street Irregulars, named for the group of street urchins that Holmes uses to help him get information.



Members of the Baker Street Irregulars have included famous writers such as Rex Stout (whose Nero Wolfe novels I devoured). Homes scholar William S. Baring-Gould, Isaac Asimov and Neil Gaiman. They regular produce scholarly or mock-scholarly papers about Holmes. Our chapter was called The Noble Bachelors, named for the story, *The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor* from *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

It was a long time ago, but as I recall, the members of the Noble Bachelors were diverse and entertaining ... we met in a English pub-themed inn in a private

room called 221B Baker Street (where Holmes and Watson lived, although that address never existed) . I most recall a young woman who was blind and her dog, Jerry. Jerry was the most popular member of the Noble Bachelors. At one meeting, Basil Rathbone's niece attended. I have to say, although the Basil Rathbone/Nigel Bruce films weren't faithful to the books, and although they were set during World War II instead off the era they were written in, I am partial to Basil Rathbone. I also have a large collection of radio shows with various Sherlocks. I prefer Rathbone, though he made quite a few flubs on-air!

However, Jeremy Brett was supreme in the PBS series, produced from 1984-1994. Unfortunately he died before they could film an adaptation of every single Holmes story.

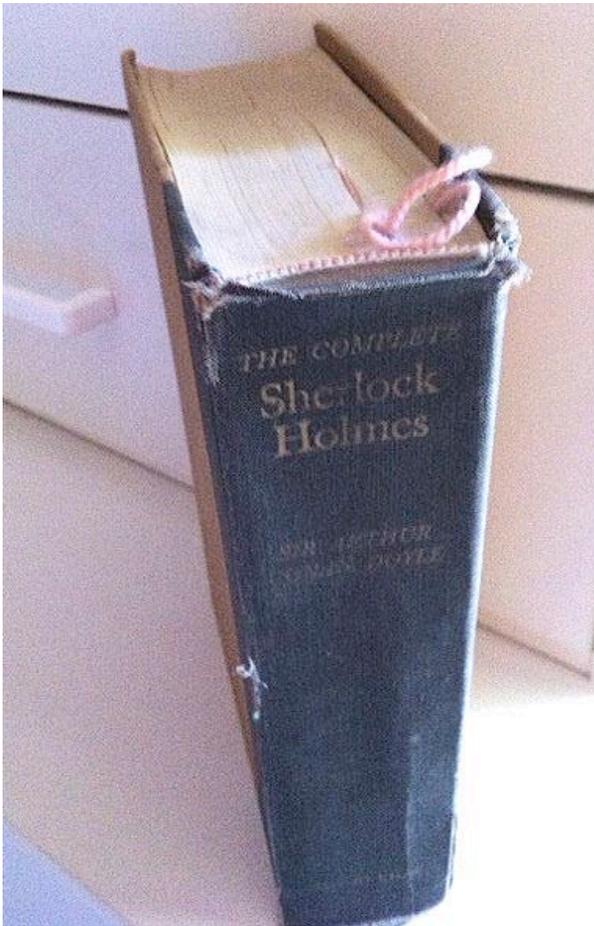


*Jeremy Brett as Holmes*

I didn't exactly love the Robert Downey steam punk version – a bit overwrought for my tastes. I liked the most recent television version with Benedict Cumberbatch (maybe I just like his name). These are updated to the present. *A Study in Scarlet* became *A Study in Pink*. I liked them, but I'm a pretty classic Sherlock kind of fan.

However you like your Holmes, may I recommend him?

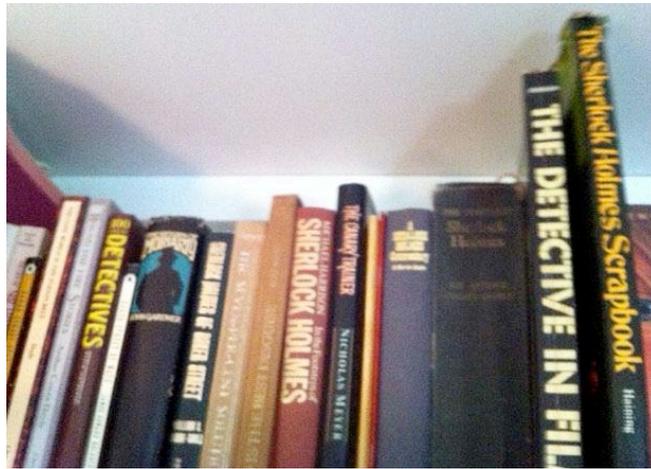
Over the years, people have asked me what to give readers who are highly advanced 12 or 13-year old readers, but not ready for "adult books" and I've recommended Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie. Cracking good stories, not bloody or violent. Now, I guess they read *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games*. Still, the pastime of curling up with Holmes and Watson isn't about to go away.



*My well-worn copy of "the canon"*

I've gathered quite a collection of books about Sherlock Holmes and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and I have read "the canon" (as insiders call the entire

collection of Sherlock Holmes books and stories) a number of times ... but not for awhile.



As *Mysteries According to Humphrey* went into production, I wasn't surprised that Putnam's, my U.S. publisher, which is part of the Penguin Group, and my U.K. publisher, Faber & Faber, both put Humphrey in a deerstalker hat for the cover of their respective offerings.

It's only fitting and proper.

*The Red-Headed League* is still one of my favorite stories. You'll have to read to the end of Humphrey's *Mysteries* to see how a hamster connects with that tale in a very personal way!