

# The People v. Dr. Grimesby Roylott



A lesson plan to use in conjunction with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of the Speckled Band"

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The People  
v.  
Dr. Grimesby Roylott

A Mock Trial to use in conjunction with Arthur Conan Doyle's

"The Adventure of the Speckled Band"

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## CASE SUMMARY

Dr. Grimesby Roylott is an eccentric man, subject to violent outbursts. Until two years ago, he resided in his dilapidated ancestral home with two stepdaughters, Julia and Helen Stoner, whom he had raised since they were two years of age. The income left to the three of them by his late wife, the girls' mother, was the family's sole source of financial support. As directed by their mother's will, each of the daughters would be entitled to a designated portion of the inheritance upon her marriage, amounting to a third apiece of the family's total annual income.

Two years ago, shortly before Julia was scheduled to be married, she reported several strange occurrences in the house to her sister and then died under suspicious circumstances. When Helen became engaged, her stepfather scheduled repairs to be made to the house that forced Helen to move into her dead sister's room. As soon as she moved in, strange incidents began to occur, similar to the odd occurrences her sister had described, and Helen began to suspect that Dr. Roylott intended her demise. She sought aid from a private investigator, Sherlock Holmes. When the detective and his assistant spent the night in Helen Stoner's bedroom to initiate their investigation, a series of events took place that indicated that Dr. Roylott intended to kill his stepdaughter. The Prosecutor is now seeking to bring charges against Dr. Grimesby Roylott for the attempted murder of Helen Stoner.

## MAIN CHARACTERS

Sherlock Holmes

Dr. Watson

Dr. Grimesby Roylott

Helen Stoner

Dr. Phinius McQuincy , Coroner\*

Housekeeper\*

\*These characters are only mentioned in the story but are elaborated for the purposes of the trial.

## **THE ISSUE**

This case is set for trial in the Surrey County Court of Common Pleas. The prosecution must show beyond a reasonable doubt that Dr. Grimesby Roylott is guilty of the charge of attempted murder or aggravated murder for attempting to kill his stepdaughter, Helen Stoner.

## **DEFINITION OF THE CRIMES**

### **MURDER AND AGGRAVATED MURDER (See O.R.C. 2903)**

1. Aggravated murder means that a person is guilty of aggravated murder if, “by prior design and calculation” they cause the death of another.
2. Murder means that a person is guilty of murder if they, “purposely cause the death” of another person.

### **ATTEMPT (See O.R.C. 2923.02)**

3. Attempt means that a person is guilty of an attempt if they “purposely or knowingly, and when purpose or knowledge is sufficient culpability for the commission of an offense,” engage in conduct that, if successful, would constitute or result in the offense.
4. It is no defense to a charge of attempt that “in retrospect, the offense that was the object of the attempt was either factually or legally impossible under the attendant circumstances, if that offense could have been committed had the attendant circumstances been as the actor believed them to be.”
5. Whoever violates this section is guilty of an attempt to commit an offense. An attempt to commit aggravated murder, murder, or an offense for which the maximum penalty is imprisonment for life is a felony of the first degree.

## LEGAL ARGUMENTS

### *THE PROSECUTION*

- I. The prosecution will argue that there is sufficient evidence to convict the defendant, Dr. Grimesby Roylott for the crime of attempted murder.

The prosecution will establish that the aforementioned defendant deliberately planned and attempted to enact the murder of his stepdaughter, Helen Stoner, in April of 1883. Mr. Roylott worked to commit this murder by constructing an elaborate contraption that allowed him to insert a deadly, venomous snake into the bedroom of his intended victim. The prosecution will establish the guilt of the defendant through several pieces of evidence. The first piece of evidence is the testimony of Mr. Sherlock Holmes, an eyewitness who asserts in a sworn statement that he observed as Mr. Roylott attempted to execute the murder in question. The second piece of evidence is the testimony of Ms. Stoner herself whose statement reveals that the defendant stood to reap significant financial benefits in the event of his stepdaughter's death. Finally, the prosecution will show that the defendant's attempt to murder Ms. Stoner is part of a pattern of violence that includes Mr. Roylott's murder conviction for the slaying of his butler in India and his involvement in a number of brawls that have been documented by local constables. Ms. Stoner will further testify that she believed her own life was in danger, for she believed that her stepfather was instrumental in killing her sister Julia Stoner.

### *THE DEFENSE*

- II. The defense will show that the prosecution does not have sufficient evidence to prove that the defendant, Grimesby Roylott is guilty of attempted murder.

The defense will show that the prosecution has failed to meet their burden of proof in this case. Central to the defense's case is the testimony of Dr. Roylott who claims in his statement that he never planned to use his snake as a weapon to attack Ms. Stoner. Moreover, he asserts in his statement that he constructed no mechanism to allow the snake to enter into Ms. Stoner's bedroom. The case for the defense will also draw upon the expert testimony of the coroner, Dr. Phinius McQuincy, whose examination of Julia Stoner's body shows that there was no evidence that she was bitten by a venomous snake, and thus the defendant cannot be implicated in her death. Therefore, the defense argues that the pattern of violence that the prosecution seeks to establish is based on unsubstantiated speculation.

## THE FACTS

Helen Stoner, age 30, visited detective Sherlock Holmes and his assistant, Dr. Watson, in London early in April, 1883. The purpose of her visit was to report her fears concerning the recent death of her twin sister, Julia, who had passed away two years prior to her interview with Sherlock Holmes. At the time, Julia and Helen were residing with their stepfather, Dr. Grimesby Roylott, in Stoke Moran, on the western border of Surrey. Ms. Stoner's mother had married Dr. Roylott in India after the death of her husband, Major-General Stoner, of the Bengal Artillery. At the time of their mother's remarriage, the twin daughters were two years old. Mrs. Stoner had had an income of over one thousand pounds a year. She assigned that sum to Dr. Roylott during their marriage, with a provision that a certain annual sum should be allowed to each of the daughters upon their marriage. Mr. Holmes later researched the terms of the will and determined that the income had dropped to about 750 pounds, and that each daughter would get 250 pounds annually when she married.

During his time in India, Dr. Roylott established a large medical practice in Calcutta. At some point, however, he was imprisoned for a long term. In a fit of anger, he had beaten a native butler to death following some robberies in the home.

Upon his release, after approximately twenty years in India, the family returned to London, where Dr. Roylott attempted to set up a practice in London. Mrs. Stoner Roylott was killed in a railway accident soon after their return to England. After her death, Dr. Roylott took his stepdaughters to live in his ancestral home in Stoke Moran. The house was two hundred years old and in great disrepair. The Grimesby family had been among the richest in England, but a succession of dissolute heirs had wiped out the family fortune. Only the house, with a burdensome mortgage, and several acres of ground remained at the time of these events. A housekeeper was the only staff.

Ms. Helen Stoner reported to Mr. Holmes that Dr. Roylott's behavior, once they had moved to Stoke Moran, included ferocious quarrels with villagers, including one incident that ended up in the local police court. She stated that the week prior to her meeting with Mr. Holmes, Dr. Roylott had hurled the local blacksmith into a stream, and that she had had to gather up all available monies and pay to keep the matter private. Dr. Roylott, however, had befriended a band of wandering gypsies, whom he allowed to encamp on his property, whom he visited when they were encamped, and with whom he often wandered away for weeks at a time.

The twin sisters had little social life; Helen stated that this was due to her stepfather's behavior. However, they did have a maiden aunt, Miss Honoria Westphail, near Harrow, who entertained them from time to time. On one such occasion, Julia met a half-pay major in the marines, to whom she then became engaged. According to Helen, Dr. Roylott voiced no objection to the marriage.

Two weeks before the wedding, Julia died under mysterious circumstances. According to Helen, her sister visited her room prior to her death. Julia said she visited because she was bothered by the smell of cigar smoke from Dr. Roylott's room. The three residents had rooms in a row on the ground floor of the home, with Julia's in the middle. They all had doors opening onto a shared corridor and windows which opened onto the lawn. No doors joined any of the three rooms to one another, although a small ventilation duct high on the wall joined Julia's chambers with that of Dr. Roylott.

Helen stated that her sister asked her that evening if she had ever heard odd whistles at night. Helen had not. She suggested to Julia that it was the gypsies on the lawn. The sisters locked themselves in that night, as they did every night, because Dr. Roylott kept a cheetah and a baboon, brought back with him from his years in India. During a storm that night, Helen heard terrified screams. She opened her door, and thought she heard a low whistle. She described hearing a "clanging sound, as if a mass of metal had fallen." She ran to her sister's door, and found it unlocked. Julia emerged from the room and fell immediately to the floor. Helen stated that Julia shrieked, "Oh my God! Helen! It was the band! The speckled band!" Julia then "stabbed with her finger into the air in the direction of the doctor's room," but then convulsed again. Helen ran calling for her stepfather, who "hastened from his room in his dressing gown." Julia was unconscious. He gave her brandy and called for medical help from the village, but Julia died without gaining consciousness.

The village coroner investigated the odd circumstances of Julia's death. The evidence showed that the door had been locked from inside, and that the windows were blocked by locked shutters with broad iron bars. The walls and floors were found to be solid. The chimney was wide, but had been barred up by four large staples. It was determined that no one else could have been with Julia. No poison was found in her body, and no marks were on her body. Gypsies were present on the property at the time, but no evidence was drawn to them. It was believed that Julia had died of pure fear and shock.

At the time of her visit to Sherlock Holmes, Helen herself had become engaged to Percy Armitage of Crane Water. She planned to be married in the spring. She became concerned because repairs being done to her bedroom necessitated her moving into Julia's old room two days prior to her visit. She had heard the odd low whistle of which her sister had spoken. She lighted a lamp, but had seen nothing.

After her visit, Dr. Roylott visited Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson. They described him as a large, wrinkled, suntanned man who was dressed in a combination of professional and agricultural clothing. He asked what Helen had said to them. He warned them not to meddle in his affairs.

Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson traveled that afternoon to Stoke Moran. They toured the home while Dr. Roylott was still in London. The left wing had boarded-up windows, and the roof was partly caved in. The right wing, where the residents lived, was in better repair and had scaffolding erected against the end wall. The stonework had been broken into, but no workmen were present. Julia's old room contained a chest of drawers, a fireplace, two small chairs, a worn carpet, and a narrow bed, which was nailed to the floor. A bell



rope hung beside the bed. It appeared newer than the rest of the furnishings. Holmes determined that it was a dummy. Dr. Roylott's room contained a camp bed, a bookshelf, an armchair, a wooden chair, and a safe. They also noted a small saucer of milk, and a small dog leash.

Holmes and Watson took a room at a nearby inn. They arranged for Helen to signal them with a light when Dr. Roylott had gone to bed. When they crossed the fields from the inn to the house at her signal, they encountered the baboon. They then spent the night in Julia's old room, without Dr. Roylott's knowledge. They did not sleep, and used no lights. At some time after 3:00 a.m., they saw a brief light through the ventilator, and smelled the odor of a lantern being lighted. They heard a sound like steam escaping from a kettle. A swamp adder then slithered down the bell pull. Holmes beat it, so it returned up the bell pull and back through the ventilator. It wrapped itself around Dr. Roylott's head and bit him. Holmes and Watson, running into his room observed Dr. Roylott immediately giving himself a shot of anti-venom, so he survived what would otherwise have been a deadly bite.

## WITNESS STATEMENTS

### *Sherlock Holmes*

In April of 1883, one Helen Stoner of Stoke Moran solicited the services of myself and my associate, Dr. Watson. Watson and I are investigators who hire out our services to private clients. Ms. Stoner came to us because she was concerned about the suspicious circumstances of her sister Julia's death, and she feared that the same fate might be her own. As she expressed it to Watson and myself, Julia Stoner died mysteriously one night two years ago at their residence in Stoke Moran. On that night, Julia went to her sister's room and asked whether she had heard a high whistling noise followed by a metallic clang. Later that night, Ms. Stoner heard Julia scream.

As Ms. Stoner opened the door she heard the very whistle and clang that her sister described. When Helen Stoner ran into the corridor to investigate, she found her sister prostrate and writhing in pain. Julia soon expired from causes that the local coroner was unable to identify. Upon her death, Julia Stoner uttered the mysterious phrase, "It was the Speckled Band."

Helen Stoner hired me and Watson to investigate because she believed that she was about to meet the same fate as her dead sister. Due to repairs being made to her own bedroom, Ms. Stoner was forced to sleep in the bedroom that once belonged to her dead sister. While she resided in the room, Ms. Stoner heard the same whistling sound that she had heard on the night of her sister's mysterious death. It was soon after this that Ms. Stoner asked that my colleague Watson and I investigate this ominous coincidence.

Watson and I went to Stoke Moran where Ms. Stoner lived with her stepfather, Grimesby Roylott, and a single house servant. We decided that the best way to discover the origin of the strange sounds that Ms. Stoner reported was for Watson and I to sleep in the room where she heard the noises. Upon investigating this room, I observed that there were several curious things about its structure. There was a bell-rope that was not connected to any bell. In addition, there was a ventilator that did not ventilate. Finally, the bed was clamped to the floor so that it could not be moved. The reason for these structural oddities would become all too clear as the night progressed.

Later that night I heard a hissing sound. I went to the ventilator, and there I discovered a large snake. I struck the snake with my cane, and it quickly retreated back into the ventilator. It was soon after this that I heard a man cry out. Watson and I ran to the room of Grimesby Roylott, and there we discovered him with a large swamp adder wrapped around his head. Because of the pattern on the snake's skin, it looked just like a speckled band. It was then that I understood that this same snake must have bitten Julia Stoner, for her dying words were in reference to the speckled band.

Undoubtedly, this was the same snake that I had struck moments ago in the ventilator. When I struck it with my cane it went back in the direction it came from only to bite Roylott. Roylott had a dog-whip in his lap, which I withdrew. I threw the noose round the

reptile's neck and drew it from its horrid perch. Carrying the creature at arm's length, I threw it into the iron safe and then closed the door. I noted that in Roylott's room there was a chair placed near an opening that led to the ventilator. The chair appeared to have been used for the express purpose of allowing Roylott to reach the ventilator. I concluded that Roylott used the ventilator in order to enable the snake's attack on the occupant in Julia Stoner's room. Indeed, the bed itself was fixed in place so that the snake would have easy access to the victim.

## Dr. Watson

My name is Watson, Dr. John H. Watson. I am an Englishman in the company of Mr. Holmes. Our livelihood is in solving mysteries, and in that I am the chief aide to Mr. Holmes. I also am known as his chief chronicler of the tales he unravels. I am used to noticing things on my own but particularly writing down the things that Mr. Holmes sees and does.

I came by the title "Dr." honestly, earning my medical degree from the University of London. I do not currently practice medicine other than to use my knowledge in assisting Mr. Holmes. I spent time in the Royal Engineers (part of the army) with postings all over the Empire. While I have many areas of expertise, my greatest area of accomplishment is in writing about Mr. Holmes' adventures.

In that regard I came to accompany Mr. Holmes on his journey to Stoke Moran to visit Ms. Helen Stoner. Ms. Stoner suspected treachery was involved in the death of her sister Julia and believed that she might be in danger as well. Holmes and I visited the mansion, or what was left of it, and it was easy to see, as far as Holmes was concerned, that all was not well in the House of Roylott. We viewed the room in which Ms. Julia Stoner had met her demise, and a more curious room you could not find. A bed fixed to the floor, a ventilator with no link, and a bell-rope that attached to nothing. Of course it was Holmes that had pointed out the peculiarities of the bell-rope and ventilator, but I noticed the bed myself.

While Holmes was inspecting the rooms I wandered down to the riverbank to see if I could interview the gypsies who were encamped there. I was cautious, as we had been informed that wild animals from India roamed the grounds. I did not want to encounter any of them. Finding no one, I returned to the house, and Holmes explained the plan for the evening to me. Holmes indicated that we were to occupy Ms. Stoner's room in her place that evening and see if we could crack the case.

After an agreed upon signal, Holmes and I climbed into Ms. Stoner's room to await the appearance of the killer. After what seemed like hours in the darkness, we heard a whistle and noticed a light by the ventilator. When he saw this occur, Holmes threw himself upon the bed and began shouting and swinging his cane. We lit a light but saw nothing, then we rushed out of the room. As we stood in the hallway we heard this awful noise coming from Dr. Roylott's room. We ran into the room, Holmes leading the way. Holmes began to wave his cane and chased something back into a vault that was in the room. As Holmes closed the door on the vault, I noticed Dr. Roylott injecting himself with what I later found out to be anti-venom. I had seen such medicines used in my postings in Canada and was familiar with the symptoms of snakebite. I observed Dr. Roylott breathing heavily and cursing Holmes, the snake and anyone within earshot. After a few moments his breathing seemed to become normal. I examined him and sent for a lorry to take him to the hospital. I thought it was curious that Roylott had anti-venom, as that is not something you normally keep around the house. I was also unaware of the deductions that Mr. Holmes had already made regarding the identity of Ms. Stoner's killer.

Mr. Holmes told me that Roylott was responsible for Julia Stoner's death and that very night Roylott had attempted to commit a second murder. Holmes said the snake we had chased was the same one that had killed Julia Stoner and that it had been trained by Dr. Roylott to come down into the room, encircle the intended victim's head and bite her. The whistle was actually the teapot to which the snake had been trained to return. Roylott was apparently ready to use this unusual weapon against Helen Stoner until we intervened. When Holmes scared the snake back into the ventilator opening, it must have attacked the first thing it saw, Dr. Roylott. On the one hand, he was fortunate in that he had the anti-venom close by and avoided death. But on the other hand, he could not cheat Mr. Holmes' powers of deduction. I gave my statement to the police, and that is why I am here today.

## Grimesby Roylott

I neither planned nor attempted to murder my stepdaughter Helen Stoner. Certainly, it has been a difficult time in our household since my wife passed away. And certainly the death of my stepdaughter Julia has only served to compound that difficulty. While I can understand that Helen is deeply troubled by the death of her sister, I have never treated either of my stepdaughters with cruelty. Indeed, in keeping with the promise that I made to my wife, I have sought diligently to make sure that the needs of my stepdaughters be met. While financial difficulties have sometimes prevented me from providing the girls with the standard of living that I would like, I have always been concerned primarily with their welfare. I know that I can be a difficult man to live with, but these accusations are an utter outrage.

On the night in question I was relaxing quietly in my room, smoking an Indian cigar and reading, as is my custom. I arose to get a glass of water. When suddenly I was bitten by the snake that I typically keep encased in a safe. I screamed from the searing pain. I then rushed to the dresser and grabbed the dose of antidote for the snake's lethal venom. Fortunately, I was able to inject the antidote into my arm before the venom could do me harm. I suspect that I must have been careless in closing the door of the safe, and the snake must have escaped in this way.

My accusers are grossly mistaken in their claim that my rare snake was used for sinister purposes. I have been a collector of exotic creatures since my days practicing medicine in India. I also own a cheetah and a baboon that I imported from India. These are precious pets that I keep as one of the few pleasures left to me. It is preposterous that I would train my snake to attack my stepdaughters or anyone else for that matter. If I could control the beast, I would have prevented my own painful, near death encounter with his fangs. Instead I could only rush to save myself with a dose of antidote. Had I the capacity to command the beast, I would not have needed to keep such antidotes on hand.

Some of the suspicion that has been directed toward me stems from the unusual modifications that I made to the bedroom that once belonged to Julia and which has been occupied by Helen since Julia's death. It is unfortunate that changes made to improve the lives of my stepdaughters have been interpreted as malicious gestures. Two years ago I contracted with a carpenter to have a ventilator and a bell-rope installed in the room. My intention was to add amenities that would make the room more pleasant for Julia.

The ventilator was to improve the circulation in an old manse that often makes its ripe age known through the scents that it omits. Given that Julia was a young defenseless woman, I thought that the ventilator would improve the circulation without endangering her, as would an open window.

During the same period I also asked this carpenter to install a bell-rope that would allow Julia to summon the servants more readily. The nailing down of the bed resulted from a confrontation with that imbecile of a carpenter I'd hired to do the work. He couldn't just follow directions and trust my logic! Every instruction was subject to question! Maybe I got carried away, but I wanted to make my point. I wanted to emphasize how committed I was

to having that room organized the way I wanted it, so our disagreement ended with me nailing the bed in place. In the end it didn't matter. Unfortunately, I encountered financial difficulties in the midst of these renovations, and as a consequence the construction was not completed. For this reason the bell-rope and the ventilator do not function as they should.

I recognize that I have not always conducted myself with the appropriate reserve in the past. This has brought great grief to my family and myself. But I have tried to move beyond the tempests of youth. Moving back to London away from the hot winds that flamed my passions as a younger man was my way of creating a calmer existence for myself and my stepdaughters. I should not be made to suffer for the indiscretions of the past.

## Helen Stoner

No one can imagine what I have been through in the years since my dear mother died. My stepfather had behaved oddly before; after all, he was imprisoned while we lived in India. He had flown into a fit of rage at a poor helpless native boy and attacked him, you know. We all hoped that returning to England and Stoke Moran would somehow change him. But we had constant pressures concerning money. There was so much to do to the house. Poor Julia. She thought she had escaped when she finally found someone to marry. She was worried about leaving me behind with the doctor, though. Our most peaceful times were when he would disappear with his Gypsy friends - and what a lot that was. We never knew when he would return, but we were grateful to have just ourselves for a bit. It was a respite.

In fact, now that I think about it, her worried looks and her paleness - why, I thought at the time that they were because she felt torn between seeking her own happiness and deserting me. Now I wonder if she sensed that the doctor had some kind of plot to kill her. Perhaps. We never thought to wonder why the bell rope didn't work, or why there was a ventilator in her room. The whole estate was crumbling around us and we didn't notice these details. The whole house was odd, you see.

It all goes back to the money. We had barely enough, Julia and I, to keep the house running - with the housekeeper, the upkeep, and so on. I believe my Mum's will stated that when we married, we continued to have our income. After all, we had to have something for a dowry - heaven knows we had little else to make ourselves marriageable.

When Julia died, I was desolate. Until I met my fiancé at my aunt's home, I had nothing to live for. The loneliness was unbearable. Then the odd things started - that low whistle, more of those Gypsies lurking about. I would have thought I had lost my mind, were it not for Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson. When they came to our home, and thwarted the attempt to - no, I can't bear to speak of it. To think I could have ended up as did Julia - choking, grasping my throat, trying to breathe - no, I can't bear this any longer. My stepfather has killed before. He killed my sister. He tried to kill me. All I want is to flee this house and find safety. I don't know if I can even testify against him. This is unbearable.



*Dr. Phinius McQuincy, CORONER*

In my many years of practice in these parts, I have seen many kinds of odd ways to die, as you may imagine. We've had farming accidents, and ladies thrown from their horses, and hunting accidents. But the case of Julia Stoner was one that I could never let go of. There were no marks on her, you see. None. I looked. I suspected from the start some kind of foul play - it was clear to me that she hadn't been thrown from a horse or crushed by a thresher! But every test I ran, and every examination I performed, turned up nothing. When the sister told me about the young missus saying "the speckled band," I thought perhaps she had been choked by some kind of scarf or tie. But her appearance was not consistent with that suspicion.

I interviewed the family after the first incident. Helen Stoner reported hearing a whistle and a metallic sound, but she could not swear that this was more than an impression. Julia's room appeared completely secure - the door locked from the inside and Helen testified that she witnessed her sister locking the door. Shutters and bars blocked the windows, the walls and floors were solid, and the chimney was barred. I was certain, and the family agreed, that Julia must have been alone and no one else could have accessed the room. Furthermore, there was no evidence on her body that another person had inflicted violence upon her.

In the end I had to rule that the cause of her death was unknown. Late at night I still wondered. After all, her stepfather was by her side immediately, and he was a doctor. If something could have been done, he would have done it. He may be odd, but he is a physician. We all do follow our Hippocratic oath. One cannot help but be suspicious, but while Dr. Roylott is notoriously bad tempered, I have never heard anyone question his professional conduct or integrity as a physician. Furthermore, when I appeared on the scene, he appeared disheveled and distraught, as any parent would be.

I cannot say whether Dr. Roylott owned a swamp adder at the time of Julia Stoner's death. I had no evidence to implicate the Stoner-Roylott family, so I did not search beyond Julia Stoner's room. I was not looking for a weapon because it didn't appear that one had been used. I still believe foul play may have been involved in the death of Julia Stoner, but I am not convinced that Dr. Roylott intentionally sought to murder either of his stepdaughters. A saucer of milk, a whistle, and a dog-whip - these are his training tools? Clearly, he barely knew how to control such a dangerous creature himself. Surely, someone clever and calculating enough to plan such an elaborate scheme over the course of at least two years wouldn't be foolish enough to select such an unreliable and unmanageable weapon to execute his plan. And surely he wouldn't attempt to commit the crime on the very night that he learned that his daughter and her private investigators suspected him.

## Housekeeper

None of the service people in town regarded Stoke Moran as choice employment. But in spite of all that I heard before coming to work for the Stoner-Roylotts, I managed fine in the household and had every intention of staying.

The master has a reputation for being a hotheaded brute, despite being a doctor. Before I came to work for the family, I'd seen him in town from time to time, screaming at his driver and carrying on. From what I've heard, that kind of humiliation was nothing; he'd supposedly killed one of his servants overseas. On top of all that, people said he kept the house - what used to be one of the most respectable estates in the county - like a jungle! Wild animals running about and wild people camped out on the grounds. Not all of it is untrue, but, as I said, I got along all right. I do my work and keep to myself, so I've never been subjected to his outbursts.

In addition to the doctor's idiosyncrasies, it was known that the family just generally didn't get along. Roylott raised his stepdaughters for most of their lives, but they weren't close. He isn't exactly the nurturing type. While they generally just went their separate ways, he could be rather rough with them. From what I could see, the girls both feared him and held him in contempt. I think they resented his dependence on an inheritance provided by *their* relations and his control over it. He used money from *their* mother to overcome his own relations' ill management and crumbling property. He no longer practiced medicine or provided for his own support, but used their shared income to support bands of gypsies, who he invited to reside on the estate, and indulged himself with exotic pets shipped from overseas. Meanwhile, the income couldn't support a full house staff, so his own stepdaughters - ladies, mind you - were reduced to doing the work of servants! I'll bet those girls probably wouldn't have minded seeing him dead as much as he supposedly wanted them out of the picture!

And of course when Miss Julia died, that was the final straw. Miss Helen looked as though she doubled in age. There was talk that foul play was involved. I'm sure Miss Helen thought so too, but I don't believe it. I was there both nights. When I closed up the house and turned in for the night, I saw Dr. Roylott, sitting in his own room reading, as was his nightly custom. He looked no different than any other night. The coroner hasn't proved anything unnatural happened to that girl. At best, maybe one of those so-called pets did get away and get to her. But I don't think it was Dr. Roylott's scheme. Not that I think he's a saint or anything like that. He just isn't a subtle man. If he didn't want those girls married or was upset by the prospect, he wouldn't - couldn't - have kept quiet. He would have just ranted and raved and maybe attacked one of the young men. He had no trouble denying those girls other things.

Careless? Yes. I certainly keep my doors locked in a house where wild creatures have free reign. Inconsiderate? Yes. Self-centered and only thinking of his own pleasure rather than the threat dangerous pets present to the household - or a band of gypsies, for that matter? Most certainly. But such a calculating murderer? That I just can't see.

## The Adventure of the Speckled Band

By Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

On glancing over my notes of the seventy odd cases in which I have during the last eight years studied the methods of my friend Sherlock Holmes, I find many tragic, some comic, a large number merely strange, but none commonplace; for, working as he did rather for the love of his art than for the acquirement of wealth, he refused to associate himself with any investigation which did not tend towards the unusual, and even the fantastic. Of all these varied cases, however, I cannot recall any which presented more singular features than that which was associated with the well-known Surrey family of the Roylotts of Stoke Moran. The events in question occurred in the early days of my association with Holmes, when we were sharing rooms as bachelors in Baker Street. It is possible that I might have placed them upon record before, but a promise of secrecy was made at the time, from which I have only been freed during the last month by the untimely death of the lady to whom the pledge was given. It is perhaps as well that the facts should now come to light, for I have reasons to know that there are widespread rumours as to the death of Dr. Grimesby Roylott which tend to make the matter even more terrible than the truth.

It was early in April in the year '83 that I woke one morning to find Sherlock Holmes standing, fully dressed, by the side of my bed. He was a late riser, as a rule, and as the clock on the mantelpiece showed me that it was only a quarter-past seven, I blinked up at him in some surprise, and perhaps just a little resentment, for I was myself regular in my habits.

“Very sorry to knock you up, Watson,” said he, “but it’s the common lot this morning. Mrs. Hudson has been knocked up, she retorted upon me, and I on you.”

“What is it, then—a fire?”

“No; a client. It seems that a young lady has arrived in a considerable state of excitement, who insists upon seeing me. She is waiting now in the sitting-room. Now, when young ladies wander about the metropolis at this hour of the morning, and knock sleepy people up out of their beds, I presume that it is something very pressing which they have to communicate. Should it prove to be an interesting case, you would, I am sure, wish to follow it from the outset. I thought, at any rate, that I should call you and give you the chance.”

“My dear fellow, I would not miss it for anything.”

I had no keener pleasure than in following Holmes in his professional investigations, and in admiring the rapid deductions, as swift as intuitions, and yet always founded on a logical basis with which he unravelled the problems which were submitted to him. I rapidly threw on my clothes and was ready in a few minutes to accompany my friend down to the sitting-room. A lady dressed in black and heavily veiled, who had been sitting in the window, rose as we entered.

“Good-morning, madam,” said Holmes cheerily. “My name is Sherlock Holmes. This is my intimate friend and associate, Dr. Watson, before whom you can speak as freely as before myself. Ha! I am glad to see that Mrs. Hudson has had the good sense to light the fire. Pray draw up to it, and I shall order you a cup of hot coffee, for I observe that you are shivering.”

“It is not cold which makes me shiver,” said the woman in a low voice, changing her seat as requested.

“What, then?”

“It is fear, Mr. Holmes. It is terror.” She raised her veil as she spoke, and we could see that she was indeed in a pitiable state of agitation, her face all drawn and grey, with restless frightened eyes, like those of some hunted animal. Her features and figure were those of a woman of thirty, but her hair was shot with premature grey, and her expression was weary and haggard. Sherlock Holmes ran her over with one of his quick, all-comprehensive glances.

“You must not fear,” said he soothingly, bending forward and patting her forearm. “We shall soon set matters right, I have no doubt. You have come in by train this morning, I see.”

“You know me, then?”

“No, but I observe the second half of a return ticket in the palm of your left glove. You must have started early, and yet you had a good drive in a dog-cart, along heavy roads, before you reached the station.”

The lady gave a violent start and stared in bewilderment at my companion.

“There is no mystery, my dear madam,” said he, smiling. “The left arm of your jacket is spattered with mud in no less than seven places. The marks are perfectly fresh. There is no vehicle save a dog-cart which throws up mud in that way, and then only when you sit on the left-hand side of the driver.”

“Whatever your reasons may be, you are perfectly correct,” said she. “I started from home before six, reached Leatherhead at twenty past, and came in by the first train to Waterloo. Sir, I can stand this strain no longer; I shall go mad if it continues. I have no one to turn to—none, save only one, who cares for me, and he, poor fellow, can be of little aid. I have heard of you, Mr. Holmes; I have heard of you from Mrs. Farintosh, whom you helped in the hour of her sore need. It was from her that I had your address. Oh, sir, do you not think that you could help me, too, and at least throw a little light through the dense darkness which surrounds me? At present it is out of my power to reward you for your services, but in a month or six weeks I shall be married, with the control of my own income, and then at least you shall not find me ungrateful.”

Holmes turned to his desk and, unlocking it, drew out a small case-book, which he consulted.

“Farintosh,” said he. “Ah yes, I recall the case; it was concerned with an opal tiara. I think it was before your time, Watson. I can only say, madam, that I shall be happy to devote the same care to your case as I did to that of your friend. As to reward, my profession is its own reward; but you are at liberty to defray whatever expenses I may be put to, at the time which suits you best. And now I beg that you will lay before us everything that may help us in forming an opinion upon the matter.”

“Alas!” replied our visitor, “the very horror of my situation lies in the fact that my fears are so vague, and my suspicions depend so entirely upon small points, which might seem trivial to another, that even he to whom of all others I have a right to look for help and advice looks upon all that I tell him about it as the fancies of a nervous woman. He does not say so, but I can read it from his soothing answers and averted eyes. But I have heard, Mr. Holmes, that you can see deeply into the manifold wickedness of the human heart. You may advise me how to walk amid the dangers which encompass me.”

“I am all attention, madam.”

“My name is Helen Stoner, and I am living with my stepfather, who is the last survivor of one of the oldest Saxon families in England, the Royslotts of Stoke Moran, on the western border of Surrey.”

Holmes nodded his head. “The name is familiar to me,” said he.

“The family was at one time among the richest in England, and the estates extended over the borders into Berkshire in the north, and Hampshire in the west. In the last century, however, four successive heirs were of a dissolute and wasteful disposition, and the family ruin was eventually completed by a gambler in the days of the Regency. Nothing was left save a few acres of ground, and the two-hundred-year-old house, which is itself crushed under a heavy mortgage. The last squire dragged out his existence there, living the horrible life of an aristocratic pauper; but his only son, my stepfather, seeing that he must adapt himself to the new conditions, obtained an advance from a relative, which enabled him to take a medical degree and went out to Calcutta, where, by his professional skill and his force of character, he established a large practice. In a fit of anger, however, caused by some robberies which had been perpetrated in the house, he beat his native butler to death and narrowly escaped a capital sentence. As it was, he suffered a long term of imprisonment and afterwards returned to England a morose and disappointed man.

“When Dr. Royslott was in India he married my mother, Mrs. Stoner, the young widow of Major-General Stoner, of the Bengal Artillery. My sister Julia and I were twins, and we were only two years old at the time of my mother’s re-marriage. She had a considerable sum of money—not less than £1000 a year—and this she bequeathed to Dr. Royslott entirely while we resided with him, with a provision that a certain annual sum

should be allowed to each of us in the event of our marriage. Shortly after our return to England my mother died—she was killed eight years ago in a railway accident near Crewe. Dr. Roylott then abandoned his attempts to establish himself in practice in London and took us to live with him in the old ancestral house at Stoke Moran. The money which my mother had left was enough for all our wants, and there seemed to be no obstacle to our happiness.

“But a terrible change came over our stepfather about this time. Instead of making friends and exchanging visits with our neighbours, who had at first been overjoyed to see a Roylott of Stoke Moran back in the old family seat, he shut himself up in his house and seldom came out save to indulge in ferocious quarrels with whoever might cross his path. Violence of temper approaching to mania has been hereditary in the men of the family, and in my stepfather’s case it had, I believe, been intensified by his long residence in the tropics. A series of disgraceful brawls took place, two of which ended in the police-court, until at last he became the terror of the village, and the folks would fly at his approach, for he is a man of immense strength, and absolutely uncontrollable in his anger.

“Last week he hurled the local blacksmith over a parapet into a stream, and it was only by paying over all the money which I could gather together that I was able to avert another public exposure. He had no friends at all save the wandering gipsies, and he would give these vagabonds leave to encamp upon the few acres of bramble-covered land which represent the family estate, and would accept in return the hospitality of their tents, wandering away with them sometimes for weeks on end. He has a passion also for Indian animals, which are sent over to him by a correspondent, and he has at this moment a cheetah and a baboon, which wander freely over his grounds and are feared by the villagers almost as much as their master.

“You can imagine from what I say that my poor sister Julia and I had no great pleasure in our lives. No servant would stay with us, and for a long time we did all the work of the house. She was but thirty at the time of her death, and yet her hair had already begun to whiten, even as mine has.”

“Your sister is dead, then?”

“She died just two years ago, and it is of her death that I wish to speak to you. You can understand that, living the life which I have described, we were little likely to see anyone of our own age and position. We had, however, an aunt, my mother’s maiden sister, Miss Honoria Westphail, who lives near Harrow, and we were occasionally allowed to pay short visits at this lady’s house. Julia went there at Christmas two years ago, and met there a half-pay major of marines, to whom she became engaged. My stepfather learned of the engagement when my sister returned and offered no objection to the marriage; but within a fortnight of the day which had been fixed for the wedding, the terrible event occurred which has deprived me of my only companion.”

Sherlock Holmes had been leaning back in his chair with his eyes closed and his head sunk in a cushion, but he half opened his lids now and glanced across at his visitor.

“Pray be precise as to details,” said he.

“It is easy for me to be so, for every event of that dreadful time is seared into my memory. The manor-house is, as I have already said, very old, and only one wing is now inhabited. The bedrooms in this wing are on the ground floor, the sitting-rooms being in the central block of the buildings. Of these bedrooms the first is Dr. Roylott’s, the second my sister’s, and the third my own. There is no communication between them, but they all open out into the same corridor. Do I make myself plain?”

“Perfectly so.”

“The windows of the three rooms open out upon the lawn. That fatal night Dr. Roylott had gone to his room early, though we knew that he had not retired to rest, for my sister was troubled by the smell of the strong Indian cigars which it was his custom to smoke. She left her room, therefore, and came into mine, where she sat for some time, chatting about her approaching wedding. At eleven o’clock she rose to leave me, but she paused at the door and looked back.

“ ‘Tell me, Helen,’ said she, ‘have you ever heard anyone whistle in the dead of the night?’

“ ‘Never,’ said I.

“ ‘I suppose that you could not possibly whistle, yourself, in your sleep?’

“ ‘Certainly not. But why?’

“ ‘Because during the last few nights I have always, about three in the morning, heard a low, clear whistle. I am a light sleeper, and it has awakened me. I cannot tell where it came from—perhaps from the next room, perhaps from the lawn. I thought that I would just ask you whether you had heard it.’

“ ‘No, I have not. It must be those wretched gipsies in the plantation.’

“ ‘Very likely. And yet if it were on the lawn, I wonder that you did not hear it also.’

“ ‘Ah, but I sleep more heavily than you.’

“ ‘Well, it is of no great consequence, at any rate.’ She smiled back at me, closed my door, and a few moments later I heard her key turn in the lock.”

“Indeed,” said Holmes. “Was it your custom always to lock yourselves in at night?”

“Always.”

“And why?”

“I think that I mentioned to you that the doctor kept a cheetah and a baboon. We had no feeling of security unless our doors were locked.”

“Quite so. Pray proceed with your statement.”

“I could not sleep that night. A vague feeling of impending misfortune impressed me. My sister and I, you will recollect, were twins, and you know how subtle are the links which bind two souls which are so closely allied. It was a wild night. The wind was howling outside, and the rain was beating and splashing against the windows. Suddenly, amid all the hubbub of the gale, there burst forth the wild scream of a terrified woman. I knew that it was my sister’s voice. I sprang from my bed, wrapped a shawl round me, and rushed into the corridor. As I opened my door I seemed to hear a low whistle, such as my sister described, and a few moments later a clanging sound, as if a mass of metal had fallen. As I ran down the passage, my sister’s door was unlocked, and revolved slowly upon its hinges. I stared at it horror-stricken, not knowing what was about to issue from it. By the light of the corridor-lamp I saw my sister appear at the opening, her face blanched with terror, her hands groping for help, her whole figure swaying to and fro like that of a drunkard. I ran to her and threw my arms round her, but at that moment her knees seemed to give way and she fell to the ground. She writhed as one who is in terrible pain, and her limbs were dreadfully convulsed. At first I thought that she had not recognised me, but as I bent over her she suddenly shrieked out in a voice which I shall never forget, ‘Oh, my God! Helen! It was the band! The speckled band!’ There was something else which she would fain have said, and she stabbed with her finger into the air in the direction of the doctor’s room, but a fresh convulsion seized her and choked her words. I rushed out, calling loudly for my stepfather, and I met him hastening from his room in his dressing-gown. When he reached my sister’s side she was unconscious, and though he poured brandy down her throat and sent for medical aid from the village, all efforts were in vain, for she slowly sank and died without having recovered her consciousness. Such was the dreadful end of my beloved sister.”

“One moment,” said Holmes, “are you sure about this whistle and metallic sound? Could you swear to it?”

“That was what the county coroner asked me at the inquiry. It is my strong impression that I heard it, and yet, among the crash of the gale and the creaking of an old house, I may possibly have been deceived.”

“Was your sister dressed?”

“No, she was in her night-dress. In her right hand was found the charred stump of a match, and in her left a match-box.”

“Showing that she had struck a light and looked about her when the alarm took place. That is important. And what conclusions did the coroner come to?”



“He investigated the case with great care, for Dr. Roylott’s conduct had long been notorious in the county, but he was unable to find any satisfactory cause of death. My evidence showed that the door had been fastened upon the inner side, and the windows were blocked by old-fashioned shutters with broad iron bars, which were secured every night. The walls were carefully sounded, and were shown to be quite solid all round, and the flooring was also thoroughly examined, with the same result. The chimney is wide, but is barred up by four large staples. It is certain, therefore, that my sister was quite alone when she met her end. Besides, there were no marks of any violence upon her.”

“How about poison?”

“The doctors examined her for it, but without success.”

“What do you think that this unfortunate lady died of, then?”

“It is my belief that she died of pure fear and nervous shock, though what it was that frightened her I cannot imagine.”

“Were there gipsies in the plantation at the time?”

“Yes, there are nearly always some there.”

“Ah, and what did you gather from this allusion to a band—a speckled band?”

“Sometimes I have thought that it was merely the wild talk of delirium, sometimes that it may have referred to some band of people, perhaps to these very gipsies in the plantation. I do not know whether the spotted handkerchiefs which so many of them wear over their heads might have suggested the strange adjective which she used.”

Holmes shook his head like a man who is far from being satisfied.

“These are very deep waters,” said he; “pray go on with your narrative.”

“Two years have passed since then, and my life has been until lately lonelier than ever. A month ago, however, a dear friend, whom I have known for many years, has done me the honour to ask my hand in marriage. His name is Armitage—Percy Armitage—the second son of Mr. Armitage, of Crane Water, near Reading. My stepfather has offered no opposition to the match, and we are to be married in the course of the spring. Two days ago some repairs were started in the west wing of the building, and my bedroom wall has been pierced, so that I have had to move into the chamber in which my sister died, and to sleep in the very bed in which she slept. Imagine, then, my thrill of terror when last night, as I lay awake, thinking over her terrible fate, I suddenly heard in the silence of the night the low whistle which had been the herald of her own death. I sprang up and lit the lamp, but nothing was to be seen in the room. I was too shaken to go to bed again, however, so I dressed, and as soon as it was daylight I slipped down, got a dog-cart at the Crown Inn,

which is opposite, and drove to Leatherhead, from whence I have come on this morning with the one object of seeing you and asking your advice.”

“You have done wisely,” said my friend. “But have you told me all?”

“Yes, all.”

“Miss Roylott, you have not. You are screening your stepfather.”

“Why, what do you mean?”

For answer Holmes pushed back the frill of black lace which fringed the hand that lay upon our visitor’s knee. Five little livid spots, the marks of four fingers and a thumb, were printed upon the white wrist.

“You have been cruelly used,” said Holmes.

The lady coloured deeply and covered over her injured wrist. “He is a hard man,” she said, “and perhaps he hardly knows his own strength.”

There was a long silence, during which Holmes leaned his chin upon his hands and stared into the crackling fire.

“This is a very deep business,” he said at last. “There are a thousand details which I should desire to know before I decide upon our course of action. Yet we have not a moment to lose. If we were to come to Stoke Moran to-day, would it be possible for us to see over these rooms without the knowledge of your stepfather?”

“As it happens, he spoke of coming into town to-day upon some most important business. It is probable that he will be away all day, and that there would be nothing to disturb you. We have a housekeeper now, but she is old and foolish, and I could easily get her out of the way.”

“Excellent. You are not averse to this trip, Watson?”

“By no means.”

“Then we shall both come. What are you going to do yourself?”

“I have one or two things which I would wish to do now that I am in town. But I shall return by the twelve o’clock train, so as to be there in time for your coming.”

“And you may expect us early in the afternoon. I have myself some small business matters to attend to. Will you not wait and breakfast?”

“No, I must go. My heart is lightened already since I have confided my trouble to you. I shall look forward to seeing you again this afternoon.” She dropped her thick black veil over her face and glided from the room.

“And what do you think of it all, Watson?” asked Sherlock Holmes, leaning back in his chair.

“It seems to me to be a most dark and sinister business.”

“Dark enough and sinister enough.”

“Yet if the lady is correct in saying that the flooring and walls are sound, and that the door, window, and chimney are impassable, then her sister must have been undoubtedly alone when she met her mysterious end.”

“What becomes, then, of these nocturnal whistles, and what of the very peculiar words of the dying woman?”

“I cannot think.”

“When you combine the ideas of whistles at night, the presence of a band of gipsies who are on intimate terms with this old doctor, the fact that we have every reason to believe that the doctor has an interest in preventing his stepdaughter’s marriage, the dying allusion to a band, and, finally, the fact that Miss Helen Stoner heard a metallic clang, which might have been caused by one of those metal bars that secured the shutters falling back into its place, I think that there is good ground to think that the mystery may be cleared along those lines.”

“But what, then, did the gipsies do?”

“I cannot imagine.”

“I see many objections to any such theory.”

“And so do I. It is precisely for that reason that we are going to Stoke Moran this day. I want to see whether the objections are fatal, or if they may be explained away. But what in the name of the devil!”

The ejaculation had been drawn from my companion by the fact that our door had been suddenly dashed open, and that a huge man had framed himself in the aperture. His costume was a peculiar mixture of the professional and of the agricultural, having a black top-hat, a long frock-coat, and a pair of high gaiters, with a hunting-crop swinging in his hand. So tall was he that his hat actually brushed the cross bar of the doorway, and his breadth seemed to span it across from side to side. A large face, seared with a thousand wrinkles, burned yellow with the sun, and marked with every evil passion, was turned

from one to the other of us, while his deep-set, bile-shot eyes, and his high, thin, fleshless nose, gave him somewhat the resemblance to a fierce old bird of prey.

“Which of you is Holmes?” asked this apparition.

“My name, sir; but you have the advantage of me,” said my companion quietly.

“I am Dr. Grimesby Roylott, of Stoke Moran.”

“Indeed, Doctor,” said Holmes blandly. “Pray take a seat.”

“I will do nothing of the kind. My stepdaughter has been here. I have traced her. What has she been saying to you?”

“It is a little cold for the time of the year,” said Holmes.

“What has she been saying to you?” screamed the old man furiously.

“But I have heard that the crocuses promise well,” continued my companion imperturbably.

“Ha! You put me off, do you?” said our new visitor, taking a step forward and shaking his hunting-crop. “I know you, you scoundrel! I have heard of you before. You are Holmes, the meddler.”

My friend smiled.

“Holmes, the busybody!”

His smile broadened.

“Holmes, the Scotland Yard Jack-in-office!”

Holmes chuckled heartily. “Your conversation is most entertaining,” said he. “When you go out close the door, for there is a decided draught.”

“I will go when I have said my say. Don’t you dare to meddle with my affairs. I know that Miss Stoner has been here. I traced her! I am a dangerous man to fall foul of! See here.” He stepped swiftly forward, seized the poker, and bent it into a curve with his huge brown hands.

“See that you keep yourself out of my grip,” he snarled, and hurling the twisted poker into the fireplace he strode out of the room.

“He seems a very amiable person,” said Holmes, laughing. “I am not quite so bulky, but if he had remained I might have shown him that my grip was not much more feeble

than his own.” As he spoke he picked up the steel poker and, with a sudden effort, straightened it out again.

“Fancy his having the insolence to confound me with the official detective force! This incident gives zest to our investigation, however, and I only trust that our little friend will not suffer from her imprudence in allowing this brute to trace her. And now, Watson, we shall order breakfast, and afterwards I shall walk down to Doctors’ Commons, where I hope to get some data which may help us in this matter.”

It was nearly one o’clock when Sherlock Holmes returned from his excursion. He held in his hand a sheet of blue paper, scrawled over with notes and figures.

“I have seen the will of the deceased wife,” said he. “To determine its exact meaning I have been obliged to work out the present prices of the investments with which it is concerned. The total income, which at the time of the wife’s death was little short of £1100, is now, through the fall in agricultural prices, not more than £750. Each daughter can claim an income of £250, in case of marriage. It is evident, therefore, that if both girls had married, this beauty would have had a mere pittance, while even one of them would cripple him to a very serious extent. My morning’s work has not been wasted, since it has proved that he has the very strongest motives for standing in the way of anything of the sort. And now, Watson, this is too serious for dawdling, especially as the old man is aware that we are interesting ourselves in his affairs; so if you are ready, we shall call a cab and drive to Waterloo. I should be very much obliged if you would slip your revolver into your pocket. An Eley’s No. 2 is an excellent argument with gentlemen who can twist steel pokers into knots. That and a tooth-brush are, I think, all that we need.”

At Waterloo we were fortunate in catching a train for Leatherhead, where we hired a trap at the station inn and drove for four or five miles through the lovely Surrey lanes. It was a perfect day, with a bright sun and a few fleecy clouds in the heavens. The trees and wayside hedges were just throwing out their first green shoots, and the air was full of the pleasant smell of the moist earth. To me at least there was a strange contrast between the sweet promise of the spring and this sinister quest upon which we were engaged. My companion sat in the front of the trap, his arms folded, his hat pulled down over his eyes, and his chin sunk upon his breast, buried in the deepest thought. Suddenly, however, he started, tapped me on the shoulder, and pointed over the meadows.

“Look there!” said he.

A heavily timbered park stretched up in a gentle slope, thickening into a grove at the highest point. From amid the branches there jutted out the grey gables and high roof-tree of a very old mansion.

“Stoke Moran?” said he.

“Yes, sir, that be the house of Dr. Grimesby Roylott,” remarked the driver.

“There is some building going on there,” said Holmes; “that is where we are going.”

“There’s the village,” said the driver, pointing to a cluster of roofs some distance to the left; “but if you want to get to the house, you’ll find it shorter to get over this stile, and so by the foot-path over the fields. There it is, where the lady is walking.”

“And the lady, I fancy, is Miss Stoner,” observed Holmes, shading his eyes. “Yes, I think we had better do as you suggest.”

We got off, paid our fare, and the trap rattled back on its way to Leatherhead.

“I thought it as well,” said Holmes as we climbed the stile, “that this fellow should think we had come here as architects, or on some definite business. It may stop his gossip. Good-afternoon, Miss Stoner. You see that we have been as good as our word.”

Our client of the morning had hurried forward to meet us with a face which spoke her joy. “I have been waiting so eagerly for you,” she cried, shaking hands with us warmly. “All has turned out splendidly. Dr. Roylott has gone to town, and it is unlikely that he will be back before evening.”

“We have had the pleasure of making the doctor’s acquaintance,” said Holmes, and in a few words he sketched out what had occurred. Miss Stoner turned white to the lips as she listened.

“Good heavens!” she cried, “he has followed me, then.”

“So it appears.”

“He is so cunning that I never know when I am safe from him. What will he say when he returns?”

“He must guard himself, for he may find that there is someone more cunning than himself upon his track. You must lock yourself up from him to-night. If he is violent, we shall take you away to your aunt’s at Harrow. Now, we must make the best use of our time, so kindly take us at once to the rooms which we are to examine.”

The building was of grey, lichen-blotched stone, with a high central portion and two curving wings, like the claws of a crab, thrown out on each side. In one of these wings the windows were broken and blocked with wooden boards, while the roof was partly caved in, a picture of ruin. The central portion was in little better repair, but the right-hand block was comparatively modern, and the blinds in the windows, with the blue smoke curling up from the chimneys, showed that this was where the family resided. Some scaffolding had been erected against the end wall, and the stone-work had been broken into, but there were no signs of any workmen at the moment of our visit. Holmes

walked slowly up and down the ill-trimmed lawn and examined with deep attention the outsides of the windows.

“This, I take it, belongs to the room in which you used to sleep, the centre one to your sister’s, and the one next to the main building to Dr. Roylott’s chamber?”

“Exactly so. But I am now sleeping in the middle one.”

“Pending the alterations, as I understand. By the way, there does not seem to be any very pressing need for repairs at that end wall.”

“There were none. I believe that it was an excuse to move me from my room.”

“Ah! that is suggestive. Now, on the other side of this narrow wing runs the corridor from which these three rooms open. There are windows in it, of course?”

“Yes, but very small ones. Too narrow for anyone to pass through.”

“As you both locked your doors at night, your rooms were unapproachable from that side. Now, would you have the kindness to go into your room and bar your shutters?”

Miss Stoner did so, and Holmes, after a careful examination through the open window, endeavoured in every way to force the shutter open, but without success. There was no slit through which a knife could be passed to raise the bar. Then with his lens he tested the hinges, but they were of solid iron, built firmly into the massive masonry. “Hum!” said he, scratching his chin in some perplexity, “my theory certainly presents some difficulties. No one could pass these shutters if they were bolted. Well, we shall see if the inside throws any light upon the matter.”

A small side door led into the whitewashed corridor from which the three bedrooms opened. Holmes refused to examine the third chamber, so we passed at once to the second, that in which Miss Stoner was now sleeping, and in which her sister had met with her fate. It was a homely little room, with a low ceiling and a gaping fireplace, after the fashion of old country-houses. A brown chest of drawers stood in one corner, a narrow white-counterpaned bed in another, and a dressing-table on the left-hand side of the window. These articles, with two small wicker-work chairs, made up all the furniture in the room save for a square of Wilton carpet in the centre. The boards round and the panelling of the walls were of brown, worm-eaten oak, so old and discoloured that it may have dated from the original building of the house. Holmes drew one of the chairs into a corner and sat silent, while his eyes travelled round and round and up and down, taking in every detail of the apartment.

“Where does that bell communicate with?” he asked at last pointing to a thick bell-rope which hung down beside the bed, the tassel actually lying upon the pillow.

“It goes to the housekeeper’s room.”

“It looks newer than the other things?”

“Yes, it was only put there a couple of years ago.”

“Your sister asked for it, I suppose?”

“No, I never heard of her using it. We used always to get what we wanted for ourselves.”

“Indeed, it seemed unnecessary to put so nice a bell-pull there. You will excuse me for a few minutes while I satisfy myself as to this floor.” He threw himself down upon his face with his lens in his hand and crawled swiftly backward and forward, examining minutely the cracks between the boards. Then he did the same with the wood-work with which the chamber was panelled. Finally he walked over to the bed and spent some time in staring at it and in running his eye up and down the wall. Finally he took the bell-rope in his hand and gave it a brisk tug.

“Why, it’s a dummy,” said he.

“Won’t it ring?”

“No, it is not even attached to a wire. This is very interesting. You can see now that it is fastened to a hook just above where the little opening for the ventilator is.”

“How very absurd! I never noticed that before.”

“Very strange!” muttered Holmes, pulling at the rope. “There are one or two very singular points about this room. For example, what a fool a builder must be to open a ventilator into another room, when, with the same trouble, he might have communicated with the outside air!”

“That is also quite modern,” said the lady.

“Done about the same time as the bell-rope?” remarked Holmes.

“Yes, there were several little changes carried out about that time.”

“They seem to have been of a most interesting character—dummy bell-ropes, and ventilators which do not ventilate. With your permission, Miss Stoner, we shall now carry our researches into the inner apartment.”

Dr. Grimesby Roylott’s chamber was larger than that of his step-daughter, but was as plainly furnished. A camp-bed, a small wooden shelf full of books, mostly of a technical character, an armchair beside the bed, a plain wooden chair against the wall, a



round table, and a large iron safe were the principal things which met the eye. Holmes walked slowly round and examined each and all of them with the keenest interest.

“What’s in here?” he asked, tapping the safe.

“My stepfather’s business papers.”

“Oh! you have seen inside, then?”

“Only once, some years ago. I remember that it was full of papers.”

“There isn’t a cat in it, for example?”

“No. What a strange idea!”

“Well, look at this!” He took up a small saucer of milk which stood on the top of it.

“No; we don’t keep a cat. But there is a cheetah and a baboon.”

“Ah, yes, of course! Well, a cheetah is just a big cat, and yet a saucer of milk does not go very far in satisfying its wants, I daresay. There is one point which I should wish to determine.” He squatted down in front of the wooden chair and examined the seat of it with the greatest attention.

“Thank you. That is quite settled,” said he, rising and putting his lens in his pocket. “Hullo! Here is something interesting!”

The object which had caught his eye was a small dog lash hung on one corner of the bed. The lash, however, was curled upon itself and tied so as to make a loop of whipcord.

“What do you make of that, Watson?”

“It’s a common enough lash. But I don’t know why it should be tied.”

“That is not quite so common, is it? Ah, me! it’s a wicked world, and when a clever man turns his brains to crime it is the worst of all. I think that I have seen enough now, Miss Stoner, and with your permission we shall walk out upon the lawn.”

I had never seen my friend’s face so grim or his brow so dark as it was when we turned from the scene of this investigation. We had walked several times up and down the lawn, neither Miss Stoner nor myself liking to break in upon his thoughts before he roused himself from his reverie.

“It is very essential, Miss Stoner,” said he, “that you should absolutely follow my advice in every respect.”

“I shall most certainly do so.”

“The matter is too serious for any hesitation. Your life may depend upon your compliance.”

“I assure you that I am in your hands.”

“In the first place, both my friend and I must spend the night in your room.”

Both Miss Stoner and I gazed at him in astonishment.

“Yes, it must be so. Let me explain. I believe that that is the village inn over there?”

“Yes, that is the Crown.”

“Very good. Your windows would be visible from there?”

“Certainly.”

“You must confine yourself to your room, on pretence of a headache, when your stepfather comes back. Then when you hear him retire for the night, you must open the shutters of your window, undo the hasp, put your lamp there as a signal to us, and then withdraw quietly with everything which you are likely to want into the room which you used to occupy. I have no doubt that, in spite of the repairs, you could manage there for one night.”

“Oh, yes, easily.”

“The rest you will leave in our hands.”

“But what will you do?”

“We shall spend the night in your room, and we shall investigate the cause of this noise which has disturbed you.”

“I believe, Mr. Holmes, that you have already made up your mind,” said Miss Stoner, laying her hand upon my companion’s sleeve.

“Perhaps I have.”

“Then, for pity’s sake, tell me what was the cause of my sister’s death.”

“I should prefer to have clearer proofs before I speak.”

“You can at least tell me whether my own thought is correct, and if she died from some sudden fright.”

“No, I do not think so. I think that there was probably some more tangible cause. And now, Miss Stoner, we must leave you for if Dr. Roylott returned and saw us our journey would be in vain. Good-bye, and be brave, for if you will do what I have told you, you may rest assured that we shall soon drive away the dangers that threaten you.”

Sherlock Holmes and I had no difficulty in engaging a bedroom and sitting-room at the Crown Inn. They were on the upper floor, and from our window we could command a view of the avenue gate, and of the inhabited wing of Stoke Moran Manor House. At dusk we saw Dr. Grimesby Roylott drive past, his huge form looming up beside the little figure of the lad who drove him. The boy had some slight difficulty in undoing the heavy iron gates, and we heard the hoarse roar of the doctor’s voice and saw the fury with which he shook his clinched fists at him. The trap drove on, and a few minutes later we saw a sudden light spring up among the trees as the lamp was lit in one of the sitting-rooms.

“Do you know, Watson,” said Holmes as we sat together in the gathering darkness, “I have really some scruples as to taking you to-night. There is a distinct element of danger.”

“Can I be of assistance?”

“Your presence might be invaluable.”

“Then I shall certainly come.”

“It is very kind of you.”

“You speak of danger. You have evidently seen more in these rooms than was visible to me.”

“No, but I fancy that I may have deduced a little more. I imagine that you saw all that I did.”

“I saw nothing remarkable save the bell-rope, and what purpose that could answer I confess is more than I can imagine.”

“You saw the ventilator, too?”

“Yes, but I do not think that it is such a very unusual thing to have a small opening between two rooms. It was so small that a rat could hardly pass through.”

“I knew that we should find a ventilator before ever we came to Stoke Moran.”

“My dear Holmes!”

“Oh, yes, I did. You remember in her statement she said that her sister could smell Dr. Roylott’s cigar. Now, of course that suggested at once that there must be a communication between the two rooms. It could only be a small one, or it would have been remarked upon at the coroner’s inquiry. I deduced a ventilator.”

“But what harm can there be in that?”

“Well, there is at least a curious coincidence of dates. A ventilator is made, a cord is hung, and a lady who sleeps in the bed dies. Does not that strike you?”

“I cannot as yet see any connection.”

“Did you observe anything very peculiar about that bed?”

“No.”

“It was clamped to the floor. Did you ever see a bed fastened like that before?”

“I cannot say that I have.”

“The lady could not move her bed. It must always be in the same relative position to the ventilator and to the rope—or so we may call it, since it was clearly never meant for a bell-pull.”

“Holmes,” I cried, “I seem to see dimly what you are hinting at. We are only just in time to prevent some subtle and horrible crime.”

“Subtle enough and horrible enough. When a doctor does go wrong he is the first of criminals. He has nerve and he has knowledge. Palmer and Pritchard were among the heads of their profession. This man strikes even deeper, but I think, Watson, that we shall be able to strike deeper still. But we shall have horrors enough before the night is over; for goodness’ sake let us have a quiet pipe and turn our minds for a few hours to something more cheerful.”

About nine o’clock the light among the trees was extinguished, and all was dark in the direction of the Manor House. Two hours passed slowly away, and then, suddenly, just at the stroke of eleven, a single bright light shone out right in front of us.

“That is our signal,” said Holmes, springing to his feet; “it comes from the middle window.”

As we passed out he exchanged a few words with the landlord, explaining that we were going on a late visit to an acquaintance, and that it was possible that we might spend the night there. A moment later we were out on the dark road, a chill wind blowing in our faces, and one yellow light twinkling in front of us through the gloom to guide us on our sombre errand.

There was little difficulty in entering the grounds, for unrepaired breaches gaped in the old park wall. Making our way among the trees, we reached the lawn, crossed it, and were about to enter through the window when out from a clump of laurel bushes there darted what seemed to be a hideous and distorted child, who threw itself upon the grass with writhing limbs and then ran swiftly across the lawn into the darkness.

“My God!” I whispered; “did you see it?”

Holmes was for the moment as startled as I. His hand closed like a vice upon my wrist in his agitation. Then he broke into a low laugh and put his lips to my ear.

“It is a nice household,” he murmured. “That is the baboon.”

I had forgotten the strange pets which the doctor affected. There was a cheetah, too; perhaps we might find it upon our shoulders at any moment. I confess that I felt easier in my mind when, after following Holmes’ example and slipping off my shoes, I found myself inside the bedroom. My companion noiselessly closed the shutters, moved the lamp onto the table, and cast his eyes round the room. All was as we had seen it in the daytime. Then creeping up to me and making a trumpet of his hand, he whispered into my ear again so gently that it was all that I could do to distinguish the words:

“The least sound would be fatal to our plans.”

I nodded to show that I had heard.

“We must sit without light. He would see it through the ventilator.”

I nodded again.

“Do not go asleep; your very life may depend upon it. Have your pistol ready in case we should need it. I will sit on the side of the bed, and you in that chair.”

I took out my revolver and laid it on the corner of the table.

Holmes had brought up a long thin cane, and this he placed upon the bed beside him. By it he laid the box of matches and the stump of a candle. Then he turned down the lamp, and we were left in darkness.

How shall I ever forget that dreadful vigil? I could not hear a sound, not even the drawing of a breath, and yet I knew that my companion sat open-eyed, within a few feet of me, in the same state of nervous tension in which I was myself. The shutters cut off the least ray of light, and we waited in absolute darkness.

From outside came the occasional cry of a night-bird, and once at our very window a long drawn catlike whine, which told us that the cheetah was indeed at liberty. Far away

we could hear the deep tones of the parish clock, which boomed out every quarter of an hour. How long they seemed, those quarters! Twelve struck, and one and two and three, and still we sat waiting silently for whatever might befall.

Suddenly there was the momentary gleam of a light up in the direction of the ventilator, which vanished immediately, but was succeeded by a strong smell of burning oil and heated metal. Someone in the next room had lit a dark-lantern. I heard a gentle sound of movement, and then all was silent once more, though the smell grew stronger. For half an hour I sat with straining ears. Then suddenly another sound became audible—a very gentle, soothing sound, like that of a small jet of steam escaping continually from a kettle. The instant that we heard it, Holmes sprang from the bed, struck a match, and lashed furiously with his cane at the bell-pull.

“You see it, Watson?” he yelled. “You see it?”

But I saw nothing. At the moment when Holmes struck the light I heard a low, clear whistle, but the sudden glare flashing into my weary eyes made it impossible for me to tell what it was at which my friend lashed so savagely. I could, however, see that his face was deadly pale and filled with horror and loathing. He had ceased to strike and was gazing up at the ventilator when suddenly there broke from the silence of the night the most horrible cry to which I have ever listened. It swelled up louder and louder, a hoarse yell of pain and fear and anger all mingled in the one dreadful shriek. They say that away down in the village, and even in the distant parsonage, that cry raised the sleepers from their beds. It struck cold to our hearts, and I stood gazing at Holmes, and he at me, until the last echoes of it had died away into the silence from which it rose.

“What can it mean?” I gasped.

“It means that it is all over,” Holmes answered. “And perhaps, after all, it is for the best. Take your pistol, and we will enter Dr. Roylott’s room.”

With a grave face he lit the lamp and led the way down the corridor. Twice he struck at the chamber door without any reply from within. Then he turned the handle and entered, I at his heels, with the cocked pistol in my hand.

It was a singular sight which met our eyes. On the table stood a dark-lantern with the shutter half open, throwing a brilliant beam of light upon the iron safe, the door of which was ajar. Beside this table, on the wooden chair, sat Dr. Grimesby Roylott clad in a long grey dressing-gown, his bare ankles protruding beneath, and his feet thrust into red heelless Turkish slippers. Across his lap lay the short stock with the long lash which we had noticed during the day. His chin was cocked upward and his eyes were fixed in a dreadful, rigid stare at the corner of the ceiling. Round his brow he had a peculiar yellow band, with brownish speckles, which seemed to be bound tightly round his head. As we entered he made neither sound nor motion.

“The band! the speckled band!” whispered Holmes.

I took a step forward. In an instant his strange headgear began to move, and there reared itself from among his hair the squat diamond-shaped head and puffed neck of a loathsome serpent.

“It is a swamp adder!” cried Holmes; “the deadliest snake in India. He has died within ten seconds of being bitten. Violence does, in truth, recoil upon the violent, and the schemer falls into the pit which he digs for another. Let us thrust this creature back into its den, and we can then remove Miss Stoner to some place of shelter and let the county police know what has happened.”

As he spoke he drew the dog-whip swiftly from the dead man’s lap, and throwing the noose round the reptile’s neck he drew it from its horrid perch and, carrying it at arm’s length, threw it into the iron safe, which he closed upon it.

Such are the true facts of the death of Dr. Grimesby Roylott, of Stoke Moran. It is not necessary that I should prolong a narrative which has already run to too great a length by telling how we broke the sad news to the terrified girl, how we conveyed her by the morning train to the care of her good aunt at Harrow, of how the slow process of official inquiry came to the conclusion that the doctor met his fate while indiscreetly playing with a dangerous pet. The little which I had yet to learn of the case was told me by Sherlock Holmes as we travelled back next day.

“I had,” said he, “come to an entirely erroneous conclusion which shows, my dear Watson, how dangerous it always is to reason from insufficient data. The presence of the gipsies, and the use of the word ‘band,’ which was used by the poor girl, no doubt, to explain the appearance which she had caught a hurried glimpse of by the light of her match, were sufficient to put me upon an entirely wrong scent. I can only claim the merit that I instantly reconsidered my position when, however, it became clear to me that whatever danger threatened an occupant of the room could not come either from the window or the door. My attention was speedily drawn, as I have already remarked to you, to this ventilator, and to the bell-rope which hung down to the bed. The discovery that this was a dummy, and that the bed was clamped to the floor, instantly gave rise to the suspicion that the rope was there as a bridge for something passing through the hole and coming to the bed. The idea of a snake instantly occurred to me, and when I coupled it with my knowledge that the doctor was furnished with a supply of creatures from India, I felt that I was probably on the right track. The idea of using a form of poison which could not possibly be discovered by any chemical test was just such a one as would occur to a clever and ruthless man who had had an Eastern training. The rapidity with which such a poison would take effect would also, from his point of view, be an advantage. It would be a sharp-eyed coroner, indeed, who could distinguish the two little dark punctures which would show where the poison fangs had done their work. Then I thought of the whistle. Of course he must recall the snake before the morning light revealed it to the victim. He had trained it, probably by the use of the milk which we saw, to return to him when summoned. He would put it through this ventilator at the hour that he thought best, with the certainty that it would crawl down the rope and land on the bed. It might or might not

bite the occupant, perhaps she might escape every night for a week, but sooner or later she must fall a victim.

“I had come to these conclusions before ever I had entered his room. An inspection of his chair showed me that he had been in the habit of standing on it, which of course would be necessary in order that he should reach the ventilator. The sight of the safe, the saucer of milk, and the loop of whipcord were enough to finally dispel any doubts which may have remained. The metallic clang heard by Miss Stoner was obviously caused by her stepfather hastily closing the door of his safe upon its terrible occupant. Having once made up my mind, you know the steps which I took in order to put the matter to the proof. I heard the creature hiss as I have no doubt that you did also, and I instantly lit the light and attacked it.”

“With the result of driving it through the ventilator.”

“And also with the result of causing it to turn upon its master at the other side. Some of the blows of my cane came home and roused its snakish temper, so that it flew upon the first person it saw. In this way I am no doubt indirectly responsible for Dr. Grimesby Roylott’s death, and I cannot say that it is likely to weigh very heavily upon my conscience.”