

SHERLOCK HOLMES

AND THE SPECKLED BAND

A MYSTERY JIGSAW PUZZLE



Story by
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

CHAPTER ONE

Helen's Story

At the time of this story, I was still living at my friend Sherlock Holmes's flat in Baker Street in London. Very early one morning, a young woman, dressed in black, came to see us. She looked tired and unhappy, and her face was very white.

'I'm afraid! Afraid of death, Mr Holmes!' she cried. 'Please help me! I'm not thirty yet and look at my grey hair! I'm so afraid!'

'Just sit down and tell us your story,' said Holmes kindly.

'My name is Helen Stoner,' she began, 'and I live with my stepfather, Dr Grimesby Roylott, near a village in the country. His family was once very rich, but they had no money when my stepfather was born. So he studied to be a doctor, and went out to India. He met and married my mother there, when my sister Julia and I were very young. Our father was dead, you see.'

'Your mother had some money, perhaps?' asked Sherlock Holmes.

'Oh yes, mother had a lot of money, so my stepfather wasn't poor any more.'

'Tell me more about him, Miss Stoner,' said Holmes.

'Well, he's a violent man. In India he once got angry with his Indian servant and killed him! He had to go to prison because of that, and then we all came back to England. Mother died in an accident eight years ago. So my stepfather got all her money, but if Julia or I marry, he must pay us 250 pounds every year.'

'And now you live with him in the country,' said Holmes.

'Yes, but he stays at home and never sees anybody, Mr Holmes!' answered Helen Stoner. 'He's more and more violent

now, and sometimes has fights with the people from the village. Everybody's afraid of him now, and they run away when they see him. And they're also afraid of his Indian wild animals which run freely around the garden. A friend sends them to him from India. And the animals are not the only wild things in the garden; there are also gipsies. My stepfather likes these wild people, and they can come and go where they like. Poor Julia and I had very unhappy lives. We had no servants. They always left because they were afraid of my stepfather, and we had to do all the work in the house. Julia was only thirty when she died, and her hair was already grey, like my hair now.'

'When did she die?' asked Sherlock Holmes.

'She died two years ago, and that's why I'm here. We never met anybody in the country, but sometimes we visited some of my family who live near London. There Julia met a young man who asked to marry her. My stepfather agreed, but soon after this she died.' Miss Stoner put her hand over her eyes and cried for a minute.

Sherlock Holmes was listening with his eyes closed, but now he opened them and looked at Helen Stoner.

'Tell me everything about her death,' he said.

'I can remember it all very well. It was a terrible time!' she answered. 'Our three bedrooms are all downstairs. First there is my stepfather's room. Julia's room is next to his, and my room is next to Julia's. The rooms all have windows on the garden side of the house, and doors which open into the corridor. One evening our stepfather was smoking his strong Indian cigarettes in his room. Julia couldn't sleep because she could smell them in her room, so she came into my room to talk to me. Before she went back to bed, she said to me, "Helen, have you ever heard a whistle in the middle of the night?"'

I was surprised. "No," I said.

“It’s strange,” she said. “Sometimes I hear a whistle, but I don’t know where it comes from. Why don’t you hear it?”

I laughed and said, “I sleep better than you do.” So Julia went to her room, and locked the door after her.’

‘Why did you lock your doors?’ asked Sherlock Holmes.

‘We were afraid of the wild animals, and the gipsies,’ she answered.

‘Please go on,’ said Holmes.

‘I couldn’t sleep that night. It was a very stormy night, with a lot of wind and rain. Suddenly I heard a woman’s scream. It was my sister’s voice. I ran into the corridor, and just then I heard a whistle, and a minute later the sound of falling metal. I didn’t know what it was. I ran to my sister’s door. She opened it and fell to the ground. Her face was white and afraid, and she was crying, “Help me, help me, Helen, I’m ill, I’m dying!” I put my arms around her, and she cried out in a terrible voice: “Helen! Oh my God, Helen! It was the band! The speckled band!” She wanted to say more, but she couldn’t. I called my stepfather, who tried to help her, but we could do nothing. And so my dear, dear sister died.’

‘Are you sure about the whistle and the sound of falling metal?’ asked Holmes.

‘I think so,’ answered Helen. ‘But it was a very wild, stormy night. Perhaps I made a mistake. The police couldn’t understand why my sister died. Her door was locked and nobody could get into her room. They didn’t find any poison in her body. And what was “the speckled band”? Gipsies wear something like that round their necks. I think she died because she was so afraid, but I don’t know what she was afraid of. Perhaps it was the gipsies. What do you think, Mr Holmes?’

Holmes thought for a minute. ‘Hmm,’ he said. That is a difficult question. But please go on.’

‘That was two years ago,’ Helen Stoner said. ‘I have been very lonely without my sister, but a month ago a dear friend asked me to marry him. My stepfather has agreed, and

so we're going to marry soon. But two days ago I had to move to my sister's old bedroom, because some men are mending my bedroom wall, and last night I heard that whistle again! I ran out of the house immediately and came to London to ask for your help. Please help me, Mr Holmes! I don't want to die like Julia!

'We must move fast,' said Holmes. 'If we go to your house today, can we look at these rooms? But your stepfather must not know.'

'He's in London today, so he won't see you. Oh thank you, Mr Holmes, I feel better already.'

CHAPTER TWO

Holmes and Watson Visit the House

Holmes went out for the morning, but he came back at lunch-time. We then went by train into the country, and took a taxi to Dr Roylott's house. 'You see,' said Holmes to me, 'our dangerous friend Roylott needs the girls' money, because he only has 750 pounds a year from his dead wife. I found that out this morning. But the gipsies, the whistle, the band - they are more difficult to understand, but I think I have an answer.'

When we arrived, Helen Stoner showed us the three bedrooms. We saw her room first.

'Why are they mending your bedroom wall?' asked Holmes. 'There's nothing wrong with it.'

'You're right,' she said. 'I think it was a plan to move me into my sister's room.'

'Yes,' said Holmes. We went into Julia's room, and Holmes looked at the windows carefully.

'Nobody could come in from outside,' he said. Then he looked round the room. 'Why is that bell-rope there, just over the bed?'

'My stepfather put it there two years ago. It's for calling a servant, but Julia and I never used it because we didn't have any servants. He also put in that air-vent on the wall between his room and this one.'

Holmes pulled the rope. 'But it doesn't work,' he said. 'How strange! And it's just over the air-vent. That also is interesting. Why have an air-vent on an inside wall? Air-vents are usually on outside walls.'

Then we went into Dr Roylott's room. Holmes saw a large metal box near the wall.

'My stepfather keeps business papers in there,' said Helen.

‘Does he keep a cat in there too?’ asked Holmes. ‘Look!’ There was some milk on a plate on top of the box. ‘Now, Miss Stoner,’ he said, ‘I think your life is in danger. Tonight my friend Watson and I must spend the night in your sister’s room, where you are sleeping at the moment.’

Helen Stoner and I looked at him in surprise.

‘Yes, we must,’ he went on. ‘We’ll take a room in a hotel in the village. When your stepfather goes to bed, put a light in your sister’s bedroom window and leave it open. Then go into your old room and we’ll get into your sister’s room through the window. We’ll wait for the sound of the whistle and the falling metal.’

‘How did my sister die, Mr Holmes? Do you know? Please tell me!’ said Helen. She put her hand on Sherlock Holmes’s arm.

‘I must find out more before I tell you, Miss Stoner. Now goodbye, and don’t be afraid,’ replied Sherlock Holmes.

We walked to the village, and Holmes said to me, ‘Tonight will be dangerous, Watson. Roylott is a very violent man.’

‘But if I can help, Holmes, I shall come with you,’ I said.

‘Thank you, Watson. I’ll need your help. Did you see the bell-rope, and the air-vent? I knew about the air-vent before we came. Of course there is a hole between the two rooms. That explains why Helen’s sister could smell Dr Roylott’s cigarette.’

‘My dear Holmes! How clever of you!’ I cried.

‘And did you see the bed? It’s fixed to the floor. She can’t move it. It must stay under the rope, which is near the air-vent.’

‘Holmes!’ I cried. ‘I begin to understand! What a terrible crime!’

‘Yes, this doctor is a very clever man. But we can stop him, I think, Watson.’

CHAPTER THREE

Death in the Night

That night we went back to the house. When we saw Helen Stoner's light, Holmes and I got in quietly through the window. Then we waited silently in the middle bedroom in the dark. We waited for three hours and did not move. Suddenly we saw a light and heard a sound from Dr Roylott's room. But nothing happened, and again we waited in the dark. Then there was another sound, a very quiet sound... Immediately Holmes jumped up and hit the bell-rope hard.

'Can you see it, Watson?' he shouted. But I saw nothing. There was a quiet whistle. We both looked up at the air-vent, and suddenly we heard a terrible cry in the next room. Then the house was silent again.

'What does it mean?' I asked. My voice was shaking.

'It's finished,' answered Holmes. 'Let's go and see.'

We went into Dr Roylott's room. The metal box was open. Roylott was sitting on a chair, and his eyes were fixed on the air-vent. Round his head was a strange, yellow speckled band. He was dead.

'The band! The speckled band!' said Holmes very quietly. The band moved and began to turn its head. 'Be careful, Watson! It's a snake, an Indian snake - and its poison can kill very quickly,' Holmes cried. 'Roylott died immediately. We must put the snake back in its box.' Very, very carefully, Holmes took the snake and threw it into the metal box.

'But how did you know about the snake, Holmes?' I asked.

'At first, Watson, I thought that it was the gipsies. But then I understood. I thought that perhaps something came through the air-vent, down the bell-rope and on to the bed. Then there was the milk - and of course, snakes drink milk. It

was easy for the Doctor to get Indian animals. And because he was a doctor, he knew that this snake's poison is difficult to find in a dead body. So every night he put the snake through the air-vent, and it went down the bell-rope on to the bed. Of course, nobody must see the snake, so every night he whistled to call it back. The sound of metal falling was the door of the metal box, which was the snake's home. Perhaps the snake came through the air-vent many times before it killed Julia. But in the end it killed her. And Helen, too, nearly died because of this snake.

‘But tonight, when I hit the snake on the rope, it was angry and went back through the air-vent. And so it killed the Doctor. I'm not sorry about that.’

Soon after this Helen Stoner married her young man and tried to forget the terrible deaths of her sister and stepfather. But she never really forgot the speckled band.

- THE END -

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