

'What about poison?'

'The doctors examined her for it, but without success.'

'What do you think this unfortunate lady died of, then?'

'I believe that she died of fear, though I cannot imagine what frightened her so much.'

'Ah, and what did you think she meant by a band – a speckled band?'

'I do not know. Perhaps it was wild talk caused by fear. Perhaps she meant a band of people – those travellers in the woods. Many of them wear spotted handkerchiefs.'

Holmes shook his head. 'Please continue with your story,' he said.

'Two years have passed since then, and until recently my life has been a lonely one. A month ago, however, a dear friend, who I have known for many years, asked me to marry him. My stepfather has agreed to our marriage, and this will happen in the spring.'

'Two days ago, some repairs were started in the west part of the building, and I have had to move into my sister's room. Imagine my terror when, last night, I suddenly heard the low whistle which she talked about on the night she died. I jumped up and lit the lamp, but I could see nothing in the room.'

'I was too frightened to go to bed again, so I got dressed.

When daylight came, I ran to the Crown Inn and got a carriage to Leatherhead. I have come from there this morning, to see you and to ask your advice.'

'You have been very sensible,' said my friend. 'But have you told me everything?'

'Yes, everything.'

'Miss Stoner, you have not. You are protecting your stepfather.'

'What do you mean?'

Holmes took Helen Stoner's hand, which lay on her knee, and pulled it forward a little. On her wrist were five little red spots,

the marks of four fingers and a thumb.

'He has been cruel to you,' said Holmes.

The lady looked embarrassed, and covered her wrist. 'He is a difficult man,' she said, 'and perhaps he does not know his own strength.'

There was a long silence. Holmes stared into the fire.

'This is a very complicated business,' he said at last. 'There are a thousand details which I would like to know. But we cannot waste time. If we came to Stoke Moran today, would it be possible for us to see these rooms without your stepfather's knowledge?'

'Yes, I think so. He spoke of spending the whole day in London. He has some important business here.'

'Excellent. You will come with me, Watson?'

'I shall be very pleased to come.'

'I have one or two things that I would like to do since I am in London. But I shall return by the twelve o'clock train.'

'Then you will see us early in the afternoon,' Holmes said.

'Will you not eat breakfast with us?'

'No, I must go. I feel better since I have told my trouble to you. I shall look forward to seeing you again this afternoon.'

She dropped her veil over her face, and left the room.

'And what do you think of it all, Watson?' asked Sherlock

Holmes, sitting back in his chair.

'It seems to me a terrible business. But the lady said that there is no way through the floor and walls. The chimney has iron bars across it, and nobody could pass through the door or the window. That means her sister was certainly alone when she met her strange death.'

'What about these whistles in the night, and the very odd words of the dying woman?'

'I have no idea.'

'I think it is possible that these travelling people had

something to do with it. They are close friends of the old doctor, and the doctor may want to stop his stepdaughter's marriage. Then we must think about the whistles and the speckled band. But what . . . !'

These last words were spoken because our door had suddenly been pushed open and a very large man had appeared in the room. His clothes were a strange mix. He had on the black hat and long black coat of a professional man, but his trousers were the type that you would see on a farmer. He had a thick walking stick in his hand.

His large face was very lined, burned yellow by the sun. He turned his hate-filled eyes from one to the other of us.

'Which of you is Holmes?' he asked.

'That is my name, sir,' said Holmes, 'And you are . . . ?'

'I am Dr Grimesby Roylott of Stoke Moran.'

'Really?' said Holmes quietly. 'Please take a seat.'

'No, I will not. My daughter has been here. What has she been saying to you?'

'It is a little cold for this time of year,' Holmes said.

'What has she been saying to you?' screamed the old man, now very angry.

'But the flowers are starting to appear,' continued Holmes.

'Ha! You refuse to answer?' said our new visitor, taking a step forward and waving his stick in the air. 'I know you, you troublemaker! You are Holmes, the man who cannot keep his nose out of other people's business.' My friend smiled. 'Holmes, the man who pretends to be a policeman!'

Holmes laughed loudly. 'Your conversation is very entertaining,' he said. 'When you leave, please close the door.'

'I will leave when I have said what I want to say. Stay away from my business. I know that Miss Stoner has been here — I had her followed! I am a dangerous man! Look.' He stepped quickly forward, picked up the poker, and bent it into a curve with his

large brown hands. Then, throwing the poker into the fireplace, he marched out of the room.

'He seems to be a very nice man,' Holmes said, laughing. 'I am not quite so big, but I think my strength is almost as great as his.' As he spoke, he picked up the poker. With a sudden pull on each end, he straightened it again.

'This makes the whole case more interesting,' he added. 'I only hope that our little friend will not suffer because she came here. And now, Watson, we shall order breakfast, and afterwards I shall go to the records office. I hope to get some useful information there.'

It was nearly one o'clock when Sherlock Holmes returned. He held in his hand a sheet of blue paper, with notes and figures written on it.

'I have seen the will of the dead wife,' he said. 'There is a large sum of money which, eight years ago, produced about £1,100 a year. Now, because of the fall in farming prices, the amount is probably less than £750. And when a daughter marries, she will receive £250 a year.'

'So, if both girls — or even one girl — married, there would be little money for him. My morning's work has not been wasted. He has very strong reasons for stopping their marriages.'

'Watson, this is very serious, and the old man knows that we are interested in his business. If you are ready, we will call a carriage and drive to Waterloo. Please bring your revolver. It may be necessary to use it.'

At Waterloo we caught a train for Leatherhead, where we hired a carriage at the station inn. We drove through the lovely Surrey country roads. It was a perfect day, with a bright sun and a few light clouds in the sky. The trees were just beginning to show their new leaves, and the air was full of the pleasant smell of the wet earth. There was a big difference between the beauty of the spring and the dark business which had brought us here.

My friend sat in the front of the carriage, thinking hard. His hat was pulled down over his eyes, and his chin was on his chest. Suddenly, however, he sat up, touched me on the shoulder, and pointed over the fields at a large, very old grey house.

'Look there,' he said. 'Stoke Moran.'

'Yes sir, that is the house of Dr Grimesby Roylott,' said the driver.

'There is some building work there,' said Holmes. 'That is where we are going.'

'There's the village,' said the driver, pointing to a group of roofs a little way away, 'but the footpath through the fields is quicker. There it is, where the lady is walking.'

'And the lady, I think, is Miss Stoner,' said Holmes.

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

'I thought,' said Holmes, 'that the driver should think we had come here as builders, or on some definite business. It may stop him talking. Good afternoon, Miss Stoner.'

Our visitor of the morning hurried forward to meet us. 'I've been waiting for you,' she cried, shaking hands with us warmly. 'Everything is going well. Dr Roylott has gone to London and is unlikely to be back before evening.'

'We have already met the doctor,' said Holmes, and in a few words he told her what had happened.

Miss Stoner turned white as she listened.

'Oh no!' she cried. 'He has followed me, then?'

'You must lock yourself away from him tonight. 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. Please take us to the rooms which we need to examine.'

The house was built of grey stone, with a central part and two curving side parts. The windows on one side were broken, and covered with wooden boards. The central part was in better

condition, but the part on the right-hand side was quite modern. This was where the family lived.

Some building work was being done on the end wall, but there were no workmen at the time of our visit. Holmes carefully examined the outsides of the windows.

'This, I believe, belongs to your old room, the centre one to your sister's, and the one next to the main building belongs to Dr Roylott's bedroom?'

'Yes, but I am now sleeping in the middle room.'

'Because of the building work, as I understand. I can see no great need for repairs to that end wall.'

'The work is unnecessary. I believe that it is an excuse to move me from my room.'

'Ah! That is interesting. Now, would you please go into your room, and lock the shutters.'

Miss Stoner did so. Holmes took out a knife and tried to force the shutter open, but without success.

'Hm,' he said. 'No one could get through these shutters if the iron bars were in place, locking them. Well, perhaps the inside of the room will give us some ideas.'

A small side-door led into the white painted passage. We went first into the middle room, where Miss Stoner was now sleeping. It was quite small, with a low ceiling and a wide fireplace. A brown chest of drawers stood in one corner, a narrow bed in another, and a table on the left-hand side of the window. The only other furniture was two small chairs.

The walls were covered with wood, which looked about the same age as the house. Holmes pulled one of the chairs into a corner and sat silently. His eyes moved around, examining every detail of the room.

'When that bell rings, who answers it?' he asked at last. He pointed to a thick bell rope which hung down beside the bed. The end of it was actually lying on the pillow.

'It goes to the servant's room.'

'It looks newer than everything else in the room.'

'Yes, it was only put there two years ago.'

'Your sister asked for it, I suppose?'

'No, she never used it. When we wanted something, we got it ourselves.'

'Then it does not seem necessary to have such a nice bell rope there. Please excuse me for a few minutes while I look at this floor.'

He lay face-down and examined the spaces between the boards. Then he did the same with the wood around the walls. He walked to the bed and stared at it. Finally, he took the bell rope in his hand and pulled it.

'It is not a real bell!' he said. 'This is very interesting. It is fixed to the wall just above the ventilator.'

'How silly! I have never noticed that before.'

'Very strange!' said Holmes quietly, pulling at the rope. 'There are one or two unusual things about this room. For example, why does that ventilator go into another room, when it could open to the outside air?'

'That is also quite modern,' the lady said.

'Was it put in at about the same time as the bell rope?'

Holmes asked.

'Yes, there were several little changes at that time.'

'Bell ropes which do not pull, and ventilators which do not ventilate. Now, with your permission, Miss Stoner, we will move next door.'

Dr Roylott's room was larger than Helen's, but it also had little furniture in it. There was a bed, a small wooden shelf of books, an armchair beside the bed, a plain wooden chair against the wall, a round table, and a large iron box. Holmes walked slowly round and round, examining everything with great interest.

'What is in here?' he asked, touching the box.

'My stepfather's business papers.'

'Oh! You have seen inside?'

'Only once. Some years ago. I remember it was full of papers.'

'There is not a cat in it, for example?'

'No. What a strange idea!'

'Well, look at this!' He picked up a small bowl of milk which was on top of it.

'No, we do not keep a cat, but there are some larger animals around.'

'Ah yes, of course. But this is a very small bowl. Now, I would like to check one thing.'

He bent down in front of the wooden chair, and examined it closely.

'Thank you. That is fine,' he said, standing up straight again.

'Ah! Here is something interesting.'

He had seen a small dog lead, hanging on one corner of the bed. The end of it was tied in a small circle.

'What do you think of that, Watson?'

'It is an ordinary lead. But I do not know why it is tied.'

'That is not so normal, is it? Well, I think I have seen enough now, Miss Stoner. With your permission, we shall walk in the garden again.'

When we left the room, my friend's face was more serious than I have ever seen it. We walked several times up and down the garden before he spoke.

'Miss Stoner, you must follow my advice completely. If you do not, you may die.'

'I shall do what you want me to do.'

'First, my friend and I must spend the night in your room.'

Both Miss Stoner and I looked at him in surprise.

'Yes, we must. Let me explain. I believe that is the village inn over there?'

'Yes, that is the Crown.'

'Very good. Your windows can be seen from there?'
'Certainly.'

'You must stay in your room when your stepfather comes back. When he goes to his room for the night, you must open the shutters of your window and put your lamp there so we can see it. Then you must go into your old bedroom. I am sure that you can manage there for one night.'

'Oh, yes, easily.'

'We will spend the night in your room. We will try to discover the reason for the noise that you have heard.'

'I believe, Mr Holmes, that you already know the answer,' said Miss Stoner, placing her hand on my friend's arm.

'Perhaps I do.'

'Then please tell me the cause of my sister's death.'

'I would prefer to be more certain before I speak.'

'Do you think she died of fear?'

'No, I do not think so. I think there was probably a more real cause. And now, Miss Stoner, we must leave you. If Dr Roylott returned, and saw us, our journey would be for nothing. Goodbye, and be brave.'

R2 Sherlock Holmes and I took a bedroom and a sitting-room at the Crown Inn. They were upstairs on the first floor, and from our window we could see the house quite easily. Early in the evening we saw Dr Roylott drive past in a carriage. A few minutes later, there was a sudden light among the trees as the lamp was lit in one of the sitting-rooms.

'Watson,' said Holmes, as we sat together in the growing darkness, 'I am unsure about taking you tonight. I think there may be some danger.'

'Can I help?'

'You might be very useful.'

'Then I shall certainly come. I think you saw more in those rooms than I could see.'

'Well, I knew that we would find a ventilator before we even came to the house.'

'My dear Holmes!'

'Oh, yes, I did. Helen Stoner said that her sister could smell the smoke of Dr Roylott's cigarettes. That, of course, suggested that there must be an opening between the two rooms. It could only be a small one, because the police did not report it. It had to be a ventilator.'

'But is that important?'

'Don't you think it is strange?' Holmes asked me. 'A ventilator is put in, a bell rope is hung, and the lady in the bed dies. Did you notice that the bed was fixed to the floor? The lady could not move her bed. It had to stay there — near the bell rope, and under the ventilator.'

'Holmes,' I cried, 'I am beginning to understand! We must stop a clever and horrible crime.'

'Yes, when a doctor becomes a criminal, he is the worst of criminals. He has all the knowledge that is necessary for murder. I think we may have a terrible night ahead of us. For the moment, let us have a quiet pipe and try to think about something more cheerful.'

At about nine o'clock, the light among the trees went out, and the house went dark. Two hours passed slowly, and then, suddenly, a single bright light shone out.

'That is our sign,' said Holmes, jumping to his feet. 'It comes from the middle window.'

A moment later, we were out on the dark road. When we got near the house, we left the road and walked through the trees. We reached the garden, walked quietly through it and climbed into the bedroom. Holmes silently closed the shutters. Then he moved the lamp on to the table and looked around the room. It seemed just the same as before.

He came close to me and, speaking in a whisper, said, 'The