

Sherlock Holmes and the Speckled Band – With Revisions by Edward Stiner

A One Act Play
By James M. Kemp

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A One Act Play Adapted from a Short Story by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

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Cast of Characters

Sherlock Holmes – the classic Sir Arthur Conan Doyle private detective.

Dr. Watson – the classic Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Sidekick.

Helen and Julia Stoner – twin sisters in late 20s; Julia is deceased. Helen is living.

Mrs. Hudson – the classic Sir Arthur Conan Doyle housekeeper to Sherlock Holmes.

Dr. Grimesby Roylott – owner of Stoke Moran, the ancestral home of Helen and Julia Stoner, Roylott's stepdaughters.

Setting

Scene One takes place in the suite of rooms owned by Sherlock Holmes and located at 221B Baker St., London.

Scene Two takes place in the bedroom of Helen Stoner, located at Stoke Moran.

The stage is relatively bare. Lighting effects identify the two areas of each scene. Downstage is the suite of rooms on Baker Street. Upstage is the bedroom of Helen Stoner.

At curtain rise, Dr. Watson stands in spotlight with the rest of the stage dark. The darkened stage contains set pieces including two Victorian chairs at opposite sides of the stage, a tea cart containing a chessboard downstage right. Downstage left is a Victorian stand. On the stand, is a violin.

The darkened upstage contains a canopy bed, a bell rope and a dressing table.

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Scene One

Dr. Watson addresses the audience.

Dr. Watson – I recall that evening in 1883 very well. I had recently moved into one of the rooms of my friend Sherlock Holmes, the consulting detective. My own rooms were being redecorated and Holmes had suggested that I should be his houseguest during the renovations. We were playing our usual evening game of chess as Holmes plucked at his violin absentmindedly from across the room, when our game was interrupted by Mrs. Hudson knocking on the chamber door. It was rather unusual for Holmes to receive guests that late in the evening.

Holmes – you may come in Mrs. Hudson. Dr. Watson and I are decent.

Mrs. Hudson enters. She carries a tray containing two small glasses of milk.

Mrs. Hudson – Good evening sir. Dr. Watson. I thought you gentlemen might enjoy cool glass of milk at bedtime. However, I must advise you of an uninvited guest who is presently seated in the entryway. While I told her that you normally do not accept visitors at this hour, I would nevertheless advise you of her presence.

Holmes – And just how old is this female visitor?

Mrs. Hudson - Sir, the young lady appears to be in her late 20s. Her attire suggests that she may have come from the well-to-do family. However, the style of her clothing tends to be outdated and the colors are fading. She claims to be one Helen Stoner of Stoke Moran.

Dr. Watson – Stoner? Holmes, do you suppose this young lady might be the daughter of the Sir Harold Stoner, deceased?

Mrs. Hudson - Sir, in fact the young lady did mention her deceased father being Sir Harold.

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Dr. Watson - As I recall, Holmes, Sir Harold passed into the next life shortly after returning from an assignment in India.

Holmes - Precisely Watson. He was somehow involved with some strange goings-on while on assignment. Upon his return from India, it seems he fell on hard times. Stoke Moran went to rack and ruin after his death.

Dr. Watson – And it was only a few years later that his widow remarried, rather suddenly.

Holmes – Yes, Watson. It seems the widow took a fancy for one of Sir Harold’s officers. Another doctor whose surname is Roylott. Although it is not certain as to the exact nature of Roylott’s practice. In fact, I seem to recall Roylott’s being involved in some sort of scandal while he was stationed in India.

Dr. Watson – Mrs. Hudson, did the young lady make any representations as to why she needs to talk with Mr. Holmes?

Mrs. Hudson – In fact, she did Sir. Young lady stated that she had recently lost her twin sister, Julia Stoner. She seemed quite upset about losing her sister, in circumstances that she stated to be suspicious.

Holmes – Well then Mrs. Hudson, perhaps we should entertain this late calling guest. Invite her in and we shall see why she is upset.

Mrs. Hudson – Very well Sir. Shall I bring him a glass of milk for her?

Holmes – No Mrs. Hudson, that would only encourage her to continue to make late calls.

Mrs. Hudson – Very well Sir. Shall I bring in another chair for the young lady?

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Dr. Watson – Now that really would encourage her to extended her stay with us.

Holmes – No Mrs. Hudson, Dr. Watson and I will stand during the interview.

Mrs. Hudson – Very well Sir.

Mrs. Hudson exits.

Holmes – Watson, what do you suppose this Helen Stoner is up to?

Dr. Watson – Only the Good Lord knows, Holmes. But, I do recall seeing an article in the Times' society column announcing the engagement of the deceased sister several months ago. And, a few weeks after that, a second announcement in the Times. The second announcement dealt with the engagement of this same sister, Helen Stoner, the young lady we are about to entertain.

Holmes – Watson, was there any mention of Dr. Roylott?

Dr. Watson –I don't recall all of the details of the announcements, but I think I also would've noticed the mention of another physician. And I remember no such mention.

Holmes – And don't you find that peculiar, Watson? The mother of the twin daughters was deceased by that time and Roylott, as the twins' stepfather, would have been mentioned under normal circumstances.

Dr. Watson – Holmes, any meeting you have had in the past with a member of the opposite sex, would not be considered normal circumstances.

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Mrs. Hudson and Helen Stoner enter stage left.

Mrs. Hudson – Miss Helen Stoner, Sir of Stoke Moran.

Helen Stoner takes center downstage between Watson and Holmes. She appears to be quite nervous and wrings her gloved hands together. Mrs. Hudson exits.

Holmes – Miss Stoner. This is my associate, Dr. Watson.

Helen – Dr. Watson, pleased to make your acquaintance. And I presume you are the famed private detective, Mr. Sherlock Holmes.

Holmes – In fact I am, Miss Stoner. My housekeeper, Mrs. Hudson, tells Watson and myself that you are distraught over your twin sister's apparently sudden demise.

Helen – Yes, Mr. Holmes. And in my opinion, you are correct. My twin sister's death was sudden and unexpected. Julia had no history of any chronic disease which might've contributed to her death. In fact she had been in good humor, anticipating being able to leave Stoke Moran upon her marriage which was imminent.

Holmes – And tell me Miss Stoner, why would your sister anticipate being able to leave Stoke Moran and was apparently looking forward to leaving?

Helen – Because of our stepfather. Dr. Grimesby Roylott. You see, Mr. Holmes, Dr. Watson, even though Stoke Moran had fallen upon difficult times after the deaths of our parents, Roylott had taken it upon himself to allow the tribe of Irish Traveler Gypsies to set up their disheveled camp of caravans on our very estate. Furthermore, our stepfather upon returning from the far east, brought with him a menagerie of wild animals. He allows these animals to roam freely about the estate.

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Dr. Watson – Miss Stoner, the Irish Travelers have been known to invade places of commerce and to ravage those places by stealing everything in sight.

Helen – Yes, Dr. Watson. The Travelers do have that reputation. My sister and I allowed Roylott to entertain these guests on our property after Roylott claimed that the Travelers were actually commercial tinkers who were willing to do repairs at Stoke Moran in exchange for being able to park their caravans on our property.

Holmes – Tell me, Miss Stoner. Did the Travelers actually perform maintenance work at Stoke Moran?

Helen – Well, Mr. Holmes, in fact the Travelers were always underfoot about the main house doing some sort of work at all hours of the day and night. In fact, the Travelers were sprucing up Julia's chamber only a few days before her demise. Julia had moved into the chamber next door to Roylott during the renovation.

Dr. Watson – Was there any connection between the two chambers?

Helen – None. Furthermore, on the night of my sister's demise, I heard her scream from that chamber and ran down the hall from my own chamber to find that her door was locked from the inside. I ran back to my room and obtained a master key. I ran back to her room and unlocked the door. Julia was alive when I entered the room. She was gasping for air and had a very frightened look on her face. Julia grasped my hand and in her dying words whispered, "It was the band. The speckled band." And then Julia took her last breath.

Dr. Watson – What do you suppose your sister was referring to when she said, "it was a speckled band"?

Helen – My first thought went to my imagining evil acts by one of the Travelers. They are known to wear bandannas on their heads which often have speckled patterns.

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Holmes – However as of the present, miss Stoner, you seem to be implying that your first impression might have been wrong.

Helen – Mr. Holmes, the longer I thought about my sister's death, the more I became convinced that our stepfather may have held motives which might have caused him to benefit from my sister's death. That motive involves a substantial legacy left to us by our mother whose will stipulated that we would each, my sister and I, inherit that legacy upon our marriage.

Mrs. Hudson suddenly enters the room followed by an obviously outraged Roylott.

Mrs. Hudson – Sorry to interrupt Sir. This man claims to be the stepfather of your current visitor.

Roylott – In fact, not only am I the stepfather of Helen Stoner, I am also trustee of her interest in the estate of Stoke Moran.

Helen – Stepfather! Why have you bothered to follow me here where I'm conducting personal business?

Roylott – Helen, I followed you here because I suspect your motives in discussing personal business with a private detective.

Holmes – Dr. Roylott, your stepdaughter was just informing my associate and I about some strange occurrences at Stoke Moran which may be involved in the cause of death of Helen's twin sister, Julia.

Roylott – Julia's death was certainly unfortunate and unexpected. However the coroner's inquiry reported that Julia passed on as a result of an undiagnosed coronary condition.

Holmes – In that case, Dr. Roylott, I would think that you should have no objection to Dr. Watson and myself making a simple examination of the chamber in which Julia Stoner died.

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Roylott – I don't know why you would want to make such an examination unless you suspected foul play which has been ruled out in this case.

Dr. Watson – Excuse me, Dr. Roylott. But exactly who has ruled out foul play, as you claim?

Roylott – By an officer appointed to be the official coroner by the Court of St. James.

Holmes – However, Dr. Roylott. The stepdaughter here has advised us of some very peculiar situations that exist at Stoke Moran. Something to do with Irish Gypsy Travelers.

Roylott – The Travelers are my guests. They are professional tinkers who perform maintenance at Stoke Moran. I realize they have a bad reputation in some parts of the realm. However, they perform valuable services for an estate that has fallen on hard times.

Holmes – Therefore, Dr. Roylott, given this bad reputation, given the possibility that Julia may not have died from a chronic condition, as Helen has described to us the circumstances on the night of Julia's demise, the involvement of myself and Watson here could only serve to enhance our understanding and Helen's understanding of the cause of her twin sister's death.

Roylott – And so, Mr. Holmes, I suppose that you and Dr. Watson here would like to inspect Stoke Moran in order to satisfy the superstitions of my stepdaughter.

Holmes – Yes. Our inspection of the estate may result in some sort of fortuitous information that might further explain the cause of death of Julia Stoner.

Roylott – Then by God, have at it! Make your inspection posthaste. I myself have nothing to hide. In fact, I still find myself mourning the death of my wife.

Dr. Watson – Dr. Roylott, I don't recall ever having heard what the cause of death was, where your deceased wife is concerned.

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Roylott – It seems that the undiagnosed heart condition discovered at the time of Julia Stoner’s autopsy, may have been hereditary. In fact, that condition may even be present in the case of the twin standing before us in this room.

Holmes – Then Dr. Roylott, posthaste it shall be. Dr. Watson and I will conduct our inspection of Stoke Moran tomorrow evening. Now the two of you will excuse us, it is getting late and we will meet our rest in order to do our best at the time of our inspection tomorrow.

Stage lights dim as the cast exits. The chairs and contents of the Baker Street rooms are removed from the stage. Lights come up on the upstage area where Julia Stoner’s chamber is seen.

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Scene Two