

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SPECKLED BAND
(Continued From Page Five)

"Were there gypsies in the plantation at the time?"
"Yes, there are nearly always some here."
"Ah, and what did you gather from his 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 gypsies 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."

CHAPTER III.

"Two years have passed since then," continued Miss Stoner, "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 honor 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 fringe 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 colored 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 my course of action. Yet we have not a moment to lose. If we were to come to Stoke Moran today, 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 today upon some most important business. It is probable that he will be away all day, and 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, her feet pattering on the carpet.
"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, windows, 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 gypsies who are 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, and finally the fact that Miss Helen Stoner heard a metallic clang, which might have been caused by one of those metal

bars which secured the shutters falling back into their place. I think that there is good ground to think that the mystery may be cleared along those lines."
"But what, then, did the gypsies 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, scarred 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-stained eyes, and his 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 meddling!"
My friend smiled.
"Holmes, the busybody!"
His smile broadened.
"Holmes, the Scotland-yard Jack-in-office!"
Holmes chuckled heartily. "Your conversation is most entertaining." "You 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 1,100 pounds, is now, through the fall in agricultural prices, not more than 750 pounds. Each daughter can claim an income of 350 pounds, 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."

CHAPTER IV.

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, and 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 head pulled down over his eyes, and his chin sunk upon his breast, buried in the deepest thought, 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 gray walls and high roof-trees 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. "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, "(Continued on Page Seven)



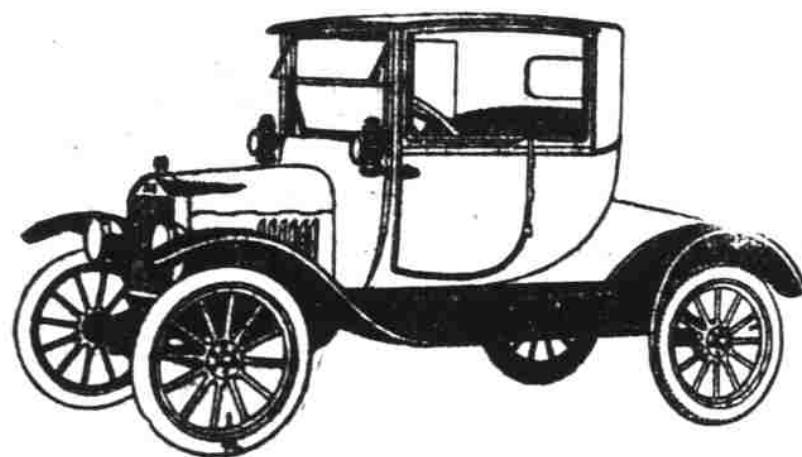
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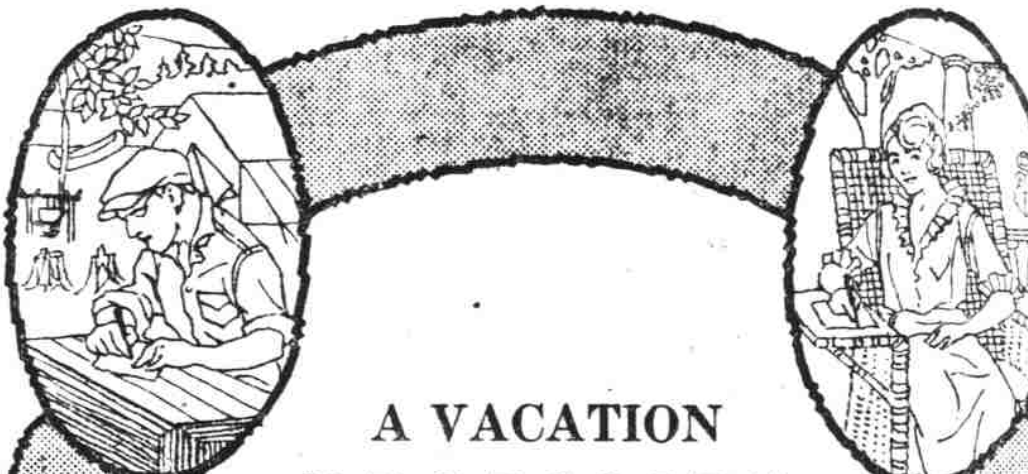
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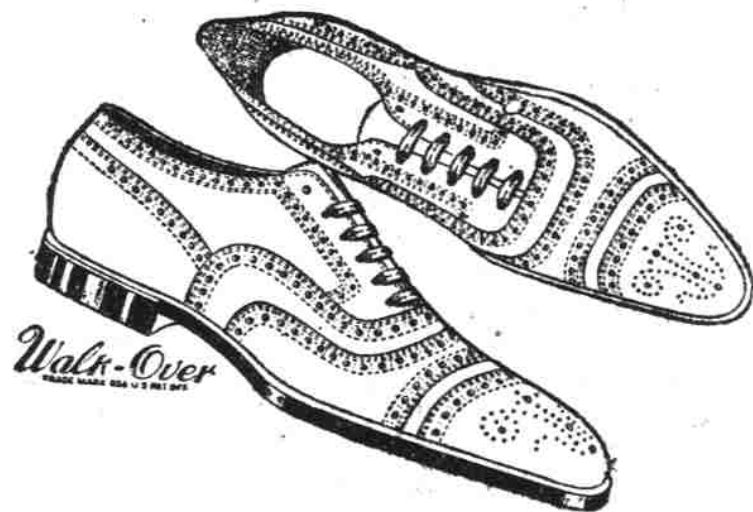


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