

"Watson," said Holmes as we sat looking out at the house, "I must warn you that we could be in danger tonight."

"Danger? But how?" I asked. "I didn't see anything this afternoon that suggested danger. You have clearly seen more than I have in these rooms."

"No, we have seen the same things," replied Holmes. "But I have reasoned out what those things mean. First, there is the air vent, which I expected to find. Miss Stoner said that her sister could smell her stepfather's cigar smoke the night she died. That told me that there would be a vent connecting the two rooms. There is also the bell-rope that doesn't ring a bell. Plus the interesting fact that the air vent and the bell-rope were put in the room at the same time.

"What you may not have seen was an odd feature about the bed. It was clamped to the floor. That means you could not move the bed away from the bell-rope and air vent. Yes, Watson. We are dealing with a dreadful criminal. We may have a night of horrors ahead of us."

As the hours passed, the two of us watched the distant, dark house. Finally, a light appeared in a window. It was our signal. We left the inn and made our way through the fields. Suddenly, as we were crossing the lawn, a dark figure darted from the bushes. The creature's arms and legs flew wildly as it ran off into the shadows.

"My word!" I gasped. "What was *that*?"

Holmes laughed quietly. "This is a strange case indeed. Watson. That was the doctor's baboon. Now quickly. Let us climb in the bedroom window before we see the cheetah as well.



We crawled in through the window and closed it behind us. Once inside, Holmes whispered to me. "Do not make a sound, Watson. I will sit on the bed. You sit in that chair. Have your gun ready." Holmes had brought a cane with him, and he placed it on the bed. "We must sit in the dark. We do not want Dr. Roylott to see anything." He turned out the lamp, and we were in total darkness.

The hours passed as we waited silently. A church bell echoed in the distance. A bird called in the night. Then we heard a sound that could only come from a large, wild cat. It was the cheetah walking by the bedroom window.

After a long wait, my eyes caught a dim flicker of light from the air vent above the bed. The light quickly disappeared and was followed by the odour of burning oil. Someone had lighted a lamp in the next room. Next came the sound of movement, followed by silence.

A half hour passed before I heard something else. It was a quiet hissing sound, like steam from a boiling kettle. Suddenly, Holmes jumped from the bed. He struck a match, grabbed his cane, and swung it at the bell-rope. At the same time, I heard a low, whistling sound.

"Did you see it, Watson?" yelled Holmes. "Did you see it?"

My companion was looking up at the air vent. Just then, a loud cry filled Stoke Moran. It was a cry of pain and fear that turned into an angry shriek. As Holmes and I stared at each other, the cry faded away into silence.

We ran into the hallway, to the door of Dr. Roylott's room. Holmes knocked loudly. No one answered, so we opened the door and entered. The room was lit by the light of a lamp. We could see that the safe was open. Dr. Grimesby Roylott sat on a wooden chair that Holmes had studied earlier in the day. The doctor was in his dressing gown and slippers. The coiled rope lay across his lap.

The doctor did not move. His head was turned toward the ceiling, and his eyes started upward. Wrapped tightly around his head was a strange yellow band. It was covered with brown speckles.

"The band! The speckled band!" Whispered Holmes.

As I took a step forward, the band began to move. Then the head and puffed-up collar of a snake rose up out of the doctor's hair.



"It is a swamp adder!" cried Holmes. "The deadliest snake in India. The doctor's murder weapon has turned on him. He has been bitten." Holmes took the rope and put it across the snake's collar. He tightened it and carefully conveyed the snake into the safe. "It is too late for us to do anything for him. But we must take Miss Stoner from this place, and call the police."

The next day, as Holmes and I returned to London by train, he explained the facts of the case to me. "At first, Watson, I was on the wrong track, I knew that Miss Stoner's sister had used the word 'band'. I also knew of the travellers who were camping nearby. So I thought the solution to the mystery lay with the band of travellers.

"But when we inspected the rooms. I realised that no-one could have entered the locked bedroom. I also took note of the bell-rope, the air became clear to me that the rope was a bridge between the bed and the air vent. Right away, I thought of a

snake. If Dr. Roylott had a cheetah and a baboon, he might easily have a snake. As a doctor who practiced in India, he would also know that this snake's poison could not be detected. And he would know that its bite would be invisible.

"When his stepdaughter Julia became engaged," Holmes explained, "he did not want her to get the money. So he put the bell-rope in her room and had the air vent installed. Once they were in place, he waited until his stepdaughter was asleep. I could tell from looking at the chair in his room that he stood on it to reach the air vent. He would place the snake in the air vent. The deadly creature would crawl through the vent, down the rope and onto the victim's bed.

"At first, the snake did not attack Julia Stoner. But the doctor had trained it to return at the sound of a whistle. That is what she heard. The milk also helped lure the snake back to Roylott's room. He would then catch it with the rope and put it in the safe. The clanging sound that the sisters heard was that of the safe being closed.

"And so, last night, I listened for the faintest sound that a snake could make. When I heard the hissing, I lit a match and attacked it. The creature quickly slithered back to Dr. Roylott's room. But I had hit it with my cane, making it angry. So when it returned to the doctor's bedroom, it attacked."

Sherlock Holmes looked out the window at the English countryside. It was hard to imagine that last night's events had taken place in such a peaceful setting. "The murderer is dead," he said, "killed by his own strange murder weapon."