

Sherlock Holmes Essay Contest

2012 Clarkson Prize Winning Essay

This year, Watson's Tin Box is celebrating its Eight Annual Sherlock Holmes Essay Contest for seventh graders in Howard County, Maryland. Once again, the Tin Box partnered with Howard County Library and Howard County Public Schools. Participating students read the *Adventure of the Speckled Band* and wrote essays. English teachers in the Public Schools voluntarily participated, and Howard County Library made the participation possible for home schooled, private school, and public school students (whose teachers do not participate). Watson's Tin Box is very grateful to its partners for making this contest such a success. We survey the teachers to find out how many of them used the *Speckled Band* as part of their curriculum as a result of the contest. This year, we reached approximately 350 children. Over the last eight years, the contest has reached more than 2,550 students.

Each year, the Tin Box has awarded First, Second, and Third Place Prizes to the top three essays. The First Prize in the contest is *The Clarkson Prize*, an award named after Tin Box founder Steve Clarkson, BSI, who was a mentor to so many young Sherlockians. Steve started a Sherlock Holmes literary society for young people in the late 1960s. It included members from across the country. Before the advent of email, the young Sherlockians would distribute their analyses of the Sherlock Holmes stories to each other in real envelopes. Steve continued his mentoring of young Sherlockians until he passed away in 2004.

The 2012 winner was Matt, a 13 year old student. A hearty congratulations for a job well done! With his (and his parents') approval, Matt's essay is being published in *Irene's Cabinet*, the annual journal of Watson's Tin Box, and posted on the Tin Box and Beacon Society web sites. It is with great pride that we publish this year's Clarkson Prize winning essay on the *Speckled Band*. Matt can be proud to be a young published author.

"The Adventure of the Speckled Band"

By Matt

It was in "The Adventure of The Speckled Band" that Sherlock Holmes, detective extraordinaire, met the strange and mysterious Doctor Roylott. In the case, Julia Stoner, stepdaughter to Dr. Roylott and sister to Helen Stoner, died of an unknown cause a short time before her wedding. Years later, Helen, herself, began to experience the same series of events that led up to her sister's premature demise. Frightened, she sought help from Sherlock Holmes. Dr. Roylott's relationship with his stepdaughters was by no means a good one. He was unconcerned about his stepdaughters' happiness or well-being, took extreme measures to keep their mother's fortune from them, and, yet, despite it all, his stepdaughter Helen still managed to feel defensive for him.

Dr. Roylott was most certainly unconcerned about his stepdaughters' happiness and well-being. Exemplifying this, Helen says on page 9, "You can imagine from what I say that my poor sister Julia and I had no great pleasure in our lives. No servant would stay with us, and for a long time we did all the work of the house." In the beginning of this quote, Helen states that she and her sister had, "No great pleasure," in their lives. From this, it is easy to deduce (as, if anyone would know how Dr. Roylott treated his stepdaughters, it would definitely be one of the stepdaughters themselves) that Dr. Roylott really had no regard for his stepdaughters' happiness.

If he did, he would have endeavored to provide some sort of pleasure or source of happiness for them to brighten up their lives. Next, in the latter part of the quote, Helen tells how she and her sister were forced to do all the work in the house. Any caring parent or guardian would most certainly not allow this to happen. At the very least, they would have taken some of the work upon themselves to ease the burden on the other family members. However, Dr. Roylott literally abandoned Helen and Julia to labor away at all the household chores as he isolated himself in his room, and, as Helen states on page 8, "wandering away with them [the gypsies] sometimes for weeks on end." Obviously, this shows how little regard Dr. Roylott had for his stepdaughters' well-being, mercilessly working them by leaving them all the household work in the rundown and decrepit Roylott household.

Additionally, Dr. Roylott went to extreme measures to prevent the stepdaughters from claiming their rightful part of their mother's fortune. On page 29, Holmes reveals to Watson Dr. Roylott's method of dispatching his stepdaughters in order to keep their mother's money to himself. Holmes says, "He would put it [the swamp adder] through this ventilator at the hour that he thought best, with the certainty that it would crawl down the rope and land on the bed. It might or might not bite the occupant, perhaps she might escape every night for a week, but sooner or later she must fall a victim." This quote shows that in order to have sole claim to his wife's fortune, Dr. Roylott attempted to murder his stepdaughters, as, when married, they would have a third of the yearly 750 pounds that Mrs. Stoner bequeathed to her family in her will. This also shows that Dr. Roylott thought of his stepdaughters so lowly that he attempted to murder them, just to ensure his future happiness. From what can be deduced from this quote,

it is very evident how broken their relationship was and how Dr. Roylott did not care for his stepdaughters in the least.

Despite Dr. Roylott neglecting, disrespecting, and mistreating his stepdaughters, Helen still managed to find a place in her heart for him and felt defensive of him when he was spoken against. For example, on page 13, when Sherlock Holmes discovers the bruises left by her stepfather, Helen defends him, saying, "He is a hard man ... and perhaps he hardly knows his strength." It would take a good deal of love for a person to say something like that, especially after the years of mistreatment Helen had endured from her stepfather. So, despite most evidence pointing that Dr. Roylott's relationship with his stepdaughters was broken beyond repair, Helen may have just been holding it together with her love, if not for what her stepfather was now, then for what her stepfather had been - for the time before he had returned to Stoke Moran and changed into the vicious brute he was presently. In conclusion, while Dr. Roylott's relationship with his stepdaughters was most certainly a bad one, Helen still managed to have a soft spot in her heart for him and would defend him when he was subject to insult or criticism.

Dr. Roylott's relationship with his stepdaughters was broken and terrible in most respects. He had no regard for his stepdaughters' happiness or well-being; he took extreme measures to prevent the stepdaughters from taking their rightful part of the family fortune; but Helen still managed to feel defensive of him. In closure, say Helen and Julia had married. Dr. Roylott would be forced to survive on only 250 pounds a year, and he had been accustomed to living on three times that much. Understandably, he would be afraid. So, although Dr. Roylott used extreme measures to ensure that this situation would never come to pass, he may have possibly done so out of fear, not, perhaps, simply because he was a bad person.