

The Speckled Band

1

Helen's Story

At the time of this story, I was still living at my friend Sherlock Holmes's flat in Baker Street in London. Very early one morning, a young woman, dressed in black, came to see us. She looked tired and unhappy, and her face was very white. 'I'm afraid! Afraid of death, Mr Holmes!' she cried. 'Please help me! I'm not thirty yet and look at my grey hair! I'm so afraid!'



*Very early one morning, a young woman, dressed in black,
came to see us.*



‘My sister’s face was white and afraid.’

to help her, but we could do nothing. And so my dear, dear sister died.’

‘Are you sure about the whistle and the sound of falling metal?’ asked Holmes.

‘I think so,’ answered Helen. ‘But it was a very wild, stormy night. Perhaps I made a mistake. The police couldn’t understand why my sister died. Her door was locked and nobody could get into her room. They didn’t find any poison in her body. And what was “the speckled band”? Gipsies wear something like that round their necks. I think she died because she was so afraid, but I don’t know what she was afraid of. Perhaps it was the gipsies. What do you think, Mr Holmes?’

Holmes thought for a minute. ‘Hmm,’ he said. ‘That is a difficult question. But please go on.’

‘That was two years ago,’ Helen Stoner said. ‘I have been very lonely without my sister, but a month ago a dear friend asked me to marry him. My stepfather has agreed, and so we’re going to marry soon. But two days ago I had to move to my sister’s old bedroom, because some men are mending my bedroom wall, and last night I heard that whistle again! I ran out of the house immediately and came to London to ask for your help. Please help me, Mr Holmes! I don’t want to die like Julia!’

‘We must move fast,’ said Holmes. ‘If we go to your house today, can we look at these rooms? But your stepfather must not know.’

‘He’s in London today, so he won’t see you. Oh thank you, Mr Holmes, I feel better already.’

2

Holmes and Watson Visit the House

Holmes went out for the morning, but he came back at lunch-time. We then went by train into the country, and took a taxi to Dr Roylott’s house. ‘You see,’ said Holmes to me, ‘our dangerous friend Roylott needs the girls’ money, because he only has £750 a year from his dead wife. I found that out this morning. But the

box. ‘Now, Miss Stoner,’ he said, ‘I think your life is in danger. Tonight my friend Watson and I must spend the night in your sister’s room, where you are sleeping at the moment.’

Helen Stoner and I looked at him in surprise.

‘Yes, we must,’ he went on. ‘We’ll take a room in a hotel in the village. When your stepfather goes to bed, put a light in your sister’s bedroom window and leave it open. Then go into your old room and we’ll get into your sister’s room through the window. We’ll wait for the sound of the whistle and the falling metal.’

‘How did my sister die, Mr Holmes? Do you know?’



‘Now goodbye, Miss Stoner, and don’t be afraid,’ said Holmes.

Please tell me!’ said Helen. She put her hand on Sherlock Holmes’s arm.

‘I must find out more before I tell you, Miss Stoner. Now goodbye, and don’t be afraid,’ replied Sherlock Holmes.

We walked to the village, and Holmes said to me, ‘Tonight will be dangerous, Watson. Royslott is a very violent man.’

‘But if I can help, Holmes, I shall come with you,’ I said.

‘Thank you, Watson. I’ll need your help. Did you see the bell-rope, and the air-vent? I knew about the air-vent before we came. Of course there is a hole between the two rooms. That explains why Helen’s sister could smell Dr Royslott’s cigarette.’

‘My dear Holmes! How clever of you!’ I cried.

‘And did you see the bed? It’s fixed to the floor. *She can’t move it*. It must stay under the rope, which is near the air-vent.’

‘Holmes!’ I cried. ‘I begin to understand! What a terrible crime!’

‘Yes, this doctor is a very clever man. But we can stop him, I think, Watson.’

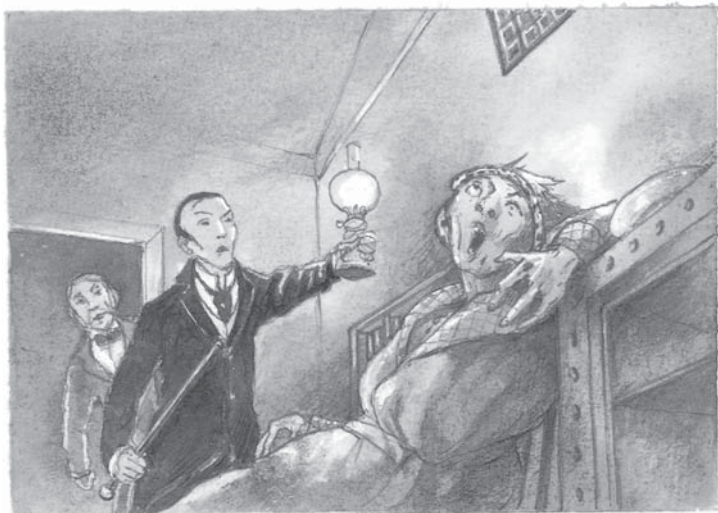
Death in the Night

That night we went back to the house. When we saw Helen Stoner's light, Holmes and I got in quietly through the window. Then we waited silently in the middle bedroom in the dark. We waited for three hours and did not move. Suddenly we saw a light and heard a sound from Dr Roylott's room. But nothing happened, and again we waited in the dark. Then there was another sound, a very quiet sound . . . Immediately Holmes jumped up and hit the bell-rope hard.

'Can you see it, Watson?' he shouted. But I saw nothing. There was a quiet whistle. We both looked up at the air-vent, and suddenly we heard a terrible cry in the next room. Then the house was silent again.



Immediately Holmes jumped up and hit the bell-rope hard.



*Round his head was a strange, yellow speckled band.
He was dead.*

‘What does it mean?’ I asked. My voice was shaking.
‘It’s finished,’ answered Holmes. ‘Let’s go and see.’

We went into Dr Roylott’s room. The metal box was open. Roylott was sitting on a chair, and his eyes were fixed on the air-vent. Round his head was a strange, yellow speckled band. He was dead.

‘The band! The speckled band!’ said Holmes very quietly. The band moved and began to turn its head. ‘Be careful, Watson! It’s a snake, an Indian snake – and its poison can kill very quickly,’ Holmes cried. ‘Roylott died immediately. We must put the snake back in its box.’ Very, very carefully, Holmes took the snake and threw it into the metal box.

‘But how did you know about the snake, Holmes?’ I asked.

‘At first, Watson, I thought that it was the gipsies. But then I understood. I thought that perhaps something came through the air-vent, down the bell-rope and on to the bed. Then there was the milk – and of course, snakes drink milk. It was easy for the Doctor to get Indian animals. And because he was a doctor, he knew that this snake’s poison is difficult to find in a dead body. So every night he put the snake through the air-vent, and it went down the bell-rope on to the bed. Of course, nobody must see the snake, so every night he whistled to call it back. The sound of metal falling was the door of the metal box, which was the snake’s home. Perhaps the snake came through the air-vent many times before it killed Julia. But in the end it killed her. And Helen, too, nearly died because of this snake.

‘But tonight, when I hit the snake on the rope, it was angry and went back through the air-vent. And so it killed the Doctor. I’m not sorry about that.’

Soon after this Helen Stoner married her young man and tried to forget the terrible deaths of her sister and stepfather. But she never really forgot the speckled band.

A Scandal in Bohemia

1

The King's Mistake

For Sherlock Holmes, there was only one woman in the world. He did not love her, because he never loved women. But after their meeting he never forgot her. Her name was Irene Adler.

One night in March I visited my old friend at his home in Baker Street. I was married by now, so I did not often see him.

‘Come in, Watson,’ he said. ‘Sit down. I’m happy to see you, because I’ve got something to show you. What do you think of this? It arrived in the last post.’ It was a letter, with no date, name or address. It said:

‘Tonight someone will visit you, to talk about some very secret business. You have helped other important people, and you can, we hope, help us. Be in your room at 7.45 p.m.’

‘The paper – what do you think about the paper?’ asked Holmes.

I tried to think like Holmes. ‘It’s expensive, so this person is rich. It’s strange paper.’

‘Yes, it’s not English. If you look at it in the light, you can see that it was made in Bohemia. And a German, I think, wrote the letter. Ah, here comes our man now.’