



The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure X – The Adventure of the Speckled Band

Publishing History

10 OF THE 60 STORIES

First published in *The Strand Magazine*, February, 1892 Part of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* collection by George Newnes, Ltd., London, 1892

In the US by Harper Bros., New York, 1892

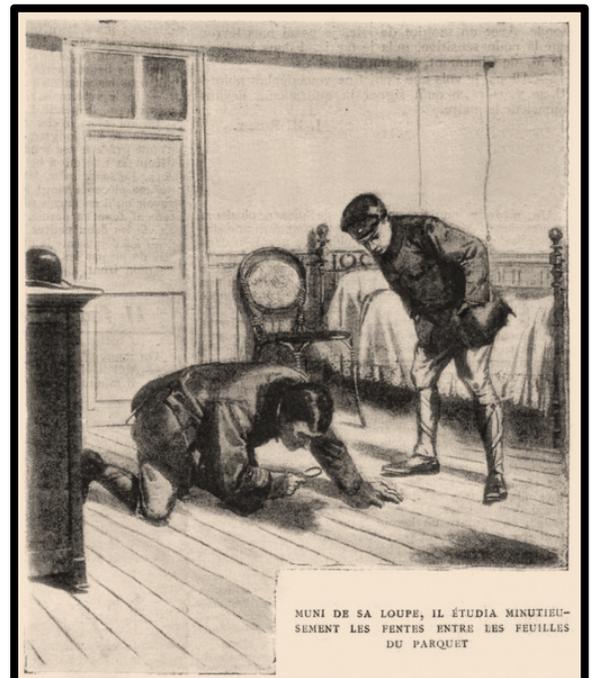
British illustrator was Sidney Paget

Chronology

Baring-Gould places the date of the story at Friday April 6, 1883 which makes it the 15th of the 60 stories. This means that Holmes was 29 and Watson 31.

Christopher Morley Says

“One of the most famous cases, in which the brutal Dr. Roylott terrorizes his twin stepdaughters and twists Holmes’s poker into a curve with his bare hands. Why did the smoke of Dr. Roylott’s strong cigar bother his stepdaughter in another room and why was the bed clamped to the floor?”



Dummies Short Summary

“One of the spookiest and best-known tales in the canon. What killed Julia Stoner as she lay in bed behind her locked bedroom door? What was the mysterious whistle in the night? And what did she mean by, “It was the band! The speckled band”? This story is one of the canon’s best locked-room mysteries.”

How Many Words

At 9,880 words SPEC has the 50th most words (#1 is VEIL – 4,499, #56 is NAVL – 12,701)

Classifying This Case

This case is one of 23 classified as a MURDER and one of 14 where the perpetrator was either killed, arrested, or otherwise satisfactorily handled. And the murdered was a snake.

The Best Of Sherlock Holmes

This story is number 1 on almost every list. Most likely you read it in English class in Junior high or middle school. It is the first story luring people into the world of Sherlock Holmes,

- 1927 – Arthur Conan Doyle made it # 1 on his list of 12 favorites.
- 1944 – The Baker Street Irregulars voted it as #1 on their top 12 favorites.
- 1954 - The Baker Street Irregulars voted it as #1 on their top 12 favorites .
- 1999 – The Sherlock Holmes Society of London voted it as #1 of 56 short stories.

What Else Happened That Year (1883)

- Britain evacuates The Sudan.
- Royal College of Music established.
- The volcano on Krakatoa kills 40,000 and spews ashes around the world, giving red sunsets for decades.
- Germans take Southwest Africa.
- Orient Express begins service from Paris to Istanbul.
- Brooklyn Bridge opens.
- Buffalo Bill organizes his Wild West Show.
- Life Magazine publishes first issue
- Karl Marx dies.
- Robert Louis Stevenson publishes Treasure Island.
- Mark Twain's Life on the Mississippi published.

- New York Metropolitan Opera House opens.
- Sir Victor Horsley discovers role of thyroid gland.
- Edison discovers electricity can travel through space.
- Klebs discovers the bacillus bacterium.
- First skyscraper built in Chicago. Ten stories.

Holmes And Watson – Personal Information

Holmes and Watson are splitting the rent at 221B.

Dramatis Personae

This cast includes the character usually considered the most evil person in the Canon. He is guilty of “murder by snake.”

- **Dr. Grimesby Roylott** of Stoke Moran.
- **Helen Stoner**, step daughter of Dr. Roylott who consulted Holmes.
- **Julia Stoner**, deceased twin of Helen.
- **Mrs. Farintosh**, recommended Holmes to Helen.
- **Major General Stoner** of the Bengal artillery. Harriet and Julia's father.
- **Honorina Westphail**, maternal aunt to the Stoner twins.
- **Percy Armitage** betrothed of Helen.
- **A Swamp Adder** “The deadliest snake in India.” The murderer

Quotable Sherlock

- “Mrs. Hudson on has been knocked up.” *see end
- "This is my intimate friend and associate, Dr. Watson, before whom you can speak as freely as before myself."
- “As to reward, my profession is its own reward; but you are at liberty to defray whatever expenses I may be put to, at the time which suits you best.”
- “These are very deep waters.’

- “You are Holmes, the meddler.”

My Friend Smiled

“Holmes, the busybody!”

His smile broadened.

“Holmes, the Scotland Yard Jack-in-office!”

Holmes chuckled heartily.

- "An Eley's No. 2 is an excellent argument with gentlemen who can twist steel poker into knots."
- "Ah, me! it's a wicked world, and when a clever man turns his brains to crime it is the worst of all."
- "When a doctor does go wrong he is the first of criminals. He has nerve and he has knowledge."
- "Violence does, in truth, recoil upon the violent, and the schemer falls into the pit which he digs for another."
- “In this way I am no doubt responsible indirectly for Dr. Grimesby Roylott’s death, and I cannot say that it is likely to weigh very heavily upon my conscience.”

* **“knocked up”** was an expression used when individuals were paid to rap on one’s bedroom windows to be awakened in the morning in that alarm clocks were very rare.

Holmes’ Fee

Holmes’ client states “in a month or six weeks I shall be married, with the control of my own income, and then at least you shall not find me ungrateful”. Holmes replies “I shall be happy to devote the same care to your case as I did to that of your friend. As to reward, my profession is its own reward; but you are at liberty to defray whatever expenses I may be put to, at the time which suits you best”.

Unrecorded Cases

Two more to the pile of “I need to know more about that” cases.

- Holmes assisted Mrs. Farintosh in a matter concerning an opal tiara
- Palmer and Pritchard – two doctors gone bad

Sherlock Holmes On The Big And The Little Screen

This is one of the most performed Canonical stories on a screen

- 1923 *The Speckled Band* with Eille Norwood as one of his 47 short, but Canonical stories
- 1931 *The Speckled Band* with Raymond Massey in his only portrayal of Holmes
- 1949 *The Adventure of the Speckled Band* with Alien Napier (Batman’s butler) as Holmes

- 1964 *The Speckled Band* with Douglas Wilmer in a episode of his *Sherlock Holmes* TV series
- 1967 *Das gefleckte Band* with Eric Schellow in an episode on German TV. Not available to play on US DVD format
- 1979 *Acquaintance* with Vasily Livanov as a Russian TV episode of *Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson*
- 1980 *The Case of the Speckled Band* with Geoffrey Whitehead in the 23 episode series of *Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson*
- 1985 *The Speckled Band* with Jeremy Brett as an episode of the *Sherlock Holmes* series
- 1999 *The Scales of Justice* in the *Sherlock Holmes in the 22nd Century* (Animated TV series)

Fainting In The Canon

“Miss Stoner turned white to the lips as she listened” (read: she almost fainted) in this story. She was too brave to faint.

Annotated Sherlock

- **“Surrey”** One of the “Home Counties” around London. It is chiefly agricultural with dairying and sheep raising. Here are Croydon (airport), Wimbledon (tennis), Epsom (horse racing), and Kew (botanical gardens). It is also the site of Runnymede where King John signed the Magna Charta in 1215.
- **“the Regency”** The last nine years (1811-1820) of the reign of George III when, due to his insanity, the government was conducted in the name of the Prince of Wales, later George IV.
- **“half-pay”** The reduced pay of an army or navy officer when he is not on active service.
- **“counterpane”** is a bedspread

Weapons

Here is a very wide selection of weapons used.

- **Service Revolver** - Dr. Watson’s and is mentioned in 13 cases.
- **Hunting Crop** - Which Dr. Grimsley Roylott shook threateningly at Holmes and Watson.
- **Long Thin Cane** - With which Holmes lashed furiously at the Speckled Band which was dangling from a bell rope.
- **Hands** - OF Dr. Grimsby Roylott, with which he threw the blacksmith of the village near Stoke Moran over a parapet and into a stream, and which he used to mistreat Helen Stoner as evidenced by the nail marks on her arm.

- **Cheetah and Baboon** - Which roamed the estate of Dr. Grimesby Roylott at night to discourage intruders.
- **Swamp Adder** (The Speckled Band) - Of Roylott, used by him to kill Julian Stoner and in the attempted murder of her sister Helen. Finally, it turned on Roylott and killed him with a little persuasion on Holmes' part.

Facts - - Who Needs Facts? (Part 2)

Once again, Doyle didn't do his research. In the case of SPEC, he has created a snake that has problems. First – there is no such species as a “swamp adder.” Second - snakes are deaf, therefore unable to respond to a whistle. Third – snakes don't drink milk. Fourth – snakes can not be trained. Fifth – a snake could not live in a safe. But it is still an excellent dramatic device.

Frank Mentzel