



Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia

The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes Adventure X -- The Adventure of the Speckled Band

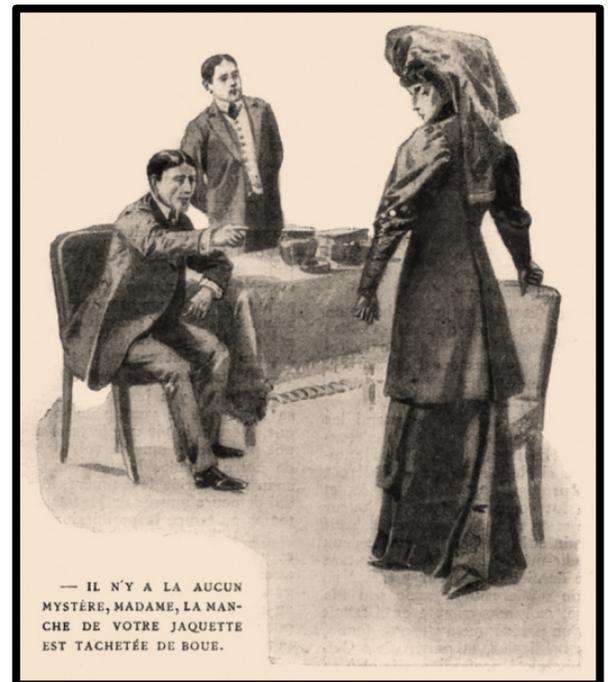
SUMMARY (Diogenes Club)

Dr. Roylott practiced medicine in India where he met and married the widow of Major General Stoner. Roylott had a violent temper and beat a servant to death. This forced his return to England and to Stoke Moran, his ancestral home. The estate was mortgaged to the hilt and the doctor was broke. His wife had an inheritance from her first husband which allowed the family to live comfortably.

Mrs. Stoner/Roylott was killed in a train accident but under her will, Dr. Roylott continued to receive the inheritance as long as the girls lived with him. Roylott's violent temper alienated the entire village and the girls lived in almost complete isolation except for occasional brief visits to Mrs. Westphail. On one of these visits Julia met and became engaged to an army officer. Shortly thereafter she died quite suddenly and unexpectedly during the night. She said something about a "speckled band" to Helen as she expired.

Helen became engaged to an old suitor and Dr. Roylott asked her to occupy Julia's old room. Helen heard a low whistle during the night and Julia had heard the same thing for several nights before her death. Helen consulted Holmes.

The "speckled band" was a swamp adder which Roylott introduced into the bedroom from an adjacent chamber via a ventilator and a fake bell rope. Holmes visits the rooms and waits during the night. When he hears noises, he beats the bell rope with the adder on it. The injured and enraged adder retreats into Roylott's room, bites and kills him.



SUMMARY (ACD Encyclopedia)

Helen Stoner, a terrified young lady, comes and asks Holmes for help. A short time before the planned marriage of her sister Julia, the latter died without identifiable cause after uttering these mysterious last words: "The Speckled Band." Some days before her demise, she had complained about being disturbed, during the nights, by a strange hissing.

Now, it is Helen's turn to get married and her step-father Doctor Roylott, an unsociable and violent man, has forced her to move into Julia's bedroom under false pretences. Holmes, worried, decides to go with Watson to Stock Moran the very same day.

During the travel, he explains to his friend that, in accordance to his wife's will, Roylott can dispose of his stepdaughters' income, until they get married. While looking over Julia's bedroom, Holmes notices that its ventilator opens onto Roylott's bedroom and that the bell rope is a dummy.

So, he lies in ambush with Watson in the garden pavilion. When Roylott has retired to his room, Helen warns our heroes by means of a light signal and leaves Julia's bedroom, where they take up position. After a long and agonizing wait, they hear something hissing: a snake.

Holmes strikes it with a rod and the angry reptile returns to his owner and bites him. Roylott, who refused to lose his stepdaughters' income because of their marriage, had trained the snake to slip, through the ventilator and along the bell rope, to the bed of its victims and to come back when he whistled for it. But Roylott's living weapon turned against the villain and killed him!

SUMMARY (Wikipedia)

Helen Stoner worries her stepfather may be trying to kill her after he contrives to move her to the bedroom where her sister had died two years earlier, shortly before her wedding. Stoner is herself now engaged, and Holmes learns that her stepfather's annuity (from the estate of his wife—Stoner's mother) would be greatly reduced if either sister married. During a late-night investigation of the bedroom, Holmes and Watson discover a dummy bell-pull near a ventilator. As they lie in wait a whistle sounds, then a snake appears through the ventilator. Holmes attacks the snake with his riding crop; it retreats to the next room, where it attacks and kills Stoner's stepfather.

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson rise unusually early one morning to meet a young woman named Helen Stoner who fears that her stepfather, Dr. Grimesby Roylott, is threatening her life. Roylott is a doctor who practised in Calcutta, India, and was married to Helen's late mother when she was a widow living there. He is also the impoverished last survivor of what was once a wealthy but violent, ill-tempered and amoral Anglo-Saxon aristocratic family of Surrey, and has already served a jail sentence for killing his Indian butler in a rage.

Helen's twin sister died almost two years earlier, shortly before she was to be married. Helen had heard her sister's dying words, "The speckled band!" but could not decode their meaning. Helen herself is now engaged. She has begun to hear strange noises and observe strange activities around Stoke Moran, the impoverished and heavily mortgaged estate where she and her stepfather live.

Dr. Roylott also keeps strange company at the estate. He is friendly with a band of Gypsies on the property, and he has a cheetah and a baboon as pets. For some time, he has been making changes to the house. Before Helen's sister's death, he had modifications made inside the house and is now having the outside wall repaired, forcing Helen to move into the room where her sister died.

Holmes listens carefully to Helen's story and agrees to take the case. He plans a visit to the manor later in the day. Before he can leave, he is visited by Dr. Roylott himself, who threatens him should he interfere. Undaunted, Holmes proceeds to the courthouse, where he examines Helen's late mother's will, and then to the countryside.

At Stoke Moran, Holmes scrutinizes the premises inside and out. Among the strange features that he discovers are a bed anchored to the floor, a bell cord that is not attached to any bell, and a ventilator hole between Helen's temporary room and that of Dr. Roylott.

Holmes and Watson arrange to spend the night in Helen's room. In darkness, they wait until about three in the morning; suddenly, a slight metallic noise and a dim light through the ventilator prompt Holmes to action. Quickly lighting a candle, he discovers on the bell cord the "speckled band"—a venomous snake. He strikes at the snake with his riding crop, driving it back through the ventilator. Agitated, it fatally attacks Roylott, who had been waiting for it to return after killing Helen. Holmes identifies the snake as an Indian swamp adder and reveals to Watson the motive: the late wife's will had provided an annual income of £750 sterling, of which each daughter could claim one third upon marriage. Thus, Dr. Roylott plotted to remove both of his stepdaughters before they married to avoid losing most of the fortune he controlled. Holmes admits his attack on the snake may make him indirectly responsible for Roylott's demise, but he does not foresee it troubling him.