

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SPECKLED BAND

A SHORT STORY BY
ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

*Adapted for Readers Theatre
By Al Rodin*

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Helen Stone, a frightened and distraught young woman, has come to Sherlock Holmes for help following the recent death of her twin sister Julia. The young women were living with their stepfather, the austere and heartless widower, Dr. Roylott, who had returned from India with them to Stoke Moran, his family's dilapidated country mansion. Wild exotic animals and gypsies now wander on the manor grounds.

Helen tells Holmes and Dr. Watson that the night Julia died, her sister had run from her bedroom screaming "the band, the speckled band." Julia was soon to be married and would have received her share of the inheritance left by their late mother. Now that Helen is also engaged, she fears for her own life.

Intrigued, Holmes agrees to go with Watson to the mansion to investigate, especially after Holmes notices marks on Helen's wrists made by her stepfather. After surveying the manor rooms and grounds, Holmes formulates a plan. Late that night they ultimately solve the deadly mystery.

About 45 minutes.

CHARACTERS

(3M, 2W)

SHERLOCK HOLMES: Austere, at times haughty, with occasional humor shown as a wry smile. Intolerant of sham and dull-witted individuals. Not overly enamored of the opposite sex, but exhibits gentlemanly behavior towards them. Has so deeply depressed his romantic nature that he no longer is aware of its existence. Prides himself on his remarkable ability to make conclusions which are based on observations and are always correct, yet completely mystifying to others, including Dr. Watson.

DOCTOR WATSON: Prosaic, somewhat stodgy, and at time thick-headed. Faithful and obedient to Holmes, being often used as his foil. Unable to unravel a mystery until Holmes's concise denouement. A lady's man, but always proper in his relationship with them, and shocked at any impropriety on their part. At Holmes's beck and call, being quite willing to leave his practice (and his wife.) immediately whenever asked.

STONER SISTERS: Helen is a cultured, attractive lady of thirty-two in a pitiful stage of agitation, with frightened eyes. A much more minor role is that of Julia, the sister who dies. They are the stepdaughters of Dr. Roylott who had married their mother who was later killed in a railway accident.

GRIMESBY ROYLOTT: A short-tempered, middle-aged, powerful and belligerent physician who practiced in India. Later left with his two stepdaughters to live at his family seat at Stoke Moran on the border of Surrey in England. The manor has a cheetah, a baboon and gypsies on the grounds.

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SCENE 1

(AT RISE: The main room of the residence of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson at 221 Baker Street, London.)

WATSON: *(DSC.)* In glancing over my notes of the seventy-odd cases in which I have, during the last eight years, studied the methods of my friend Sherlock Holmes, I find many tragic, some comic, a large number merely strange, but non commonplace., Working as he did, rather for the love of his art than for the acquirement of wealth, he refused to associate himself with any investigation which did not tend towards the unusual, and even the fantastic. Of all these varied cases, however, I cannot recall any which presented more singular features than that which was associated with the well-known Surrey family of the Roylotts of Stoke Moran.

The events in question occurred in the early days of my association with Holmes, when we were sharing rooms as bachelors, in Baker Street. It is possible that I might have placed them upon record before, but a promise of secrecy was made at the time, from which I have only been freed during the last month by the untimely death of the lady to whom the pledge was given. It is perhaps as well that the facts should now come to light, for I have reasons to know there are widespread rumors as to the death of Dr. Grimesby Roylott which tend to make the matter even more terrible than the truth. *(WATSON sits on stool, with a slump; HOLMES enters.)* It was in April, in the year '83, that I woke one morning to find Sherlock Holmes standing by the side of my bed. He was a later riser as a rule, and, as the clock on the mantel-piece showed me that it was only a quarter past seven, I blinked at him in some surprise, and perhaps just a little resentment, for I was myself regular in my habits.

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(WATSON sits erect and HOLMES sits down.)

HOLMES: *(Apologetic.)* Very sorry to knock you up, Watson, but it's the common lot this morning.

WATSON: *(Tensely.)* What is it, then? A fire?

HOLMES: No, a client. It seems that a young lady has arrived in a considerable state of excitement, who insists upon seeing me.

WATSON: *(The lady's man.)* Aha!

HOLMES: She is waiting now in the sitting room. Now, when young ladies wander about the metropolis at this hour of the morning, and knock sleepy people up out of their beds, I presume that it is something very pressing which they have to communicate. Should it prove to be an interesting case, you would, I am sure, wish to follow it from the outset. I thought at any rate that I should call you, and give you a chance.

WATSON: My dear fellow, I would not miss it for anything. *(HOLMES freezes, WATSON stands to address audience.)* I had no keener pleasure than in following Holmes in his investigations, and in admiring the rapid deductions, as swift as intuitions, and yet always founded on a logical basis, with which he unraveled the problems which were submitted to him. I rapidly threw on my clothes, and was ready in a few minutes to accompany my friend down to the sitting-room. *(JULIA STONER enters and sits. Has ticket stub in left hand.)* A lady dressed in black and heavily veiled, who had been sitting in the window, rose as we entered

(STONER stands.)

HOLMES: *(Cheerily.)* Good morning, madam. My name is Sherlock Holmes. This is my friend and associate, Dr. Watson *(Nods.)* before whom you can speak freely as before myself. Pray draw up to the fire, and I shall order you a cup of hot coffees, for I observe that you are shivering. *(STONER changes seat.)*

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STONER: *(With an agitated, frightened voice.)* It is fear, Mr. Holmes. It is terror. *(Lifts veil, revealing a frightened countenance.)*

HOLMES: *(Soothingly.)* You must not fear. We shall soon set matters right, I have no doubt. You have come in by train this morning, I see.

STONER: You know me then?

HOLMES: No, but I observe the second half of a return ticket in the palm of your left glove. You must have started early, and yet you had a good drive in a dogcart, along heavy roads, before you reached the station. *(STONER gasps, and stares in bewilderment. HOLMES smiles, WATSON drops jaw.)* There is no mystery, my dear madam. The left arm of your jacked is spattered with mud in no less than seven places. *(STONER looks.)* The marks are perfectly fresh. There is no vehicle save a dogcart which throws up mud in that way, and then only when you sit on the left-hand side of the driver.

STONER: Whatever your reasons may be, you are perfectly correct. I started from home before six, reached Leatherhead at twenty past, and came in by the first train to Waterloo. Sir, I can stand this strain no longer. I shall go mad if it continues. I have no one to turn to—none, save only one who cares for me, and he, poor fellow, can be of little aid. I have heard of you, Mr. Holmes; I have heard of you from Mrs Farintosh, whom you helped in the hour of sore need. It was from her that I had your address. Oh, sir, do you not think you could help me too, and at least throw a little light through the dense darkness which surrounds me? At present it is out of my power to reward you for your services, but in a month or two I shall be married, with the control of my own income, and then at least you shall not find me ungrateful.

HOLMES: *(Unlocks desk drawer and takes out small case-book.)* Farintosh. Ah yes, I recall the case; it was concerned with an opal tiara. I think it was before your time, Watson. I can only say, madam, that I shall be happy to devote the same care to your case as I did to that of your friend.

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