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The Adventure of the Speckled Band by Arthur Conan Doyle



Part 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 gypsies, the whistle, the band - they are more difficult to understand, but I think I have an answer.'

When we arrived, Helen Stoner showed us the three bedrooms. We saw her room first.

'Why are they mending your bedroom wall?' asked Holmes. 'There seems to be nothing wrong with it.'

'You're right,' she said. 'Do you think it was a ruse to move me into my sister's room?'

'Most definitely,' said Holmes.

We went into Julia's room, and Holmes looked at the windows carefully.

'The windows are quite secure. Nobody could come in from outside,' he said. Then he looked carefully around the room. 'Why is that bell-rope there, just over the bed?'

'My stepfather put it there two years ago. It's for calling a servant, but Julia and I never used it because we didn't have any servants. He also put in that air vent on the wall between his room and this one.'

Holmes pulled the rope. 'But it doesn't work,' he said. 'How strange! And it's just over the air-vent. That also is interesting. Why have an air-vent on an inside wall? Air-vents are usually on outside walls.'

Then we went into Dr Roylott's room. Holmes saw a large metal box near the wall.

'My stepfather keeps business papers in there,' said Helen.

'Does he keep a cat in there too?' asked Holmes. 'Look there!'

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There was some milk on a plate on top of the box.

'Now, listen carefully, 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— the one you've been sleeping in for the past two nights.'

Helen Stoner and I looked at him in surprise. 'Why? What's going to happen?' asked Helen.

Holmes didn't answer. 'Here's what you must do,' 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 there for the sound of the whistle and the falling metal.'

'How did my sister die, Mr. Holmes? Do you know? Please tell me!' said Helen.

'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. Roylott is a very violent man.'

'I understand, Holmes. Of course, 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 had to be a hole between the two rooms. That explains why Helen's sister could smell Dr. Roylott'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.'

(To be continued)