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The Adventure of the Speckled Band by Arthur Conan Doyle

Part 3: 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.

At last, 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.

Then, 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.

'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 viper, and its poison can kill very quickly,' said Holmes. '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 gypsies. 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 particular snake's poison is difficult to find in

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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 lid 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, in its anger, it killed the Doctor. To be frank with you, Watson, I'm not really sorry about that.'

A few hours later, as we were on the train headed home, Holmes turned to me and said, 'You know, Watson, there's a lesson to be learned in all this. In the end, violence always recoils upon the violent, and the schemer will fall into the trap he's set for someone else.'

THE END