

**THE SPECKLED BAND** by Arthur Conan Doyle. PART ONE 1.

A lady dressed in black and heavily veiled, who had been sitting in the window, rose as we entered.

'Good morning, Madam,' said Holmes cheerily. 'My name is Sherlock Holmes. This is my intimate friend and associate, Dr Watson. Ha, I'm glad to see that Mrs Hudson has had the good sense to light the fire. I shall order you a cup of hot coffee, for I observe that you are shivering.'

'It is not cold which makes me shiver,' said the woman in a low voice. 'It is fear, Mr Holmes.'

She raised her veil as she spoke. Her face was drawn and grey, with restless eyes like those of some hunted animal. Her features and figure were those of a woman of thirty, but her expression was weary and haggard.

'My name is Helen Stoner, and I live with my stepfather, Dr Roylott, at Stoke Moran, in Surrey. His family was at one time among the richest in England, but after years of shameful neglect, nothing was left save a few acres of ground and the two-hundred-year-old house, crushed under a heavy mortgage. My stepfather became a doctor and went out to Calcutta, where, he established a large practice. In a fit of anger, however, he beat his native butler to death, and narrowly escaped a capital sentence. As it was, he suffered a long term of imprisonment and returned to England a morose and disappointed man.

When in India, Dr Roylott married my mother, Mrs Stoner. My sister Julia and I were twins, and only two years old at the time of my mother's remarriage. She had a considerable sum of money, which she left to Dr Roylott, with a provision that a certain sum should be allowed to each of us in the event of our marriage. Shortly after our return to England my mother was killed in a railway accident.

A terrible change came over our stepfather about this time. He shut himself up in his house and seldom came out, save to indulge in ferocious quarrels with whoever might cross his path. He became the terror of the village, and the folks would fly at his approach.

He had no friends at all save the wandering gypsies, whom he gave leave to encamp upon the few acres of family estate, and often wandered away with them for weeks on end. He had a passion also for Indian animals, which are sent over to him by a correspondent, and has at this moment a cheetah and a baboon which wander freely over his grounds, and are feared almost as much as their master.

You can imagine that my poor sister Julia and I had no great pleasure in our lives. No servant would stay with us, and for a long time we did all the work of the house. Julia was but thirty at the time of her death, and it is of that I wish to speak to you. We were little likely to see anyone of our own age and position. We had, however, an aunt who lives near Harrow, and were occasionally allowed to visit her. Julia went there at Christmas two years

ago, and met a Major of Marines, to whom she became engaged. My stepfather learned of this on her return, and within a fortnight of her wedding day, the terrible event occurred, which has deprived me of my only companion.'

Sherlock Holmes glanced across at his visitor.

'Pray be precise as to details,' said he.

'Every event of that time is seared into my memory. The manor house is, as I have said, very old, and only one wing is now inhabited. The bedrooms in this wing are on the

ground floor. The first is Dr Roylott's, the second my sister's, and the third is my own. There is no communication between them, but they all open out into the same corridor. Do I make myself plain?

'Perfectly so.'

'The windows of the three rooms open out upon the lawn. That fateful night Dr. Roylott had gone to his room early, though we knew that he had not retired, for my sister was troubled by the smell of the strong Indian cigars which it was his custom to smoke. She left her room, therefore, and came into mine, where she sat for some time, chatting about her approaching wedding. At eleven o'clock, she rose to leave me, but paused at the door.

"Tell me, Helen," said she, "have you ever heard anyone whistle in the dead of night?"

'Never,' said I. 'Why?'

"Because during the last few nights I have always, about three in the morning, heard a low, clear whistle. I am a light sleeper, and it has awakened me. I cannot tell you where it came from - perhaps from the next room, perhaps from the lawn. I thought that I would ask whether you had heard it."

'No, I have not. It must be the gypsies.'

"Very likely. And yet if it were on the lawn I wonder that you did not hear it also."

'Ah, but I sleep more heavily than you.'

"Well, it is of no great consequence." She smiled, closed my door, and a few moments later I heard her key turn in the lock.

'Was it your custom to lock yourselves in at night?' asked Holmes.

'I think I mentioned that the doctor kept a cheetah and a baboon.'

'Quite so. Pray proceed.'

'I could not sleep that night. The wind was howling outside, the rain beating against the windows. Suddenly, amid the hubbub of the gale, there burst forth a wild scream. I knew that it was my sister's voice. Wrapping a shawl around me, I rushed into the corridor. As I opened my door, I seemed to hear a low whistle, such as my sister described, and a few moments later a clanging sound, as if a mass of metal had fallen. My sister's door was unlocked, and creaked on its hinges. By the light of the corridor lamp, my sister appeared, her hands groping for help, her whole figure swaying to and fro, before she fell to the ground writhing in pain. As I bent over her, she shrieked out in a voice which I shall never forget "Oh my God! Helen! It was the band! The speckled band!" There was something else which she would have said, stabbing with her finger in the direction of the Doctor's room, but a fresh convulsion choked her words. I called loudly for my stepfather, and met him hastening from his room in his dressing-gown. When he reached my sister's side she was unconscious, and though he poured brandy down her throat, and sent for medical aid from the village, all efforts were in vain.'

'Are you sure about this whistle and this metallic sound?' asked Holmes.

'It is my strong impression that I heard it, and yet among the crash of the gale, and the creaking of an old house, I may have been deceived.'

'Was your sister dressed?'

'No, she was in her night-dress. In her right hand was found the charred stump of a match, and in her left a match-box.'

'Showing that she had struck a light and looked about her when the alarm took place. That is important. And what conclusions did the coroner come to?'

'He was unable to find any satisfactory cause of death. The door had been fastened

upon the inner side, and the windows blocked by old fashioned shutters with broad iron bars, which were secured every night. The walls were shown to be quite solid all round, and the flooring was examined with the same result. The chimney is wide, but barred up by four large staples. It is certain, therefore, that my sister was quite alone when she met her end. Besides, there were no marks of any violence about her.'

'How about poison?'

'The doctors examined her without success.'

'What do you think that she died of, then?'

'Pure fear and nervous shock, though what it was which frightened her, I cannot imagine.'

'Were there gypsies on the estate at the time?'

'Yes, there were.'

'Ah, and what did you gather from her reference to a band - a speckled band?'

'Sometimes I thought it the wild talk of delirium, sometimes that it referred to a band of people, perhaps to the gypsies, perhaps to the spotted handkerchiefs which so many of them wear over their heads.'

'These are very deep waters,' said Holmes. 'Pray go on with your narrative.'

'Two years have passed since then, and my life has been a lonely one. A month ago, however, a dear friend, whom I have known for many years, has done me the honour to ask my hand in marriage. My stepfather has offered no opposition to the match, and we are to be married in the course of the spring. Two days ago some repairs were started in the west wing of the building, so that I have had to move into the chamber in which my sister died, and to sleep in the very same bed in which she slept. Imagine then my terror, when last night as I lay awake, I suddenly heard the low whistle which had been the herald of her death. I sprang up and lit the lamp, but nothing was to be seen. As soon as it was daylight I slipped down, got a dog-cart at the Crown Inn, and drove to Leatherhead, from whence I have come this morning, with the one object of seeing you and asking your advice.'

'But you have told me all?'

'Yes, all.'

'Miss Stoner. You are screening your stepfather.'

'Why, what do you mean?'

For answer, Holmes pushed back a frill of black lace which fringed her hand. The marks of four fingers and a thumb were printed upon the white wrist.

'You have been cruelly used,' said Holmes.

The lady coloured deeply. 'He is a hard man,' she said, 'and hardly knows his own strength.'

There was a long silence, during which Holmes stared into the crackling fire.

'If we were to come to your house at Stoke Moran today, would it be possible for us to see these rooms without the knowledge of your stepfather?'

'He spoke of coming into town today upon important business. There would be nothing to disturb you.'

'Then we shall both come. What are you going to do with yourself?'

'I have one or two things to occupy me now that I am in town. But I shall return by the twelve o'clock train, so as to be in time for your coming.'

'You may expect us early in the afternoon. I have myself some small business matters to attend to.'

'I must go, Mr Holmes. My heart is lightened already. I shall look forward to seeing you at Stoke Moran this afternoon.' END OF PART ONE

**THE SPECKLED BAND** by Arthur Conan Doyle. PART TWO.

1.

**Dr Roylott, an old man of violent and uncertain temper, lives at Stoke Moran in Surrey with his two stepdaughters, Julia and Helen Stoner.**

**Two years before our story, Julia had announced her intention to marry. However, a fortnight before the wedding, in the dead of night, she staggered from her bedroom, which adjoined her stepfather's, and collapsed in the corridor. She died in her sister's arms, whispering: 'Helen, it was the band! The speckled band!'**

**A month ago, Helen announced her engagement. Within two days, repairs were started in the west wing, forcing Helen to move into her late sister's room and to sleep in the very same bed. Last night she heard the low whistle and metallic sound which were the heralds of her sister's death.**

**This morning, Helen has hurried to London to engage the services of England's finest detective.**

Following her departure from 221 B Baker Street, Sherlock Holmes leaned back in his chair.

'And what do you think of it all, Watson' he asked.

'It seems a most dark and sinister business. Yet, if the lady is correct in saying that the flooring and walls are sound, that the door, window, and chimney are impassable, then her sister must have been undoubtedly alone when she met her mysterious end.'

'What becomes then, of these nocturnal whistles and the very peculiar words of the dying woman?'

'I cannot think.'

'When you combine the ideas of whistles at night, the presence of a band of gypsies who are on intimate terms with this old doctor, that we have every reason to believe that the doctor has an interest in preventing his stepdaughter's marriage, the dying allusion to a band and, finally, that Miss Helen Stoner heard a metallic clang, which might have been caused by one of those metal bars which secured the shutters falling back into their place, I think the mystery may be cleared along these lines.'

'What, then, did the gypsies do?'

'I cannot imagine. It is precisely for that reason that we are going to Stoke Moran today. What, in the name of the devil?'

Our door had been suddenly dashed open, and a huge man framed himself in the aperture, with a hunting-crop swinging in his hand. So tall was he that his hat brushed the cross-bar of the doorway. A large face, seared with a thousand wrinkles, burned yellow with the sun and marked with every evil passion, turned from one to the other of us.

'Which of you is Holmes?' asked this apparition.

'My name, Sir, but you have the advantage of me,' said my companion quietly.

'I am Dr Grimesby Roylott, of Stoke Moran.'

'Indeed Doctor,' said Holmes blandly. 'Pray take a seat.'

'My daughter has been here. What was she saying to you?'

'It is a little cold for the time of the year,' said Holmes, 'but I have heard that the crocuses promise well.'

'Ha! You put me off, do you?' said our new visitor, taking a step forward, and shaking his hunting-crop. 'I have heard of you before. You are Holmes the meddler. Holmes the busybody!'

My friend smiled.

'Holmes the Scotland Yard jack-in-office.'

Holmes chuckled heartily. 'Your conversation is most entertaining,' said he. 'When you go out close the door, for there is a decided draught.'

'I will go when I have had my say. Don't you dare to meddle in my affairs. I know that Miss Stoner has been here - I traced her here! I am a dangerous man to fall foul of! See here.'

He stepped swiftly forward, seized the poker, and bent it into a curve with his huge brown hands. 'You keep yourself out of my grip,' he snarled and, hurling the twisted poker into the fireplace, strode out of the room.

'A very amiable person,' said Holmes, laughing. 'I am not quite so bulky, but if he had remained....' As he spoke he picked up the steel poker and, with a sudden effort, straightened it out again.

'Fancy his having the insolence to confound me with the official detective force! I only trust that our little friend will not suffer from her imprudence in allowing this brute to trace her. And now, Watson, we shall order breakfast, and afterwards I hope to get some data which may help us in this matter.'

It was nearly one o'clock when Sherlock Holmes returned from his excursion. He held in his hand a sheet of blue paper.

'I have seen the will of the deceased wife of Dr Roylott. The total income is now, through the fall in agricultural prices, not more than seven hundred and fifty pounds. Each daughter can claim an income of two **hundred and fifty** pounds, in case of marriage. It is evident therefore, that if both girls had married, this beauty would have had a mere pittance, while even one of them would cripple him to a serious extent. My morning's work has proved that he has the very strongest motives for standing in the way of any marriage. And now, Watson, this is too serious for dawdling, especially as the old man is aware that we are interesting ourselves in his affairs, so if you are ready we shall call a cab and drive to Waterloo. I should be very much obliged if you would slip your revolver into your pocket, an excellent argument with gentlemen who can twist steel pokers into knots. That and a toothbrush, are, I think, all that we need.'

At Waterloo, we were fortunate in catching a train for Leatherhead, where we hired a trap at the station inn, and drove for four or five miles through the lovely Surrey lanes. My companion sat in front of the trap, his arms folded, his hat pulled down over his eyes, and his chin sunk upon his breast, buried in the deepest thought. Suddenly, however, he started, tapped me on the shoulder, and pointed over the meadows. 'Look there!' said he. 'Stoke Moran.'

'Yes sir, that be the house of Dr Grimesby Roylott,' remarked the driver. 'If you want to get to the house, you'll find it shorter to go over this stile, and so by the footpath over the fields. There it is, where the lady is walking.'

'And the lady, I fancy, is Miss Stoner,' observed Holmes, shading his eyes.

We got off, paid our fare, and the trap rattled back on its way to Leatherhead.

'Good afternoon, Miss Stoner. You see that we have been as good as our word.'

'I have been waiting so eagerly for you,' she cried, shaking hands with us warmly. Dr Roylott has gone to town, and it is unlikely that he will be back before this evening.'

'We have had the pleasure of making the Doctor's acquaintance,' said Holmes, and sketched out what had occurred. Miss Stoner turned white to the lips as she listened.

'He had followed me then.'

'So it appears.'

'He is so cunning that I never know when I am safe from him.'

'He must guard himself, for he may find that there is someone more cunning than himself upon his track. You must lock yourself from him tonight. If he is violent, we shall take you away to your aunt's at Harrow. Now, we must make the best use of our time, so kindly take us at once to the rooms which we are to examine.'

The building was of grey, lichen-blotched stone. One of the wings was a picture of ruin. The central portion was in little better repair, but the right-hand block with blue smoke curling up from the chimneys, was where the family resided. Some scaffolding had been erected against the end wall, and the stonework had been broken into, but there were no signs of any workmen. Holmes walked slowly up and down the ill trimmed lawn, and examined the outsides of the windows.

'This, I take it, belongs to the room in which you used to sleep, the centre one to your sister's and the one next to the main building to Dr Roylott's chamber?'

'Exactly so. But I am now sleeping in the middle one.'

'Pending the alterations, as I understand. There does not seem to be any pressing need for repairs at that end wall.'

'No. I believe that it was an excuse to move me from my own room.'

'Ah! That is suggestive. Now, on the other side of this narrow wing runs the corridor from which these rooms open. There are windows in it of course?'

'Yes, but very small ones. Too narrow for anyone to pass through.'

'As you both locked your doors at night, your rooms were unapproachable from that side. Now, would you have the kindness to go into your room, and to bar your shutters?'

Miss Stoner did so, and Holmes, after a careful examination through every open window, endeavored to force the shutter open, but without success. There was not a slit through which a knife could be passed to raise the bar. Then, with his lens, he tested the hinges, but they were of solid iron, built firmly into the massive masonry.

'Hum!' said he. 'My theory certainly presents some difficulties. No one could pass these shutters if they were bolted. Well, we shall see if the inside throws some light upon the matter.'

**THE SPECKLED BAND** by Arthur Conan Doyle. PART THREE. I.

**Dr Roylott, a man of violent and uncertain temper, lives at Stoke Moran in Surrey with his two stepdaughters, Julia and Helen Stoner.**

**Two years before our story, Julia had announced her intention to marry. However, a fortnight before the wedding, she staggered from her bedroom in the dead of night and collapsed in the corridor. She died in her sister's arms, whispering: 'Helen, it was the band! The speckled band!'**

**A month ago, Helen announced her engagement. Immediately, repairs were started in the west wing, forcing Helen to move into her late sister's room and to sleep in the very same bed. Last night, she heard the low whistle and metallic sound .... the heralds of her sister's death.**

**Holmes and Watson join her at Stoke Moran to unravel the mystery of Julia's lonely death, and possibly prevent another.**

A small side-door led into the white washed corridor from which the three bedrooms opened. Holmes refused to examine the third chamber, so we passed at once to the second, that in which Miss Stoner was now sleeping, and in which her sister had met her fate. It was a homely little room, with a low ceiling and a gaping fireplace. A brown chest of drawers stood in one corner, a narrow, white-counterpaned bed in another, and a dressing-table on the left-hand side of the windows. These articles with two small wicker-work chairs, made up all the furniture in the room, save for a square of Wilton carpet in the centre.

Holmes drew one of the chairs into a corner and sat silent.

'Where does that bell communicate with?' he asked at last, pointing to the thick bell-rope which hung down beside the bed, the tassel actually lying upon the pillow.

'It goes to the housekeeper's room. It was only put there a couple of years ago.'

'Your sister asked for it, I suppose?'

'No. We used to get what we wanted for ourselves.'

'Indeed. It seems unnecessary to put so nice a bell-pull there. Will you excuse me for a few minutes?'

He threw himself down upon his face with his lens in his hand, and crawled swiftly backwards and forwards, examining the cracks between the boards. Then he did the same with the woodwork panelling. He spent some time staring at the bed, and in running his eye up and down the wall. Finally, he took the bell-rope in his hand and gave it a brisk tug.

'Why, it's a dummy,' said he.

'Won't it ring?'

'It is not even attached to a wire. It is fastened to a hook just above where the little opening of the ventilator is.'

'How very absurd! I never noticed that before.'

'Very strange!' muttered Holmes, pulling at the rope. 'There are one or two very singular points about this room. For example, what a fool a builder must be to open a ventilator to another room when, with the same trouble, he might have communicated with the outside air!'

'Yes, there were several little changes carried out at one time.'

'Interesting. Dummy bell-ropes and ventilators which do not ventilate. With your permission, Miss Stoner, we shall now carry out our researches into the inner apartment.'

Dr Grimesby Roylott's chamber was larger than that of his stepdaughter, but as plainly furnished. A camp-bed, a small wooden shelf full of books, mostly of a technical character, an armchair beside the bed, a plain wooden chair against the wall, a round table, and a large iron safe were the principal things which met the eye. Holmes examined all of them with the keenest interest.

'What's in here?' he asked, tapping the safe.

'My stepfather's business papers.'

'Oh! You have seen inside then?'

'Only once, some years ago. I remember that it was full of papers.'

'There wasn't a cat in it, for example?'

'No. What a strange idea!'

He took up a small saucer of milk, which stood on the top of it.

'We do keep a cheetah and a baboon.'

'Ah, yes of course! Well, a cheetah is just a big cat, and yet a saucer of milk does not go very far in satisfying its wants. There is one point which I should wish to determine.'

He squatted down in front of the wooden chair, and examined its seat with the greatest attention.

'Thank you. That is quite settled,' said he rising and putting his lens in his pocket. 'Hullo! Here is something interesting!'

A small dog leash hung on one corner of the bed. It was curled upon itself, and tied so as to make a loop of whipcord.

'What do you make of that, Watson?'

'It's a common enough leash, but I don't see why it should be tied.'

'That is not quite so common, is it? Ah, me! It's a wicked world. I think I have seen enough now, Miss Stoner and, with your permission, we shall walk out upon the lawn.'

We walked several times up and down the lawn, before my friend roused himself from his reverie.

'It is essential, Miss Stoner,' said he, 'that you follow my advice in every respect. Your life may depend upon your compliance.'

'I assure you that I am in your hands.'

'In the first place, both my friend and I must spend the night in your room.'

Both Miss Stoner and I gazed at him in astonishment.

'Let me explain. I believe that is the village inn over there?'

'Yes, that is the Crown.'

'Very good. Your windows would be visible from there?'

'Certainly.'

'You must confine yourself to your room, on pretence of a headache, when your stepfather comes back. Then, when you hear him retire for the night, you must open the shutters of your window, put your lamp there as a signal to us, and then withdraw with everything which you are likely to want into the room which you used to occupy. In spite of the repairs, you could manage there for one night?'

'Yes, easily.'

'The rest you will leave in our hands.'

'But what will you do?'

'We shall spend the night in your room, and investigate the cause of this noise which has disturbed you.'

'I believe, Mr Holmes, that you have already made up your mind,' said Miss Stoner. 'For pity's sake, tell me what was the cause of my sister's death.'

'I should prefer to have clearer proofs before I speak.'

'You can at least tell me if she died from some sudden fright?'

'No, I think there was some more tangible cause. And now, Miss Stoner, we must leave you, for if Dr Roylott returned and saw us, our journey would be in vain. Goodbye, and be brave for if you do what I have told you, we shall soon drive away the dangers that threaten you.'

Sherlock Holmes and I had no difficulty in engaging a bedroom and sitting room at the Crown Inn. They were on the upper floor, and from our window we could command a view of the inhabited wing of the Manor House.

At dusk we saw Dr Grimesby Roylott drive past and heard the hoarse roar of his voice. A few minutes later a light sprang up among the trees as the lamp was lit in one of the sitting rooms.

'Do you know, Watson,' said Holmes, as we sat together in the gathering darkness, 'I really have some scruples as to taking you tonight. There is a distinct element of danger. It is very kind of you.'

'You speak of danger. I saw nothing remarkable save the bell-rope, and what purpose that could answer, I cannot imagine.'

'You saw the ventilator, too?'

'Yes, but it is not unusual to have a small opening between two rooms. A rat could hardly pass through.'

'I knew that we should find a ventilator before we even came to Stoke Moran.'

'My dear Holmes!'

'You remember she said that her sister could smell Dr Roylott's cigar. Now, that suggests at once that there must be a communication between the two rooms. It could only be a small one, or it would have been remarked upon at the coroner's enquiry. I deduced a ventilator.'

'But, what harm can there be in that?'

'At least a curious coincidence of dates. A ventilator is made, a cord is hung, and a lady who sleeps in the bed dies. Does not that strike you?'

'I cannot as yet see a connection.'

'Did you observe anything peculiar about that bed?'

'No.'

'It was clamped to the floor. The lady could not move it. It must always be in the same relative position to the ventilator and to the rope - for so we may call it, since it was never meant for a bell-pull.'

'Holmes,' I cried, 'I see dimly what you are hinting at. We are only just in time to prevent some subtle and horrible crime.'

'When a doctor goes wrong, he is the first of criminals. He has nerve and he has knowledge. This man strikes even deeper. But I think, Watson, we shall have horrors enough before the night is over. Let us have a quiet pipe, and turn our minds to something more cheerful.'

To be continued.....

**before her wedding. Two years later, her twin sister Helen is invited by her stepfather, Dr Roylott, to occupy the selfsame room and bed, two weeks before her wedding. Fearing for her life, Helen enlists the help of England's finest detective.**

At about nine o'clock the light among the trees was extinguished and all was dark in the direction of the Manor House. Then, suddenly, just at the stroke of eleven, a single bright light shone out in front of us.

'That is our signal,' said Holmes, springing to his feet. 'it comes from the middle window.'

A moment later we were out on the dark road, a chill wind blowing in our faces, and one yellow light twinkling in front of us through the gloom to guide us on our errand. There was little difficulty in entering the grounds. Making our way among the trees we reached the lawn, crossed it, and were about to enter through the window, when out from a clump of laurel bushes there darted what seemed to be a hideous and distorted child, who threw itself on the grass with writhing limbs, and then ran swiftly across the lawn into the darkness.

Holmes was, for a moment, as startled as I. Then he broke into a low laugh, and put his lips to my ear.

'It is a nice household,' he murmured. 'That is the baboon.'

I had forgotten the strange pets which the doctor affected. There was a cheetah too, perhaps we might find it on our shoulders at any moment. I confess that I felt easier in my mind when, after slipping off my shoes, I found myself inside the bedroom. My companion noiselessly closed the shutters, moved the lamp onto the table, and cast his eyes round the room. Then making a trumpet of his hand, he whispered into my ear:

'The least sound would be fatal to our plans.' I nodded to show that I had heard.

'We must sit without a light. He would see it through the ventilator.'

I nodded again.

'Do not go to sleep; your life may depend upon it. I will sit on the side of the bed, and you in that chair.'

I took out my revolver and laid it on the corner of the table. Holmes had brought a long, thin cane, and this he placed upon the bed beside him. By it he laid the box of matches and the stump of a candle. Then he turned down the lamp and we were left in darkness.

How shall I ever forget that dreadful vigil? From outside came the occasional cry of a night-bird, and once at our very window a long drawn, cat-like whine, which told us that the cheetah was indeed at liberty. Far away, we could hear the deep tones of the parish clock, which chimed out every quarter of an hour. How long they seemed, those quarters! Twelve o'clock, and one, and two, and three, and still we sat waiting silently for whatever might befall.

Suddenly there was a momentary gleam of light up in the direction of the ventilator, which vanished immediately, but was succeeded by a smell of burning oil and heated metal.

Someone in the next room had lit a dark lantern. I heard a gentle sound of movement, and then all was silent once more, though the smell grew stronger. For half an hour I sat with straining ears. Then a sound, like that of a small jet of steam escaping continually from a kettle. The instant we heard it, Holmes sprang from the bed, struck a match, and lashed furiously with his cane at the bell-pull.

'You see it, Watson' he yelled. 'You see it?'

But I saw nothing. I heard a low, clear whistle, but the sudden glare flashing into my weary eyes made it impossible for me to tell what it was at which my friend lashed so savagely. I could, however, see that his face was deadly pale, filled with horror and loathing.

He had ceased to strike, and was gazing up at the ventilator when suddenly there broke from the silence of the night the most horrible cry. It swelled up louder and louder, a hoarse yell of pain and fear and anger all mingled into one dreadful shriek. I stood gazing at Holmes, and he at me, until the last echoes had died away into the silence from which it rose.

'What can it mean?' I gasped.

'It means that it is all over,' Holmes answered.

With a grave face he lit the lamp, and led the way down the corridor. Twice he struck at the chamber door without any reply from within. Then he turned the handle and entered, I at his heels, the cocked pistol in my hand.

It was a singular sight which met our eyes. On the table stood a dark lantern with the shutter half open, throwing a brilliant beam of light upon the iron safe, the door of which was ajar. Beside the table, on the wooden chair, sat Dr Grimesby Roylott, clad in a long, grey dressing gown, his bare ankles protruding beneath, and his feet thrust into red heelless Turkish slippers. Across his lap lay the short stock with the long lash which we had not noticed during the day. His eyes were fixed in a dreadful rigid stare at the corner of the ceiling. Round his brow he had a peculiar yellow band, with brownish speckles, which seemed to be bound tightly to his head. As we entered, he made neither sound nor motion.

'The speckled band!' whispered Holmes.

I took a step forward. In an instant his strange head-gear began to move, and there reared itself from among his hair the squat, diamondshaped head and puffed neck of a loathsome serpent.

'It is a swamp adder!' cried Holmes. 'The deadliest snake in India. He had died within ten seconds of being bitten. Violence does, in truth, recoil upon the violent. Let us thrust this creature back into its den, and then we can remove Miss Stoner to some place of shelter, and let the county police know what has happened.'

As he spoke he drew the dog whip swiftly from the dead man's lap and, throwing the noose around the reptile's neck, he drew it from its horrid perch and, carrying it at arm's length, threw it into the iron safe, which he closed upon it.

It is not necessary that I should prolong the narrative by telling you how we broke the sad news to the terrified girl, how we conveyed her by the morning train to the care of the good aunt at Harrow, of how the official enquiry came to the conclusion that the Doctor met his fate while indiscreetly playing with a dangerous pet. The little which I had yet to learn of the case was told me by Sherlock Holmes as we traveled back the next day.

'I had,' said he, 'come to an entirely erroneous conclusion. The presence of the gypsies, and the use of the word 'band' were sufficient to put me upon an entirely wrong scent. However, it became clear to me that whatever danger threatened an occupant of the room, could not come either from the window or the door. My attention was speedily drawn to the ventilator and the bell-rope which hung down to the bed.

The discovery that this was a dummy, and that the bed was clamped to the floor, gave rise to the suspicion that the rope was there as a bridge for something passing through the hole, and coming to the bed.

The idea of a snake instantly occurred to me, and when I coupled it with my knowledge that the Doctor was furnished with a supply of creatures from India, I felt that I was probably on the right track.

The idea of using a form of poison which could not possibly be discovered by any chemical test was just such a one as would occur to a clever and ruthless man with an Eastern training. The rapidity with which such a poison would take effect would also be an advantage. It would be a sharp-eyed coroner indeed who could distinguish the two little dark punctures which would show where the poison fangs had done their work. Then I thought of the whistle. Of course, he must recall the snake before the morning light revealed it to the victim. He had trained it, probably by the use of the milk which we saw, to return to him when summoned. He would put it through the ventilator at the hour that he thought best, with the certainty that it would crawl down the rope, and land on the bed. It might or might not bite the occupant, perhaps she might escape every night for a week, but sooner or later she must fall victim.

I had come to these conclusions before ever I had entered his room. An inspection of his chair showed me that he had been in the habit of standing on it, which, of course, would be necessary in order that he should reach the ventilator. The sight of the safe, the saucer of milk, and the loop of whipcord were enough to dispel any doubt which may have remained. The metallic clang heard by Miss Stoner was obviously caused by her stepfather hastily closing the door of his safe upon its terrible occupant. You know the steps which I took in order to put the matter to the proof. I heard the creature hiss, as I have no doubt that you did and I instantly lit the light and attacked it.'

'With the result of driving it back through the ventilator?'

'And causing it to turn upon its master at the other side. Some of the blows of my cane came home, and roused its snakish temper, so that it flew upon the first person it saw. In this way, I am no doubt indirectly responsible for the death of Dr Grimesby Roylott, but I cannot say that it is likely to weigh very heavily on my conscience.'

THE END.