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SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

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# Sherlock Holmes Short Stories

*Retold by*  
Clare West



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## The Speckled Band

1

### *Helen's Story*

At the time of this story, I was still living at my friend Sherlock Holmes's flat in Baker Street in London. Very early one morning, a young woman, dressed in black, came to see us. She looked tired and unhappy, and her face was very white. 'I'm afraid! Afraid of death, Mr Holmes!' she cried. 'Please help me! I'm not thirty yet and look at my grey hair! I'm so afraid!'



*Very early one morning, a young woman, dressed in black, came to see us.*

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‘Just sit down and tell us your story,’ said Holmes kindly.

‘My name is Helen Stoner,’ she began, ‘and I live with my stepfather, Dr Grimesby Roylott, near a village in the country. His family was once very rich, but they had no money when my stepfather was born. So he studied to be a doctor, and went out to India. He met and married my mother there, when my sister Julia and I were very young. Our father was dead, you see.’

‘Your mother had some money, perhaps?’ asked Sherlock Holmes.

‘Oh yes, mother had a lot of money, so my stepfather wasn’t poor any more.’

‘Tell me more about him, Miss Stoner,’ said Holmes.

‘Well, he’s a violent man. In India he once got angry with his Indian servant and killed him! He had to go to prison because of that, and then we all came back to England. Mother died in an accident eight years ago. So my stepfather got all her money, but if Julia or I marry, he must pay us £250 every year.’

‘And now you live with him in the country,’ said Holmes.

‘Yes, but he stays at home and never sees anybody, Mr Holmes!’ answered Helen Stoner. ‘He’s more and more violent now, and sometimes has fights with the people from the village. Everybody’s afraid of him now, and they run away when they see him. And they’re also afraid of his Indian wild animals which

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run freely around the garden. A friend sends them to him from India. And the animals are not the only wild things in the garden; there are also gipsies. My stepfather likes these wild people, and they can come and go where they like. Poor Julia and I had very unhappy lives. We had no servants. They always left because they were afraid of my stepfather, and we had to do all the work in the house. Julia was only thirty when she died, and her hair was already grey, like my hair now.'

'When did she die?' asked Sherlock Holmes.

'She died two years ago, and that's why I'm here. We never met anybody in the country, but sometimes we visited some of my family who live near London. There Julia met a young man who asked to marry her. My stepfather agreed, but soon after this she died.' Miss Stoner put her hand over her eyes and cried for a minute.

Sherlock Holmes was listening with his eyes closed, but now he opened them and looked at Helen Stoner.

'Tell me everything about her death,' he said.

'I can remember it all very well. It was a terrible time!' she answered. 'Our three bedrooms are all downstairs. First there is my stepfather's room. Julia's room is next to his, and my room is next to Julia's. The rooms all have windows on the garden side of the house, and doors which open into the corridor. One evening our stepfather was smoking his strong Indian cigarettes in

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his room. Julia couldn't sleep because she could smell them in her room, so she came into my room to talk to me. Before she went back to bed, she said to me, "Helen, have you ever heard a whistle in the middle of the night?"

'I was surprised. "No," I said.

"It's strange," she said. "Sometimes I hear a whistle, but I don't know where it comes from. Why don't you hear it?"

'I laughed and said, "I sleep better than you do." So Julia went to her room, and locked the door after her.'

'Why did you lock your doors?' asked Sherlock Holmes.

'We were afraid of the wild animals, and the gipsies,' she answered.

'Please go on,' said Holmes.

'I couldn't sleep that night. It was a very stormy night, with a lot of wind and rain. Suddenly I heard a woman's scream. It was my sister's voice. I ran into the corridor, and just then I heard a whistle, and a minute later the sound of falling metal. I didn't know what it was. I ran to my sister's door. She opened it and fell to the ground. Her face was white and afraid, and she was crying, "Help me, help me, Helen, I'm ill, I'm dying!" I put my arms around her, and she cried out in a terrible voice: "Helen! Oh my God, Helen! It was the band! The speckled band!" She wanted to say more, but she couldn't. I called my stepfather, who tried

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*'My sister's face was white and afraid.'*

to help her, but we could do nothing. And so my dear, dear sister died.'

'Are you sure about the whistle and the sound of falling metal?' asked Holmes.

'I think so,' answered Helen. 'But it was a very wild, stormy night. Perhaps I made a mistake. The police couldn't understand why my sister died. Her door was locked and nobody could get into her room. They didn't find any poison in her body. And what was "the speckled band"? Gipsies wear something like that round their necks. I think she died because she was so afraid, but I don't know what she was afraid of. Perhaps it was the gipsies. What do you think, Mr Holmes?'

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Holmes thought for a minute. ‘Hmm,’ he said. ‘That is a difficult question. But please go on.’

‘That was two years ago,’ Helen Stoner said. ‘I have been very lonely without my sister, but a month ago a dear friend asked me to marry him. My stepfather has agreed, and so we’re going to marry soon. But two days ago I had to move to my sister’s old bedroom, because some men are mending my bedroom wall, and last night I heard that whistle again! I ran out of the house immediately and came to London to ask for your help. Please help me, Mr Holmes! I don’t want to die like Julia!’

‘We must move fast,’ said Holmes. ‘If we go to your house today, can we look at these rooms? But your stepfather must not know.’

‘He’s in London today, so he won’t see you. Oh thank you, Mr Holmes, I feel better already.’

## 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

**YOU HAVE REACHED THE END OF THE SAMPLE.**

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