

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930), a Scottish physician, became so successful at creating mystery stories that he finally gave up his medical practice to devote all his time to writing. Many people consider his fictional character Sherlock Holmes to be the world's greatest detective. In fact, Conan Doyle once wrote a story in which Sherlock Holmes died; his devoted readers insisted he bring Holmes back to life. *The Speckled Band* is a play based on one of Conan Doyle's stories. As you read, try to find the clues Holmes will use to help him solve his baffling mystery.

*A Dramatization by Michael and Mollie Hardwick
Based on the Story by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*

The Speckled Band

CHARACTERS

SHERLOCK HOLMES: great English detective

DR. WATSON: a physician and Holmes's friend

HELEN STONER: distressed young woman

DR. GRIMESBY ROYLOTT: Helen's stepfather; a physician from an upper-class but poor family

MRS. HUDSON: Holmes's housekeeper; middle-aged

Scene: *The action takes place in and around London, England.
The time is the 1890s.*



Scene 1.

SHERLOCK HOLMES'S parlor. Early morning.

[A coffeepot stands on a small table. HOLMES, warming his back at the fire, is talking with MRS. HUDSON, who stands in the parlor doorway.]

HOLMES. All right, Mrs. Hudson. I'll see the lady at once.

MRS. HUDSON. Very good, Mr. Holmes.

[She turns to exit and collides with WATSON, who is bustling in.]

WATSON. Oops!

MRS. HUDSON. I beg your pardon, sir.

WATSON. My fault entirely, Mrs. Hudson.

[MRS. HUDSON exits, closing the door. WATSON, rubbing his hands briskly together, crosses to the coffee things and pours himself a cup.]

Morning, Holmes!

HOLMES. Good morning, my dear Watson! You're just in time.

WATSON. Eh? What for?

HOLMES. We have a client.

WATSON. What—already!

HOLMES. It seems that a young lady has arrived in a considerable state of excitement.

WATSON. Aha!

HOLMES. Now, when young ladies wander about the metropolis¹ at this hour of the morning I presume they have something very pressing to communicate. Should it prove so, I'm sure you would wish to follow the case from the outset?

WATSON. My dear fellow, I wouldn't miss it for anything! Young lady, d'ye say?

HOLMES. Watson!

[A knock at the parlor door. MRS. HUDSON enters.]

MRS. HUDSON. Miss Helen Stoner, sir.

[She steps aside to admit HELEN, then goes out, closing the door. HOLMES advances with hand outstretched, as WATSON hastily lays aside his coffee cup with interest.]

HOLMES. Good morning, madam. My name is Sherlock Holmes.

HELEN. [Her voice betrays tension.] Good morning, Mr. Holmes.

HOLMES. And this is my intimate friend and colleague, Dr. Watson.

WATSON. How d'ye do, ma'am?

HELEN. How do you do, Doctor?

1. **metropolis** [mi trop'ə līs]: large city; in this case, London.

WATSON. You're cold, ma'am! Let me pour you a cup of coffee.

[He starts off towards the coffee, but HELEN checks him.]

HELEN. No coffee, thank you. It's not . . . the cold.

WATSON. But you're shivering!

HELEN. From fear, Dr. Watson. From terror!

[HOLMES moves to her and steers her to a fireside chair. He takes the one opposite her, WATSON assuming his position at HOLMES'S elbow.]

HOLMES. Don't be afraid, Miss Stoner. We shall soon set matters right.

HELEN. If only you can!

HOLMES. You have come in by train this morning, I see.

HELEN. [Surprised.] How do you know that?

HOLMES. [Pointing.] There is the second half of a return ticket tucked into your left glove.

HELEN. Oh!

HOLMES. I see you also had a good ride in a dogcart,² along heavy roads, on your way to the station.

HELEN. Yes! But I don't see how you can possibly . . .

HOLMES. [Interrupting her.] There is no mystery, my dear madam. The left arm of your jacket is spattered with mud in no less than seven places. The marks are perfectly fresh. Only a dogcart throws up mud in that way.

HELEN. [Urgently.] Mr. Holmes, I have no one to turn to! No one!

2. **dogcart**: small open carriage.

HOLMES. Calm yourself, dear lady.

HELEN. [Sobbing.] I can stand this strain no longer! [HELEN dabs at her eyes.]

HOLMES. Tell me what I can do for you.

HELEN. [Recovering.] Forgive me, Mr. Holmes. If . . . if you can throw a little light through the darkness which seems to surround me . . .

HOLMES. Let us hope so.

HELEN. I . . . I must tell you that I can't pay for your services at present. But in a month or two I shall be married and have control of my own income.

WATSON. [A little disappointed.] Er, congratulations!

HOLMES. My profession is its own reward. Now kindly let us hear everything that may help us to form an opinion.

HELEN. Very well. [She settles back, a little more relaxed.] My mother was the young widow of Major General Stoner.

WATSON. Bengal Artillery?³

HELEN. Yes.

WATSON. [Impressed.] By Jove!

[He catches a meaningful glance from HOLMES.]

Sorry, Holmes! Pray go on, ma'am.

HELEN. When my twin sister, Julia, and I were two my mother remarried to Dr. Grimesby Roylott,⁴ of Stoke Moran, on the western border of Surrey.⁵ About eight years ago my



mother was killed in a railway accident at Crewe.⁶

[WATSON makes a sympathetic sound.]

HOLMES. Leaving you and your sister in the care of your stepfather.

HELEN. Exactly, Mr. Holmes. My mother had a great deal of money. She bequeathed it all to Dr. Roylott, with a provision that a certain annual sum should be allowed to my sister and me in the event of our marriage.

HOLMES. I understand. If I'm not mistaken, the Roylott family is one of the oldest Saxon⁷ families in England.

HELEN. And at one time amongst the richest, too. But the fortune was wasted in the last century by four successive heirs. The last

squire⁸ dragged out his existence as an aristocratic pauper,⁹ and all my stepfather inherited was a few acres of land and a 200-year-old house.

HOLMES. When was this?

HELEN. Oh, a good many years before he married my mother. He saw that he must adapt himself to conditions, so he took a medical degree. He went out to Calcutta¹⁰ and established a large practice. Unfortunately . . . [She hesitates.]

HOLMES. Yes?

HELEN. He . . . in a fit of anger, he beat his butler to death.

WATSON. Good heavens!

HELEN. He escaped a capital sentence,¹¹ but spent several years in prison.

HOLMES. And it was after his release that he married your mother?

HELEN. That is so. We all came back to England together, and my stepfather tried to establish a new practice here. But then . . . my mother was killed, and he took Julia and me to live with him in the ancestral home at Stoke Moran. It . . . it was about this time that a terrible change came over him.

HOLMES. A change? Of what kind?

HELEN. There was a series of disgraceful quarrels and brawls with anyone giving him the least offense. Two of them ended in the police court. My stepfather is a man of immense strength and absolutely uncontrollable anger.

8. **squire:** owner of a large amount of rural property.

9. **aristocratic** [ə rɪs'tə krət'ɪk] **pauper:** Aristocratic refers to the upper classes. A *pauper* is a poor person.

10. **Calcutta:** large city in northeastern India.

11. **capital sentence:** death penalty.

Only last week he threw the local blacksmith over a parapet¹² into a stream.

[WATSON whistles.]

WATSON. [Apologetically.] Er, I beg your pardon!

HELEN. He's become the terror of the village, until his only friends are the wandering gypsies. He gives them leave to camp on what remains of the estate. Oh, and he has his animals.

WATSON. He's farming now?

HELEN. Nothing like that, I'm afraid, Doctor. He has a passion for Indian animals. At this moment he has a cheetah and a baboon¹³ wandering quite freely in the grounds.

WATSON. Jove!

HOLMES. But your story is incomplete, Miss Stoner.

HELEN. I'm sorry. I was just going to add that, with this state of affairs, no servant would stay in the house, and so my poor sister and I had all the housework to do. You can imagine we had little pleasure in our lives.

[HOLMES nods sympathetically.]

Poor Julia's hair had already begun to turn white at the time of her death.

[HOLMES leans forward interestedly.]

HOLMES. Your sister is dead, then?

HELEN. She died just two years ago. She was thirty. It . . . it was just a fortnight¹⁴ before she should have been married.

12. **parapet** [par'ə pit']: low wall.

13. **cheetah** . . . **baboon:** A cheetah is a large, spotted cat, a member of the leopard family. A baboon is a large and fierce type of monkey.

14. **fortnight:** fourteen nights, or two weeks.

6. **Crewe** [krōō]: city that is the site of a great railroad junction, about 150 miles northwest of London.

7. **Saxon:** The Saxons were a German tribe that conquered Britain during the fifth and sixth centuries. Dr. Roylott's family is therefore one of the oldest in Britain.

3. **Bengal Artillery:** branch of the British Army located in northeast India, which was a British colony at the time.

4. **Grimesby Roylott** [grɪmz'bè roi'lɪt]

5. **Surrey:** county in southwestern England.

HOLMES. [Halting her with a gesture.] Miss Stoner—pray be precise about the details from this point.

HELEN. That will be easy. Every event of that dreadful time is seared into my memory.

HOLMES. Quite so.

HELEN. As I told you, the manor house is very old. Only one wing is now inhabited. The bedrooms are on the ground floor, all in a row, opening out into the same corridor. The first is Dr. Roylott's, the second was my sister's, the third mine. Do I make myself plain?

HOLMES. Perfectly. Watson?

WATSON. Three bedrooms in a row—your stepfather's, your late sister's, and then your own. Yes, I've got it.

HELEN. The windows of all three rooms open on to the lawn. Well, on that fatal night . . .

HOLMES. [Interrupting her.] One moment, Miss Stoner. You are about to tell us of your sister's death?

HELEN. Why, yes!

HOLMES. I see. And we understand, do we not, that some time before this event occurred, your sister had announced her intention of marrying?

HELEN. That's correct. Only a short while before, actually. She'd met her fiancé during a visit to our aunt's house at Harrow.¹⁵ He was a major of Marines, on half-pay.¹⁶

HOLMES. Did your stepfather oppose the match?

HELEN. No.

HOLMES. Then pray continue.

HELEN. On the night in question, Julia and I were sitting in her room, talking about her wedding arrangements. Dr. Roylott was in his room next door. We could smell his cigar. Well, I rose to leave my sister at eleven o'clock, but she stopped me at the door and asked something rather strange.

WATSON. What was that?

HELEN. Whether I had ever heard anyone whistle in the dead of the night.

WATSON. Whistle?

HELEN. I told her I hadn't. Then she said that on the past three nights she had been woken by a long, low whistle. She couldn't tell where it came from, and we put it down to the gypsies in the plantation nearby. Then I went off to my room, and I locked my door and went to bed.

HOLMES. You locked your door?

HELEN. I heard her key turn, too, as usual. With a cheetah and a baboon at large we had no feeling of security if our doors weren't locked.

HOLMES. I understand.

HELEN. I couldn't sleep that night. It was very wild outside, with the wind howling and the rain beating and splashing. Suddenly, amidst all the noise, I heard my sister scream. I turned my key and rushed into the corridor. Just as I did so, I seemed to hear a low whistle. I was in time to see my sister's door swing slowly open. I was rooted to the spot. I didn't know what I expected to see come out. Then, by the light of the corridor lamp, I saw my sister emerge. She was swaying . . . her face

was blanched¹⁷ with terror . . . her hands seemed to be groping for help . . . Oh!

[HELEN buries her face in her hands. HOLMES and WATSON exchange mystified glances.]

HOLMES. Take your time, ma'am.

HELEN. [Recovering with a determined effort.] I must tell you it all. I . . . ran to my sister. I threw my arms round her. But at that moment her knees seemed to give way and she fell to the ground. She . . . she writhed,¹⁸ as though in terrible pain. I thought she hadn't recognized me, but as I bent over her she suddenly shrieked out . . . "Helen! It was a band! The speckled band!"

HOLMES. "The speckled band?" Those were her exact words?

HELEN. I shall never forget them. It was the last time I heard her voice. As my stepfather came out of his room, pulling on his dressing gown,¹⁹ she died in my arms. [Faintly.] Such was the dreadful end of my beloved sister.

HOLMES. This whistle you say you heard—can you be sure?

HELEN. I have asked myself that sometimes.

WATSON. The wind and rain, Holmes. The old house creaking.

HELEN. I still think it was a whistle. That was what I swore to the Coroner.²⁰

HOLMES. Was your sister dressed?

HELEN. No, she was in her nightdress. We

17. **blanched**: very pale.
18. **writhed** [rɪθd]: twisted and turned.
19. **dressing gown**: bathrobe or lounging robe.
20. **Coroner**: official responsible for determining the cause of any suspicious or violent death.



found a spent match in one of her hands, and a matchbox in the other.

HOLMES. Showing that she had struck a light and looked around when she was alarmed. That is important.

WATSON. What conclusion did the Coroner come to, Miss Stoner?

HELEN. He was unable to find any satisfactory cause of death. Her door had been locked on the inside. Her window was shut and locked. She must have been quite alone when whatever it was happened to her.

WATSON. Were there any marks of violence on her?

HELEN. None at all.

WATSON. What about poison?

HELEN. The doctors could find no traces.

HOLMES. Miss Stoner . . .

15. **Harrow**: section of London.
16. **half-pay**: reduced wages received by a military officer who is not in actual service.

HELEN. Yes, Mr. Holmes?

HOLMES. What do you think this unfortunate lady died of?

HELEN. I believe she died of fear, Mr. Holmes. Of pure terror.

HOLMES. And what do you imagine frightened her?

HELEN. [Shaking her head slowly.] I don't know.

WATSON. [Inspired.] Holmes—that reference to a “speckled band.” Well, couldn't that be to do with the gypsies who were near? A band of gypsies . . . or . . . or even those spotted handkerchief things they wear on their heads. Speckled bands?

HOLMES. An interesting idea, Watson. These are very deep waters. Miss Stoner, please bring your narrative up to date now.

HELEN. Very well. All that was two years ago, as I told you. Since then, my life has been lonelier and unhappier than ever. However, a dear friend whom I've known for years has asked me to marry him. We . . . we're to be married in a few weeks' time.

HOLMES. What is your stepfather's view of that?

HELEN. He's offered no opposition whatever. But a strange thing has happened . . . sufficient to terrify me.

HOLMES. Please go on.

HELEN. Two days ago some building repairs were ordered and my bedroom wall is affected. I have had to move into the room my sister occupied at the time of her death.

WATSON. Next to your stepfather's.

HELEN. Yes, I'm . . . I'm sleeping in the very bed poor Julia slept in. You can imagine my

terror last night, then, when I heard that same low whistling sound.

WATSON. Great heavens!

HELEN. I sprang up and lit the lamp. But there was nothing to be seen in the room. I was too shaken to go to bed again. I got dressed, and as soon as it was daylight I slipped down to the Crown Inn and got a dogcart to drive me to the station at Leatherhead. My object was to see you, Mr. Holmes, and to ask your advice.

HOLMES. You were wise to do so, Miss Stoner. But have you told me everything?

HELEN. Yes, I have.

HOLMES. I fancy you have not!

HELEN. Mr. Holmes!

[HOLMES leans forward and turns back the fringe of dress at one of her wrists.]

HOLMES. If you will permit me? Thank you. You see, Watson?

[WATSON peers.]

WATSON. Those are bruises from four fingers and a thumb!

HOLMES. Precisely. You have been cruelly used, madam.

[He withdraws his hand.]

HELEN. [Flustered.] He . . . he is a hard man. But he is my stepfather. He . . . doesn't know his own strength. That is all.

HOLMES. If you insist, Miss Stoner, there are a thousand details that I should like to know before we decide on a course of action. If we were to come to Stoke Moran today . . .

HELEN. Today!

HOLMES. Believe me, there isn't a moment to lose. If we came, would it be possible for us to

see over these rooms without your stepfather's knowledge?

[HELEN gets to her feet.]

HELEN. He spoke of coming to town today on some important business. He will probably be away from home all day.

HOLMES. [Getting up.] Excellent! Will your servants be discreet?

HELEN. We only have a housekeeper. She's old and foolish. I could easily get her out of the way.

HOLMES. Then we shall come—that is, if you're not averse to the trip, Watson?

WATSON. By no means.

HELEN. I should like to do one or two things, now that I'm in town. I shall be back by the twelve o'clock train, and be at Stoke Moran in time to meet you.

HOLMES. Capital!

[He guides her towards the door.]

You're sure you won't stay for some breakfast?

HELEN. [Hesitates.] Well . . .

[HOLMES whips open the door and bows.]

HOLMES. Then you may expect to see us early this afternoon. Good day, Miss Stoner.

HELEN. Good day, gentlemen.

[She exits.]

WATSON. Good day.

[HOLMES closes the door.]

Holmes! You invite her to breakfast, then almost push her out!

HOLMES. [Seriously.] We have some business of our own to attend to before we go down there. What do you think of it all, Watson?

WATSON. [Troubled.] Dark and sinister—that's what I think of it, Holmes.

HOLMES. Dark enough and sinister enough.

WATSON. But, Holmes—if she's correct in saying the door and window of her sister's room were locked, then the girl must have been absolutely alone when she met her death.

HOLMES. Death in a sealed room, in fact?

WATSON. Natural causes. No other explanation. [Scratching his head.] But then, what about that whistling in the night—and that speckled band business?

HOLMES. I was hoping you were going to provide me with those answers, my dear Watson.

WATSON. Well, you'll have to hope again!

HOLMES. [Mock dismay.] Dear me!

WATSON. Have you any ideas?

HOLMES. We have whistles at night, a band of gypsies . . .

WATSON. Yes.

HOLMES. . . . a doctor who has a financial interest in preventing his stepdaughter's marriage.

WATSON. Ah, yes!

HOLMES. And we have a dying reference to a speckled band. Now, if we combine all these elements, I think there is good ground to believe that the mystery may be cleared up.

WATSON. Well, then—the gypsies: what did they do?

HOLMES. I can't imagine.

WATSON. Neither can I!

HOLMES. It's precisely for that reason that we're going to Stoke Moran today.

[A disturbance outside the parlor door, caused by MRS. HUDSON approaching, protesting vigorously, and ROYLOTT insisting on being allowed to pass.]

I want to see just how much can be explained . . . What in the name of . . . ?

[The parlor door is flung open, revealing ROYLOTT in a challenging attitude.]

ROYLOTT. Which of you two is Holmes?

MRS. HUDSON. [At his elbow.] I tried to prevent this gentleman, sir. He would insist.

HOLMES. [Calmly.] That's all right, Mrs. Hudson. Kindly close the door as you go.

MRS. HUDSON. Yes, sir.

[MRS. HUDSON goes, closing the door. ROYLOTT advances belligerently upon HOLMES.]

ROYLOTT. You're Holmes, then?

HOLMES. That is my name, sir. But you have the advantage of me.

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

HOLMES. Indeed, Doctor! Pray take a seat. This is your professional colleague, Dr. Watson.

[ROYLOTT ignores both the seat and WATSON.]

ROYLOTT. I'll do nothing of the kind! My stepdaughter has been here. I know she has! What has she been saying to you?

HOLMES. It is a little cold for the time of the year.

ROYLOTT. What has she been saying?

HOLMES. But I've heard that the crocuses²¹ promise well.

ROYLOTT. [Infuriated.] You think you can put

21. **crocuses** [kró'kəs əz]: flowers that appear in early spring.

me off, do you? But I know you, you scoundrel! You're Holmes, the meddler!

[HOLMES chuckles.]

Holmes, the busybody!

[HOLMES chuckles louder.]

Holmes, the Scotland Yard Jack-in-Office!²²

[HOLMES laughs out loud.]

HOLMES. Your conversation is most entertaining, Dr. Roylott. When you go out, do close the door, please. [Clasping his shoulders as though cold.] There's a decided draft.

[ROYLOTT, beside himself with fury, waves his fists in the air. WATSON quietly picks up a bottle, ready to wade in. HOLMES stands quite still and allows the tempest to rage.]

ROYLOTT. I will go when I've had my say. [Shaking his fist under HOLMES's nose.] Don't you dare meddle with my affairs! I know the girl has been here. I warn you, Holmes, I'm a dangerous man to fall foul of!

[He looks towards the fireplace, then strides over and picks up the poker.²³]

See here!

[WATSON raises his bottle in readiness, but ROYLOTT grasps the poker in both hands and begins to bend it.]

I'll show you . . . how I could bend you . . . for two pins!

[With a grunt he gets the poker almost to a right angle before relaxing the pressure. He holds the bent poker aloft for HOLMES and WATSON to see.]

See!

22. **Scotland . . . Office:** Scotland Yard is the headquarters of the London police force. *Jack-in-office* is a term for an arrogant minor official.

23. **poker:** iron bar used for stirring a fire.

[ROYLOTT hurls the poker into the fireplace with a clatter.]

That's what I could do to you.

[He turns and strides to the door.]

See that you keep yourself out of my grip!

[ROYLOTT jerks open the door and exits, slamming it behind him. WATSON puts down his bottle and joins HOLMES. They laugh heartily.]

WATSON. I say, Holmes!

HOLMES. He seems a very amiable fellow!

[HOLMES saunters to the fireplace and picks up the poker to examine it.]

If he'd stayed a moment I might have shown him something.

[HOLMES suddenly takes a two-handed grip on the poker and, with a single jerk, bends it straight again. WATSON applauds.]

WATSON. Bravo, Holmes!

[HOLMES puts the poker back with the other fire irons.]

"Scotland Yard Jack-in-Office," eh?

HOLMES. The insolence! Confusing me with the official police force!

WATSON. I hope he won't make that dear little lady suffer.

HOLMES. He's shown us that this is too serious a matter for any dawdling. Don't you see, Watson? His stepdaughters only come into their inheritance if they marry. One was about to do so, and died mysteriously two weeks beforehand. Now the other intends marriage, and the old, mysterious signs return.

WATSON. Serious business, all right.

HOLMES. I'll ring for our breakfast. . . .

[HOLMES rings the bell. Curtain.]



Scene 2.

A country railway station. That afternoon.

[HELEN enters as men and women—obviously passengers off a train—hurry away from left to exit right. HELEN peers past them and raises her hand to attract the attention of HOLMES and WATSON, as they enter. HOLMES wears his ulster and deerstalker,²⁴ WATSON his usual city clothes.]

HELEN. Mr. Holmes, Dr. Watson! I've been waiting so eagerly for your train.

[They shake hands.]

WATSON. We meet again, Miss Stoner.

HOLMES. Is everything well with you, madam?

HELEN. It's all turned out splendidly. Dr. Roylott is away in town, as I expected. It's unlikely he'll be back before evening.

HOLMES. Oh, we had the pleasure of making the Doctor's acquaintance ourselves.

HELEN. Where?

[She peers past them fearfully.]

In the train?

WATSON. He came to our rooms. Threw his weight about a bit, too. Trying to warn us off.

HELEN. He . . . he followed me there?

HOLMES. So it appears.

HELEN. What will he say when he returns?

HOLMES. He had better be on his guard. He may find there is someone more cunning than himself on his track.

24. **ulster and deerstalker:** An ulster is a very long, heavy overcoat, with a belt and attached cape. A deerstalker is a hunter's cap with visors in front and back. Both items have become associated with the character of Sherlock Holmes.

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HELEN. Then . . . Mr. Holmes, you really believe my stepfather has something to do with this mystery?

HOLMES. Judge for yourself, Miss Stoner. I found time before we left London to slip down to Doctors' Commons²⁵ and examine your late mother's will. The total income left by her to your stepfather amounted to eleven hundred pounds²⁶ a year, all derived from farm properties. But agricultural prices have fallen heavily since her death. The income has dwindled. I should say, to not much over seven hundred and fifty pounds.

HELEN. But what has this to do with anything?

HOLMES. Your mother stipulated that each daughter could claim an income of two hundred and fifty pounds a year in case of marriage. So, if both of you had married, your stepfather would have been left with what he might consider a pittance.²⁷

HELEN. [Slowly.] I see! Then . . . then even one marriage would reduce his income by about a third!

HOLMES. Exactly. My morning's work has proved that your stepfather has the strongest motives for standing in the way of your marriage. Your sister's marriage was prevented by some mysterious means, resulting in her death. And now . . . [He breaks off.] Now, we must make the best use of our time. If you will kindly take us at once to the house?

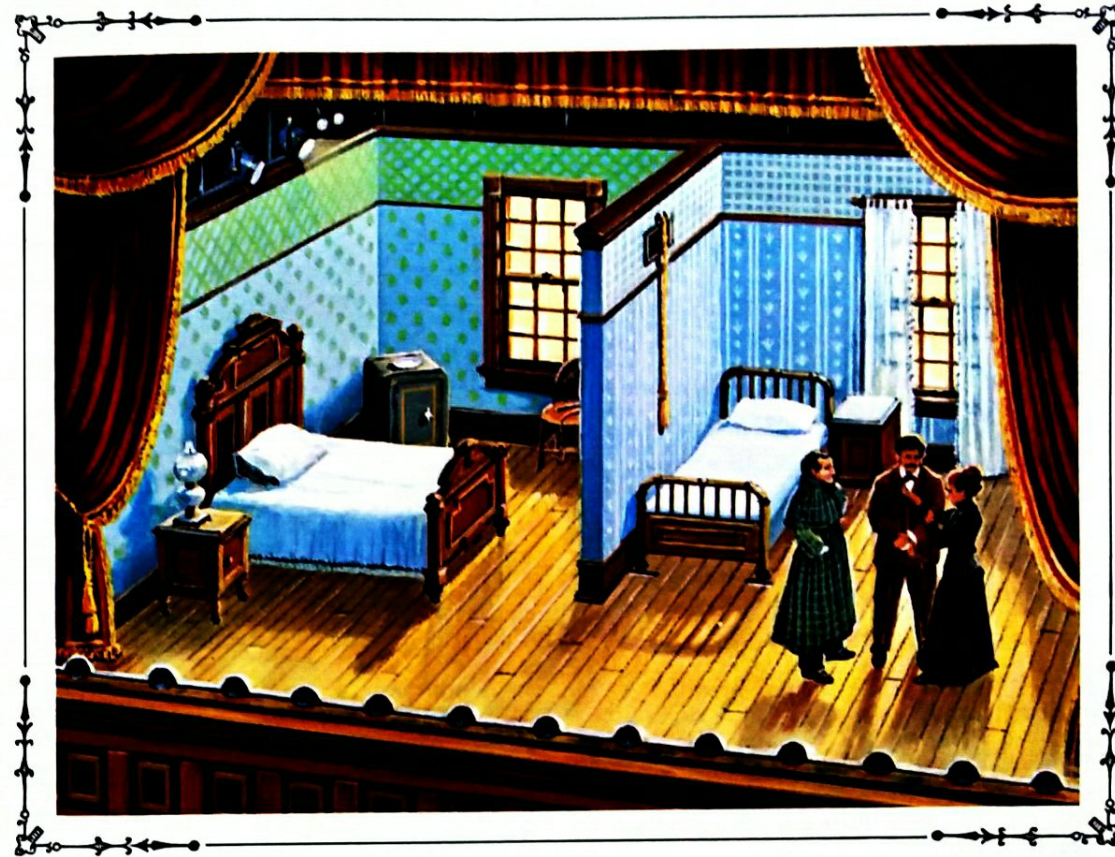
HELEN. Of course. Please come this way, gentlemen.

[She leads them off to exit right.]

25. **Doctors' Commons:** offices in London for Doctors of Civil Law.

26. **pounds:** The pound is the basic unit of British currency. In the 1890s it was worth about five dollars.

27. **pittance** [pit'əns]: small amount.



Scene 3.

The bedroom wing at Stoke Moran. Shortly afterward.

[We see the interiors of two adjoining bedrooms. In that to the audience's left hand, the bed is away from the dividing wall. A small table stands beside the bed, and there is a saucer on top of the safe. A wooden chair has its back to the back wall, in which a window is optional. A leather thong, or dogwhip,²⁸ with its thin end knotted into a small loop, lies on the chair. An unlighted oil lamp stands on a bedside table. High up in the

28. **dogwhip:** leash.

dividing wall is a ventilator. In the right-hand room, the bed—a metal, hospital type—stands against the dividing wall, with its foot to the audience. Dangling over it, attached to a point immediately above the ventilator in the dividing wall, is a bell rope.²⁹ A small table stands beside the bed, and there is a small chair nearby. There is a window in the back wall, capable of opening and shutting.

HOLMES, WATSON, and HELEN, attired as in

29. **bell rope:** rope attached to a wire that leads to a bell in the servants' quarters. When the rope is pulled, the bell rings to summon a servant.

the previous scene, stand in the right-hand room. HOLMES and WATSON looking about them.]

HOLMES. And this room, in which you are now sleeping, was formerly your late sister's?

HELEN. Yes. This . . . is where she met her death.

HOLMES. [Pointing to the dividing wall.] Dr. Roylott's room is next door in that direction?

HELEN. Yes. [Pointing the other way.] My own room . . . my usual room, is that way.

HOLMES. I think you said you are sleeping here while alterations are going on?

HELEN. Well . . . I've looked into my room once or twice. No work seems to be in progress. No workmen have been here.

WATSON. Sounds like an excuse to get you to move into here.

HELEN. I had wondered . . .

HOLMES. Then let us examine this room. Now, as both you and your sister locked your doors at night, you were quite unapproachable from the corridor.

[HOLMES points towards the audience.]

HELEN. Absolutely.

HOLMES. And the window was locked when your sister met her death?

[WATSON goes to the window, handles the catch and tests it.]

HELEN. Yes.

WATSON. Perfectly firm. Couldn't budge that from outside.

HOLMES. Then, what else have we?

[He spots the bell rope.]

Bless my soul! A bell rope!

HELEN. Yes. It rings in the housekeeper's room.

WATSON. Looks quite new. Didn't know they still made 'em.

HELEN. Oh, that one was only put in a couple of years ago.

HOLMES. Your sister asked for it, I suppose?

HELEN. No. I never heard of her using it. We always got what we needed for ourselves.

HOLMES. Indeed! Care to give it a tug, Watson?

WATSON. Certainly!

[He goes to do so, then checks.³⁰]

What about the housekeeper? She'll hear it.

HELEN. It's all right. She's in the wash house³¹ for the afternoon.

WATSON. Righto!

[He tugs at the rope, but there is no give in it, and no ring is heard. He tries again, with no result.]

That's funny!

[He tugs once more.]

Doesn't seem to work. No give in it at all.

HOLMES. Let me see.

[He tugs the rope, then looks up to the top of it.]

There's a simple explanation. This bell rope is a dummy.

HELEN. A dummy? You mean, it won't ring?

HOLMES. It isn't even attached to a bell wire.

30. **checks:** stops.

31. **wash house:** small building separate from the main house and serving as the household's laundry.

WATSON. Strange, Holmes!

HOLMES. And interesting. Look—you can see it's fastened to a hook, just above the little opening of the ventilator.

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

HOLMES. There are one or two seemingly absurd points about this room. Have you noticed, for instance, that the ventilator appears to connect with the adjoining room?

HELEN. I . . . Yes, I suppose it does!

WATSON. Take a fool of a builder to ventilate one room from another, wouldn't it? Could just as easily have put it in the outside wall.

HELEN. [Nervously.] The . . . the ventilator was a recent addition, too.

HOLMES. Done about the same time as the bell rope, I fancy.

HELEN. Why, yes! There were several little changes about that time.

HOLMES. They seem to have been of a most interesting character. A dummy bell rope and a ventilator that doesn't ventilate! Ah, well! With your permission, Miss Stoner, we shall now carry our researches into Dr. Roylott's own room.

HELEN. [Apprehensively.] Ce . . . certainly, Mr. Holmes.

[HELEN leads the way "out of room" by approaching the audience and miming³² the opening of the door, which WATSON, bringing up the rear, "closes" after he has passed through. HELEN goes through the motions of opening ROYLOTT'S door to the next room, and they all go in, WATSON "clos-

32. **miming:** gesturing without words or solid objects. The "door" must remain imaginary because a real door would block the audience's view of the action.

ing the door" behind them. HOLMES glances round.]

HOLMES. Hm! Sparsely furnished, I see.

HELEN. It is, rather.

HOLMES. And a safe!

[He goes to stand in front of the safe.]

What's in it?

HELEN. My stepfather's business papers.

HOLMES. You've seen inside it, then?

HELEN. Only once, some years ago. It was full of papers then.

HOLMES. There isn't a cat in it, for example?

WATSON. Cat in a safe, Holmes?

[HOLMES picks up the saucer and shows it to them.]

HOLMES. Look at this. What's a saucer of milk doing here?

HELEN. I can't think. We don't keep a cat. But there's the cheetah—and the baboon.

HOLMES. Well, a cheetah is just a big cat, I suppose—and yet I dare say a saucer of milk would hardly satisfy its needs!

[HOLMES replaces the saucer and looks at the chair. He picks up the leather thong.]

Hello! Here is something interesting!

WATSON. Looks like a dog leash! That milk's for a dog, then.

HELEN. But we haven't a dog!

[HOLMES catches up the looped end of the thong with his free hand and examines it closely, WATSON peering at it also.]

HOLMES. Tied to make a loop at the end. What do you make of that, Watson?

WATSON. Dashed if I know! Certainly wouldn't get a dog's neck through that. What d'you think, Holmes?

HOLMES. I think that it's a wicked world—and that when a clever man turns his brains to crime, it's wickedest of all. Now, I must just examine this chair.

[HOLMES takes a magnifying glass from his pocket and peers through it at the seat of the chair. WATSON and HELEN exchange baffled glances. HOLMES straightens up and puts his glass away.]

Yes—that point's quite settled, then.

WATSON. Eh?

HOLMES. [Seriously.] Miss Stoner . . .

HELEN. Yes, Mr. Holmes?

HOLMES. It is essential that you should follow my advice in every single respect. Your life may depend on it.

HELEN. My . . . my life! I . . . I'm in your hands.

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

HELEN. [Horried.] Mr. Holmes!

HOLMES. Please allow me to explain. I believe the village inn is straight over there?

[He points towards the window.]

HELEN. Yes—The Crown.

HOLMES. Your window should be visible from it, I think. Now, when your stepfather comes back, you must confine yourself to this room with a headache. Don't let him near you. You understand?

HELEN. Yes.

HOLMES. When you pretend to retire for the night, unfasten your window and shine a light from it as a signal to us. You must then

withdraw quietly from the room and go and spend the night in the room you used to occupy. Could you manage to do that?

HELEN. Yes, easily. But what will you do?

HOLMES. We shall come over from the inn and spend the night in the room next to this. We shall investigate the cause of this whistling noise that has disturbed you.

HELEN. I see. Mr. . . . Mr. Holmes—I believe you have already made up your mind.

HOLMES. Perhaps I have.

HELEN. Then, for pity's sake, tell me what caused my sister's death!

HOLMES. I should prefer to have clearer proof before I speak. And now, Miss Stoner, we must leave you.

HELEN. [Moving to the "door."] Very well.

[HELEN "opens the door" and they follow her out, WATSON "closing" it.]

HOLMES. Miss Stoner—perhaps Dr. Watson and I should wait in your room for a moment, while you make sure the coast is clear for us to leave. If Dr. Roylott returned unexpectedly and found us, our journey would have been in vain.

HELEN. Please go in, then. I won't be a moment.

[She exits quickly, right. HOLMES and WATSON reenter the right-hand room, WATSON "closing the door."]

WATSON. Well, Holmes?

HOLMES. You know, Watson, I really have some scruples about bringing you back here to-night. There's a distinct element of danger.

WATSON. Can I be of assistance?

HOLMES. Your presence might be invaluable.

WATSON. Then I shall certainly come!

[HOLMES claps him on the shoulder.]

HOLMES. It's very kind of you.

WATSON. Holmes—you speak of danger. You've evidently seen more here than I have.

HOLMES. I imagine you've seen as much as I. But I fancy I've deduced a little more.

WATSON. [Glancing round.] I don't see anything remarkable—except that bell rope.

HOLMES. You can see the ventilator, too.

WATSON. Yes—but, hang it, I don't think it's all that unusual to have a ventilator between two rooms!

HOLMES. Before we even came to Stoke Moran I knew we should find a ventilator.

WATSON. You did!

HOLMES. You remember in her statement she said that when she and her sister were talking in this room they could smell Roylott's cigar next door?

WATSON. I remember.

HOLMES. The windows and doors were presumably closed—so I deduced a ventilator.

WATSON. Hah! Pretty obvious, I suppose.

HOLMES. [Sarcastically.] Oh, yes!

WATSON. [Gazing at the ventilator.] But what harm can there be in that?

HOLMES. At least there's a curious coincidence of dates. A ventilator is made, a bell rope is hung, and a lady who sleeps in this room dies. By the way, did you notice anything peculiar about the bed?

WATSON. The bed?

[He bends down to peer at the bed, and prods it tentatively.]

Can't see anything wrong with it.

HOLMES. It's clamped to the floor.

WATSON. What!

[He examines the feet, then straightens up.]

Jove!

HOLMES. The bed can't be moved. It must always be in the same relative position to the ventilator and the bell rope.

[WATSON'S eyes travel from one thing to the other.]

WATSON. Holmes! Now I'm beginning to see!

HOLMES. Capital, my dear Watson!

WATSON. We . . . we're only just in time!

HOLMES. When a doctor does go wrong, Watson, he is the first of criminals. He has nerve and he has knowledge. Palmer and Pritchard were among the heads of their profession. This man strikes even deeper. But I think we shall be able to strike deeper still.

[HELEN enters right.]

We shall have horrors enough before the night is over. So let's go and have a quiet pipe and turn our minds for a few hours to something more cheerful.

[HELEN enters the room.]

HELEN. All clear, Mr. Holmes. You know the way to go.

HOLMES. Then good-bye, Miss Stoner—and be brave. If you do as I have told you, we shall soon drive away these dangers that threaten you.

[WATSON nods to HELEN. HOLMES and WATSON leave the room and exit right, leaving her gazing hopefully after them. Blackout.]



Scene 4.

The same place. That night.

[The setting as before, only now the stage remains in darkness. All is still. After a few moments the glimmer of a bull's-eye lamp³³ can be seen approaching from outside the window of the right-hand room. The window is opened and WATSON, holding the lamp, climbs stealthily through, followed by HOLMES, who carries his walking cane. WATSON closes the window. The stage lighting must now simulate³⁴ the moderate illumination from their lamp—just sufficient to enable the details of the room and the action to be seen. The left-hand room is dark.]

WATSON. So far, so good!

HOLMES. [In a lowered voice.] Keep your voice down, Watson. Just make sure she's locked the door securely.

33. **bull's-eye lamp:** lantern with outward-curving glass.
34. **simulate** [sim'yə lāt']: create the appearance of.

[WATSON goes through the motions of trying the door and turning a key.]

WATSON. She's left the key on the inside for us. I've locked it now.

HOLMES. Wise woman! Now, he's still in the parlor. I glimpsed him as we crossed the lawn. When he comes, he must believe Miss Stoner is in here, asleep.

WATSON. Hadn't we better sit in the dark?

HOLMES. I think not. It will be all right, so long as he can catch no glimmer through the ventilator.

[WATSON places their lamp carefully on the bedside table. The bed and the bell rope above it must be clearly seen, but the ventilator must remain in shadow. HOLMES draws out the small chair and places it facing the bed and the bell rope.]

Watson, I will sit on the bed, and you in the chair.

[WATSON looks at the bed, and then, ruefully,³⁵ at the hard chair.]

WATSON. Oh, all right!

[He sits on the chair. HOLMES sits near the foot of the bed.]

HOLMES. Don't go to sleep.

WATSON. Fat chance of that!

HOLMES. Your life may depend on it. Have your pistol ready, in case we should need it.

WATSON. Right.

[He draws his revolver and holds it on his knees. HOLMES keeps his cane in his hands. A smell of cigar smoke becomes apparent.]

HOLMES. Now, is everything understood?

WATSON. So far. I only wish you'd tell me . . .

[He breaks off and sniffs.]

HOLMES. [Lowering his voice further.] What is it?

[WATSON sniffs again.]

WATSON. [Low.] A cigar! He's in there!

HOLMES. He'd enter silently and without a light, not to wake up Miss Stoner. Now, Watson, listen—and watch!

[They sit absolutely still and silent, their eyes towards the ventilator. After a few movements a snakelike hissing is heard from that direction. A snake begins to make its way down the bell rope and stops halfway. There is a low whistle from the next room. HOLMES leaps up and lashes at the snake with his cane. WATSON jumps up, the snake slithers quickly up the bell rope and out of sight.]

35. **ruefully:** regretfully.

HOLMES. [Shouting.] You saw it, Watson? You saw it?

WATSON. I . . . I think I . . .

[HOLMES seizes the lamp and shines it at the ventilator, but the snake has disappeared. ROYLOTT, in the next room, screams.]

HOLMES. Quickly, Watson! Roylott's room!

[ROYLOTT continues to scream. They rush to their door, HOLMES carrying the lamp. WATSON "unlocks the door" and they run to the left-hand room and run in. The stage lighting, simulating their lamp, reveals ROYLOTT, slumped silently on his chair with the snake coiled round his head and the leather thong dangling limply from his hand. The safe door is ajar.]

WATSON. Holmes! Round his head! A snake!

HOLMES. The band—the speckled band!

[HOLMES crosses carefully to ROYLOTT.]

It's a swamp adder—the deadliest snake in India! He's dead already.

[WATSON approaches cautiously, his revolver at the ready.]

WATSON. Great heavens!

HOLMES. Violence does, in truth, recoil upon the violent. The schemer falls into the pit which he digs for another.

WATSON. Never mind that, Holmes! Shall I shoot it?

HOLMES. No.

[He hands the lamp to WATSON, then moves carefully to ROYLOTT and takes the thong from his hand.]

This noose in the dog leash will do it. It's obviously intended for this.

[HOLMES carefully dangles the noose on to the snake, as though capturing it, then, with a swift movement, gathers the reptile up in his hands, holding it firmly by neck and tail.]

HOLMES. Quickly, Watson! The safe!

[WATSON hurriedly obeys, opening the safe door wide. HOLMES pops the snake inside and slams the door. They stand silently for a moment.]

WATSON. Whew!

[HOLMES draws out a handkerchief and mops his brow. Then, taking out a box of matches, he goes to the table lamp and lights it. As the stage lights come up gradually to illuminate the whole room, WATSON blows their own lamp out and sets it down.]

HOLMES. You may put your trusty friend away, Watson. He won't be needed now.

[WATSON pats his revolver with a grin and returns it to his pocket. HOLMES subsides on to the bed. WATSON goes to ROYLOTT and examines him briefly.]

WATSON. He's dead, all right. But, Holmes—what made you suspect you'd find a snake?

HOLMES. When I examined Miss Stoner's room, it became clear to me that whatever danger threatened could not come either from the window or the door. The discovery that the bell rope leading from near the ventilator was a dummy, and that her bed was clamped to the floor, instantly made me suspicious that the rope was there as a bridge.

WATSON. I thought as much!

HOLMES. The idea of a snake occurred to me at once. When I coupled it with the knowledge that Dr. Roylott was a fancier of creatures from India, I felt sure I was on the right track.

WATSON. I see!

HOLMES. The idea of using a form of poison which couldn't possibly be discovered by any chemical test was just what would occur to a clever and ruthless man with Eastern experience. It would be a sharp-eyed coroner who could distinguish two little dark punctures in the victim's skin.

WATSON. That's quite so. Miss Stoner didn't mention any such thing being found on her sister. But, then, what about the whistle? I heard it plainly.

HOLMES. So did I. You see, he would put the snake through the ventilator with the certainty that it would crawl down the rope and land on the bed. But he couldn't be sure that it would bite the occupant of the bed. She might escape every night for a week before she fell a victim. Therefore, he had to be able to recall the snake before the morning.

WATSON. By whistling to it?

HOLMES. The equivalent of the snake charmer's flute.³⁶ He probably trained it by means of that saucer of milk.³⁷

WATSON. Remarkable!

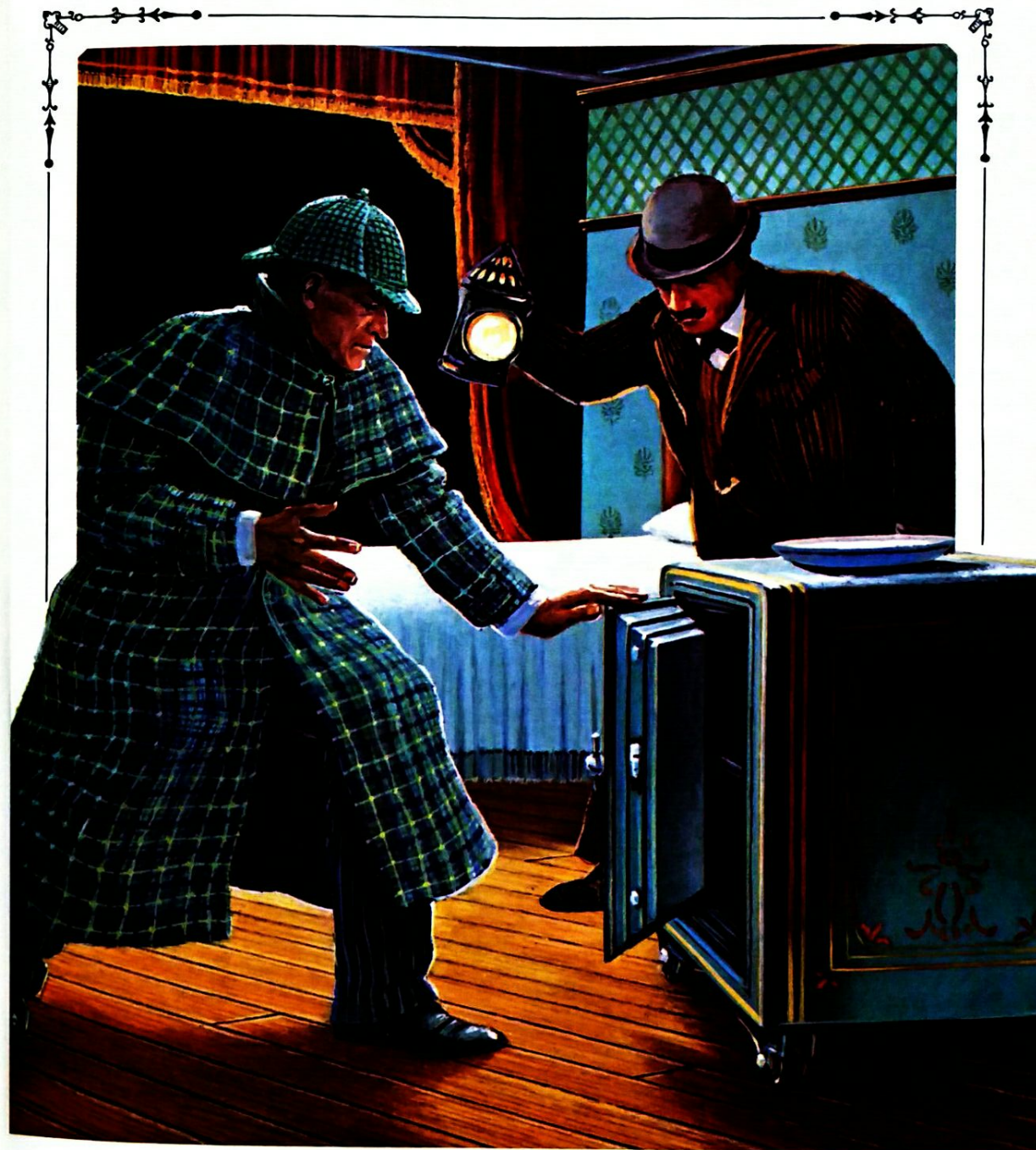
HOLMES. I had come to these conclusions before I even entered this room for the first time. You remember I examined the seat of that chair through my lens?

WATSON. Yes. What was that for?

HOLMES. Simply to confirm to myself that he had been in the habit of standing on it in order to reach the ventilator. When I saw the safe, the saucer of milk, and this loop of whip-

36. **snake charmer's flute:** A snake charmer is an entertainer who seems to hypnotize a snake by playing a flute or similar instrument.

37. **milk:** Many types of snakes are fond of milk.



cord, any doubts I might still have had were dispelled.

WATSON. [Slowly.] Holmes . . .

HOLMES. Yes, my dear Watson?

WATSON. I'm rather glad I didn't know any of this before we settled down in that room next door. When I think of that creature, sliding down the bell rope towards us . . . !

HOLMES. Well, at least I sat on the bed and gave you the chair.

WATSON. So you did! And you knew what to expect!

HOLMES. As soon as I heard the creature hiss I knew for certain what we were up against. I don't mind admitting I was glad to use my stick on it.

WATSON. Did you *hope* to drive it back into here?

HOLMES. No, I wouldn't say that. Some of my blows got home and must have roused its snakish temper. It fled through the ventilator and fastened on the first person it saw.

[HOLMES gets to his feet and stands before ROYLOTT, looking down at him.]

We must inform the country police of what has happened. No doubt I'm indirectly responsible for Dr. Grimesby Roylott's death—but I can't say it's likely to weigh very heavily upon my conscience.

[Curtain, as they stand contemplating the dead man.]

STUDY QUESTIONS

Recalling

1. How does Holmes know that Helen has traveled to his office by train? What else is Holmes able to conclude simply by observing Helen's appearance?
2. What does Watson guess that the "speckled band" may be?
3. Briefly describe Roylott's behavior in Holmes's office.
4. According to Holmes, what four elements should be combined to clear up the mystery?
5. What does the "speckled band" actually turn out to be? List five facts that caused Holmes to suspect its true identity.

Interpreting

6. What do we learn of Roylott's personality from his behavior in Holmes's office?

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7. What evidence in the play indicates Holmes's keen skill as a detective?
8. Besides his skill as a detective, name two other aspects of Holmes's personality that we learn from the drama. Give examples to support each aspect.
9. In what way does the play emphasize the idea of good triumphing over evil?

Extending

10. Imagine you were watching a performance of *The Speckled Band*. What parts would you probably find most exciting? What elements make these parts so suspenseful?

READING AND LITERARY FOCUS

Drama

A drama is a play or story that is meant to be performed before an audience. A drama always

includes two important elements. One element is the dialogue, or lines that the characters speak. The other element is the stage directions, or instructions that tell actors how to say their lines and how to move on stage.

Read the following excerpt from *The Speckled Band*:

HOLMES. [In a lowered voice.] Keep your voice down, Watson. Just make sure she's locked the door securely.

[Watson goes through the motions of trying the door and turning a key.]

The stage directions appear in brackets. The first direction tells an actor how to speak. The second direction tells an actor how to move. The dialogue, spoken by Holmes, begins, "Keep your voice down. . . ."

A drama is usually divided into acts or scenes. A new act or scene usually begins whenever the time or setting of the action changes.

Authors of plays, or playwrights, write to express their personal views about life. The behavior and experiences of characters on stage reflect the playwright's vision of life in general. For example, a play about a greedy person who ends up friendless may illustrate the playwright's belief that greed is an undesirable trait.

You will find more drama selections beginning on page 341.

Thinking About Drama

1. Find three examples of stage directions that tell actors how to move as they perform *The Speckled Band*. Find three more directions telling actors how to speak.
2. What are the time and location of each scene in *The Speckled Band*? How much time passes in the entire drama?
3. Based on the play's events, what do you feel were the playwright's feelings about people who disobey the law?

COMPOSITION

Writing a Drama Review

- Write a drama review of *The Speckled Band*. Begin by giving general information about the drama and its author. Then describe the setting of the play. Next describe the main characters, and summarize the plot. End your review by stating your opinion of the drama, backed by details from the play. For help with this assignment, see Lesson 9 in the *Writing About Literature Handbook* at the back of this book.

Writing a Scene

- Imagine that Holmes and Watson had entered Roylott's room before the snake killed him. Write a dramatic scene that reveals what might have happened then. Make sure the characters, setting, and plot remain believable. Also make sure the problem is settled somehow by the end of the scene. For help with this assignment, see Lesson 10 in the *Writing About Literature Handbook* at the back of this book.

CHALLENGE

Puzzles

- Write your favorite puzzle or riddle on a piece of paper. Have your teacher collect all the puzzles and read each one aloud. See how many of your classmates' puzzles and riddles you can solve.

COMPARING THEMES

1. Considering that Helen's life is in danger, how are her goals similar to those of Rikki-tikki-tavi?
2. How do Sherlock Holmes and the speaker in "Roadways" both pursue career goals?
3. How are the goals of individuals in the drama different from the national goals in "Morning—'The Bird Perched for Flight' "?