The Adventure of the Speckled Band Study Guide

The Adventure of the Speckled Band by Arthur Conan Doyle

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

In "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" Arthur Conan Doyle presents, for the reader's consideration, one of the most unusual cases in the long, illustrious career of Sherlock Holmes. The narrator, Holmes' friend and right hand man, Dr. Watson, fills us in on Holmes' legendary detective abilities, for the benefit of those readers who have not yet heard of the famous sleuth.

This case is brought to Holmes' attention by a distraught young woman named Helen Stoner. Miss Stoner seeks out Holmes in the early hours of the morning on a fine spring day in 1883. In her urgency, she wakes up the entire household because she must speak to Holmes right away. Holmes and the faithful Watson, always eager to hear an interesting mystery, invite her to share her problem.

Helen Stoner recounts for them the sad story of her life. Her mother, killed eight years ago, left Helen and her twin sister with a healthy inheritance and a violent stepfather. The stepfather, Dr. Grimesby Roylott, comes from a noble but tragic bloodline. The Roylott family wealth has been squandered over time by the reckless and violent male heirs of the Roylott line. Since the death of Helen's mother, Dr. Roylott has been content to live off his dead wife's income. He indulges his violent nature frequently with his stepdaughters and with the surrounding villagers, who all fear the dreaded Roylott. His only friends are a band of gypsies who frequent Roylott's family home at Stoke Moran, as well as a cheetah and a baboon that are allowed to roam freely over the grounds.

The animals are imported from India, where Roylott had a medical practice for many years. Helen confides that back in India, Roylott killed their butler over a stolen property dispute and spent quite some time in prison for it. Nowadays he continues to cause trouble and terrorize the neighbors with his violence. Helen has wasted considerable money paying off the villagers after each one of these incidents. Helen appeals to Holmes to help her because she fears her stepfather is plotting against her life. However, she has absolutely no proof, and even her fiancé thinks her fears are groundless.

Helen fears for her life because her twin sister, Julia, died mysteriously two years ago at the family home in Stoke Moran some two weeks before her wedding. Helen's wedding date is now approaching, and as she relates the story of Julia's death, we see similarities to Helen's current situation. On the night she died, Julia mentioned to Helen that for the past several nights, she'd been woken by the sound of a low whistle in the dead of night. The same night she told Helen about the whistle, Julia died mysteriously in her locked room. Julia's last words referred to a "speckled band." Helen believes she died of fright but cannot imagine what frightened her sister so.

Helen's current agitation stems from the fact that her stepfather has begun repairs on Helen's bedroom, which has forced Helen to move into her dead sister's bedroom until the repairs are completed. Helen insists to Holmes that her room was never in need of repair at all and believes it's a ploy to move her into Julia's room. Finally, late last night

while Helen was lying in bed, she heard it - the sound of a low whistle in the dead of night. Helen came straightaway to see Holmes and hire him to assist her. She explains to Holmes that she cannot pay him until after her wedding. She gets control of her inheritance only when she marries; until then it is in her stepfather's hands.

Holmes, always the gentleman, puts her mind at ease about his fee and agrees to meet her at Stoke Moran later that afternoon. Relieved, Helen leaves, and Holmes discusses the case with Watson. Holmes' initial theory is that Roylott has hired a gypsy friend to break into the bedroom and in some way cause his stepdaughters' deaths. Just then Roylott bursts through the door. He threatens Holmes by bending a steel poker in half. Roylott admits to having followed Helen there this morning and tells Holmes to stay out of his business. Holmes laughs off the encounter and bends the steel poker back in place.

Holmes goes off to research his theory that morning; in the process he reviews Helen's mother's will. Holmes and Watson travel through the English countryside, first by train and then by carriage to reach Roylott's house. During the trip, Holmes tells Watson that the provisions of the will give Roylott a very good motive for murder indeed. When they arrive at Stokes Moran, Helen shows them the rooms where she and Dr. Roylott sleep. Holmes exams the shuttered bars on the windows and immediately realizes his gypsy theory is wrong; the windows are impassable. Inside Julia's old room, he finds a fake bell-pull next to the bed attached to a tiny ventilator shaft which leads, not to the outside air, but straight to Dr. Roylott's bedroom next door. In Dr. Roylott's bedroom they find a saucer of milk standing on top of a safe and a tiny dog leash looped into a noose. Holmes has seen enough, but he needs to prove his theory. He gives Helen some instructions, then he and Watson high-tail it out of there before Roylott gets back.

Holmes and Watson keep watch from an inn across the way that has a clear view of the house. They watch as Roylott returns, and they are still watching several hours later as Helen gives the all-clear signal. They steal up to the house, seen by no one but the baboon, and enter through the window to Julia's bedroom, which Helen has left open. They seal themselves inside with a gun, a cane, and a candle, but no lamp because Roylott would see the light glow through the ventilator. Holmes warns Watson not to make a sound, and the men wait in silence.

Hours later, they see light through the ventilator shaft and then hear a soft hissing. Holmes lights the candle and attacks the bell-rope with his cane. They hear a low whistle from the next room. Watson can only watch helplessly; he has no idea what's going on. Suddenly, they hear a blood-curdling scream come from Dr. Roylott's room. Rushing to his room, they find him dead, in his chair, with a speckled bandana on his head. The head band moves, it hisses at them. Holmes warns Watson that the speckled band is a swamp adder from India, and that its venom kills in ten seconds. Holmes slips the noosed dog leash around the snake and throws it back into the open safe.

The next day, he and Watson see Helen safely off to her aunt's house to continue her life and her wedding plans. The coroner's inquiry officially lists Roylott's death as an accident; he was careless with his tropical pet. Holmes explains, for Watson's benefit,

the scientific method which led him to suspect the murder weapon was a swamp adder, and he fills in all the details we might have missed about Dr. Roylott's wicked plan. As usual with a Sherlock Holmes story, the villain is apparent from the beginning. The pleasure in reading Conan Doyle's work comes from following Holmes as he unravels the puzzle. Through Watson's eyes, the reader is able to get inside the mind of the great Holmes and to learn to think like a master detective.

Section 1

Section 1 Summary

A narrator reflects on the seventy some cases Sherlock Holmes has solved in the past eight years and advises us that the case he's about to chronicle for us is the most unusual of all. The narrator mentions that this is an old case, one which takes place back in the narrator's bachelor days when he shared rooms with Sherlock Holmes on Baker Street. The reason given for the delay in reporting the case publicly is a mysterious promise of secrecy, apparently made by the narrator to a lady who has recently passed away, thus releasing him from his vow. The narrator also feels it's important to come forward about the case to set to rest some of the uglier rumors about the death of one Dr. Grimesby Roylott.

"The Adventure of The Speckled Band" opens on Baker Street, the famous bachelor pad headquarters of detective Sherlock Holmes and our narrator — we learn as he tells the story that his name is Watson and that he is a doctor. It is early April, 1893, at a quarter past seven in the morning. Watson wakes to find Holmes, usually a late riser, standing over his bed. Holmes explains that he's been roused by an early morning visitor, a young lady in a state of agitation. Holmes figures she would not have come so early if it were not important and wants to give Watson a chance to sit in on the meeting.

Watson hurries to get dressed, explaining to the readers that his keenest pleasure is to follow along on Holmes' cases, to watch in admiration as his friend unravels deductive problems with logic so swift it seems magical. Together they descend the stairs to the sitting room where their caller awaits. Sherlock Holmes introduces himself to the mysterious lady, veiled and dressed in black; Holmes assures her that she can speak freely in front of Watson. He offers the shivering lady some hot coffee, but she tells them it's not the cold which makes her shiver, it's fright. Indeed, when she raises her veil, fear is most evident on her face.

Holmes begins a detailed visual appraisal of the woman: she looks to be about thirty, with prematurely grey hair and a weary expression. Holmes comforts the woman, assuring her that they will set things right for her. From a few visual clues in her appearance, he deduces that she has arrived by morning train, having taken a dog-cart to the train station very early today. She is startled by his seemingly psychic knowledge. Holmes smiles and explains how he logically arrived at these conclusions by observing both the train ticket stub she clutches in her hand and the distinctive pattern of fresh mud splashed on her jacket.

The woman launches into a dramatic plea for Holmes to help her out of a situation so stressful she fears she will go mad. She tells them she was referred to Holmes by a former client, Mrs. Farintosh. She informs him she cannot pay him now, but that within six weeks she will be married and in control of some income and would show her gratitude then for his help now. Holmes checks the casebook in his desk to refresh his

memory on the Farintosh case. He remembers it as being before Watson's time, and that it concerned some jewelry. He responds in a courtly manner to the woman, telling her that his work is its own reward, and that she may defray his expenditures if and when it is convenient for her. The woman's despair is not quieted, however, as she warns Holmes that she has only circumstantial evidence of her plight, and that even her most trusted confidante does not believe her fears are valid. Holmes is her last hope of finding her way out of the danger which surrounds her. Sherlock Holmes gives her his full attention.

Section 1 Analysis

The author uses the conceit of Dr. Watson as narrator to make the story sound like historical fact. This approach assists with the reader's suspension of disbelief. Arthur Conan Doyle convinces us that we are reading a true accounting of a real crime case, chronicled by the earnest narrator and friend to Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Watson.

A doctor himself, with experience in forensics, Conan Doyle was ahead of his time, writing true crime fiction. His case files were a forerunner of the current television crime drama style. The public's interest in the true crime genre was as avid then as it is now, and the public's appetite for Sherlock Holmes stories is as large or larger today. Over the years hundreds of films, television shows, and related writings have continued to chronicle the adventures of world famous Sherlock Holmes. There are even Sherlockian Societies of fans and book lovers who maintain the fiction - created by the narrator, Dr. Watson - that Holmes was a real person who lived and died (twice) and solved over sixty cases. The sixty cases chronicled in Arthur Conan Doyle's original short stories are considered the "Canon" of definitive Sherlock Holmes lore by his fans.

In this first part of the story, we meet Sherlock Holmes. Because of the stories' popularity, most readers, both at the time of publication and today, are already familiar with the famous detective. This story is one of many stories told about the detective, and his public legend stems from that complete body of work. This leaves the author, Conan Doyle, in the constant predicament of finding ways to introduce Holmes' character that work both for new readers and for existing Sherlock fans. Conan Doyle addresses this admirably in this short story by showing us Holmes' personality traits rather than explaining them all. Over the course of the various stories, Holmes has become known as a gentleman who gladly helps out ladies in distress. He is a defender of the weak and powerless, a most admirable quality which the author doesn't bother telling us about through his narrator. Instead he shows us how Holmes reacts to a damsel in distress, his early morning client. Holmes, who certainly must make a living like every man, graciously waives any upfront fee and leaves his salary entirely to the lady's discretion. He does this in a charming manner which doesn't make her feel as if she's accepting charity. How much more effective to show us Holmes as a man of noble sensibilities than to simply have the narrator, Watson, tell us about them.

Section 2

Section 2 Summary

The visitor at last gives her name: Helen Stoner. She tells Watson and Holmes that her stepfather is descended from one of the oldest families in England, the Roylotts of Stoke Moran. Holmes indicates he has heard of them. Miss Stoner recounts the history of the once wealthy and important Roylott family, who, in the last four generations, have become self-indulgent spendthrifts, shrinking the family fortune until it was finally all gambled away. She informs Holmes that today the estate is down to a few scrubby acres containing a two hundred year old house, where she lives with her stepfather, Dr. Grimesby Roylott.

Dr. Roylott is the last living heir to the Roylott aristocracy. After watching his father live out his life in aristocratic poverty, Helen Stoner's stepfather took another route. He obtained a medical degree and opened a successful practice in Calcutta, where he met and married Helen's mother, at the time a military widow with two young girls and a thousand a month in income. The twin girls, Helen and Julia, were two years old at the time of their mother's remarriage. Helen confesses that during their time in Calcutta, Dr. Roylott beat their butler to death and served a long term in prison. After his release, the family returned to England.

Soon after their return, the girls' mother was killed in a railway accident. Her will left the thousand a month income to her husband for as long as the twins lived with him, with a provision in the will that if either girl married and left the house, they were to receive a portion of the inheritance directly. Dr. Roylott immediately abandoned his medical practice and moved himself and the twins into his family home at Stoke Moran. There was enough money for them all to live happily, and the neighbors were overjoyed to see Dr. Roylott back home on his family estate.

Dr. Roylott's family left him another legacy besides the house: a violent temper, hereditary to the Roylott men. In Dr. Roylott's case, Helen believes his long residence in the tropics only intensified his natural temper. In the eight years since her mother's death, Helen's stepfather has engaged in a series of brawls, landing in court twice. Helen tells Holmes the villagers are all afraid of her stepfather, and clearly so is she; she describes him as a man of "immense strength, and absolutely uncontrollable in his anger." (pg. 110) His temper has cost them a great deal of money over the years, as Helen has paid great sums to smooth over his disgraceful behavior. Dr. Roylott's only friends are a wandering band of gypsies and the animals he imports from India — a cheetah and a baboon — all of which are given leave to roam the Roylott land freely. The neighbors are as afraid of the animals as they are of Dr. Roylott. Servants are afraid to stay at the house, and the girls would spend much of their time alone.

Somehow, despite all of this, Julia managed to meet an eligible marine who wanted to marry her. Dr. Roylott offered no objection to the marriage, but within two weeks of the

scheduled wedding date, Julia died. Sherlock Holmes has been slumped back in his chair with his eyes closed throughout Helen Stoner's recitation; now he half-opens his eyes and asks Helen for the precise details of her sister's death. Helen assures him the details are seared in her mind, and she goes on to describe the scene of her sister's death.

Only one wing of the ancient Roylott mansion is inhabitable. The ground floor of this wing contains three bedrooms: the first is Dr. Roylott's, the middle room was Julia's, and the third room, at the end of the hallway, is Helen's. All the rooms open only onto the hallway; they do not connect with one another. Each room has a window facing the lawn; the windows have heavy metal shutters which the girls always kept locked to keep the wild animals from entering.

On the night of Julia's death, Dr. Roylott had gone to his room early. Apparently he had not gone there to sleep, as the smell of his Indian cigars kept Julia awake in her room. She went down the hall to Helen's room to talk about the upcoming wedding and to escape the smell of smoke. Around eleven Julia got up to return to her room. Before leaving, she casually asked if Helen had heard a strange whistling sound the past few nights, around three in the morning. Helen told her no and suggested that the whistling came from the gypsies on the lawn. Julia remarked that if it was the gypsies on the lawn, Helen would have heard it, too, because both their windows open directly to the lawn. Helen smiled and reminded her that Julia was a lighter sleeper than she. Julia dismissed the subject as inconsequential and returned to her room. Moments later Helen heard her sister lock her door, as was her habit each night. Helen recalls that she couldn't sleep that night, mentioning the close connection that twin souls, like she and her sister, have to one another. A wild storm lashed against the windows all night, until suddenly, in the middle of it all, Julia's terrified scream reached Helen's ears.

Section 2 Analysis

Throughout Helen Stoner's introduction, Watson remains the passive observer. He asks none of the questions; his job is to study and record the accounts of his friend's cases. By remaining the detached, scientific observer, he is able to study Holmes' methods without interfering in the process. While Holmes very much values his friend's opinion, Watson gives it only when asked. We will see later in the story that when action needs to be taken, Watson is ready to help, but he only does what he's asked when he's asked. Watson never initiates the actions. Our faithful narrator is a believer in the scientific method, which is why he admires Holmes so much. Holmes solves all of his cases using scientific, logical deductions. Watson's observations and writings about Holmes are carried out in an objective, non-intrusive style; he reports what he sees. In the days before moving pictures, Watson's narration attempts to capture the scene as objectively as a camera.

It's interesting that Conan Doyle chose this narration style. He was a man of science, and we hear some of the author's rationalism spoken through both Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson. Holmes once said that where people go wrong in trying to solve crimes

is that they try and twist facts to fit their theories, instead of simply twisting their theory to fit the facts. In such a way Conan Doyle and his writings embodied the progressive move towards a more rational, scientifically quantifiable world-view which had already begun to flourish in his day. This change in the public consciousness sparked advancements in technology and medicine and led to the growing faith in science that characterized the global Industrial Revolution taking place in the time Conan Doyle lived and wrote.

Section 3

Section 3 Summary

Helen Stoner continues her narration. Upon hearing her sister's scream, she got out of bed, grabbed a shawl and rushed out of her room to the corridor. As she exited her room, she heard a low whistle, the type her sister had described, and further, she heard a metallic clanging sound. Helen ran down the hallway to her sister's room. She arrived to see her sister's door swing open eerily onto darkness. Helen was horrified at the thought of what was about to come out that door. But it was only her sister, staggering as if drunk, her face contorted in utter terror. Helen rushed to Julia, who fell to the ground writhing as if in horrible pain. Julia screamed something about a "speckled band" and pointed in the direction of Dr. Roylott's room before slumping unconscious. Helen rushed to get the doctor, who was already hurrying from his room. He tried to revive Julia with brandy and sent for medical help from the village. Julia could not be saved; she died without ever recovering consciousness.

At this point, Holmes interrupts the narration to ask how certain Helen is about the whistle and the metallic clanging sounds. She gives him the same answer she gave the county coroner at the inquiry: she cannot be certain of what she heard because of the loud storm that night. To the best of her knowledge, she believes she heard those things. Holmes asks her a series of questions, and Helen reveals that her sister died wearing her nightdress and clutching a used match in one hand and a matchbox in the other. Holmes remarks on the importance of this fact, as it tells him Julia became alarmed by something and lit a match to take a look around her room.

The coroner, Helen tells him, investigated the death thoroughly because of Dr. Roylott's reputation for violence. However, the results of the investigation were inconclusive. Helen's testimony showed that the only two entrances to the room, the door and the shuttered window, had both been locked. The floor and the walls were sound, and even the chimney was barred. Not only was there no way in, but Julia's body showed no signs of violent attack. Helen came to the conclusion that Julia had been frightened to death. Perhaps her final words about a speckled band referred to the band of gypsies who often wore polka-dotted handkerchiefs, but Helen could never figure out how they could have scared her sister so badly.

Now, two years later, Helen is engaged. Her stepfather, again, has put up no objection. But he has begun repairs on Helen's room, forcing her to move into her dead sister's bedroom for the duration. Helen's anxiety is at a peak. Last night, in the dead of night, she heard a low whistle, just like the one her sister told her about the night she died. Helen jumped out of bed, looked around, and saw nothing, but could not go back to sleep. She instead got dressed and started out to see Sherlock Holmes very early that morning.

Holmes sees bruises on Helen's wrist which she admits came from her stepfather. Holmes takes a long pause then says there's not a moment to lose. He asks if he and Watson could get a look at the bedrooms without Dr. Roylott's knowledge. Helen says that by chance her stepfather will be in town all day on business. She has some errands to run as well, but should be home by early afternoon. Holmes arranges for himself and Watson to meet her at Stoke Moran early that afternoon. Helen expresses her relief and leaves them.

Section 3 Analysis

Here we have an old-fashioned, classic, locked-room murder scenario. Since the days of Edgar Allen Poe, crime and horror writers have been fascinated with creating impossible puzzles in which someone is murdered inside a locked room so thoroughly inaccessible that there seems to be no way a murderer could have gotten in to commit the crime. It seems possible that this particular locked-room murder tale of Conan Doyle's could have been a tribute to Edgar Allen Poe himself. The baboon in "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" may be Conan Doyle's way of tipping his hat to Poe, who wrote a famous locked-room short story called "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" which involved an ape.

The concept of the detective story had been around a relatively short time when Conan Doyle pioneered his Sherlock Holmes series. These mental puzzlers became and have remained popular with the public since they first appeared on the scene. Some modern law enforcement professionals incorporate unusual case histories into their training programs as an interesting and challenging mental exercise for the rookies. One such locked-room mental puzzle deals with a man found hanging from a high rafter in a locked room. There's no chair or table underneath which he could have kicked out if this were a suicide, but there was also no way for a murderer to have entered. The only clue given the rookies is that the concrete floor underneath the body is damp when officers arrive on the scene. The solution? The man committed suicide by jumping off a block of ice, which melted before the body was found, making it appear he was murdered.

Section 4

Section 4 Summary

Alone with Watson, Holmes asks the good doctor for his opinion. Watson thinks through the facts. He responds that if there was no way into the bedroom, Julia must have been alone when she died. Holmes asks about the other evidence—the whistles, the metallic clang, and the words of the dying woman. Watson pleads ignorance, so Holmes lays out a theory. Based on the provisions of Helen's mother's will Dr. Roylott has a strong motive to prevent her marriage, for he stands to lose a substantial part of his income. Holmes theorizes that the metal clanging sound could have come from one of Roylott's gypsy friends leaving Julia's room through the metal shuttered window. Watson asks how exactly the gypsy might have killed Julia. Holmes doesn't have an answer, but hopes to find one at Stoke Moran.

In that moment, their door bursts in and a huge man stands on the threshold. His clothes make him look like a combination of a farmer and a businessman; the expression on his weathered face is one of evil. He demands to know which of the two men is Holmes. Holmes introduces himself mildly and asks for the intruder's name. It is Dr. Grimesby Roylott of Stoke Moran. Holmes offers him a chair, but Dr. Roylott remains standing over the two men. Roylott announces that he's followed his stepdaughter there and demands to know what she's been saying to Holmes. Holmes ignores the question, makes polite chit-chat - or what in other circumstances would be considered polite chit-chat but under these circumstances is meant as a run-around. Roylott is furious at Holmes and begins to insult Holmes. Holmes starts to smile. As the insults continue, Holmes' smile broadens, and then becomes outright laughter. He tells his visitor to be sure and close the door on his way out.

Roylott won't leave until he's had his say. He warns Holmes not to meddle in his affairs, that he is a dangerous man to cross. To emphasize his point, he picks up the fireplace poker and bends it in half with his bare hands. Threat made, he storms out of the room. Still laughing off the threats, Holmes picks up the steel fireplace poker and bends it back into shape. Holmes is annoyed by the insults and tells Watson this only increases his interest in the case. Serenely, he suggests breakfast, after which he plans to stroll down to the Doctors' Commons to do some research for the case.

Holmes returns from this excursion by one o'clock, and announces to Watson that he has examined Helen's mother's will. He's discovered that the monthly income of 1,100 pounds left by the mother has fallen to only 750 a month because of a corresponding drop in agricultural prices. Each daughter was entitled to claim 250 pounds upon her marriage. Therefore, if both girls got married, it would have left Dr. Roylott very little. Even one marriage would take away a third of his income. Holmes is satisfied that he has proved the man's motive for murder.

He tells Watson to pack a toothbrush and a revolver for their trip. The two men take a train to the beautiful spring countryside where they hire a horse and carriage to take them the rest of the way to Stoke Moran. En route, Holmes pulls his hat over his eyes and lets his head drop, looking for all the world like he's asleep, but Watson knows it means he's concentrating on the puzzle. Suddenly alert, Holmes looks up to see the ancient manor rising up above the tree-line and indicates to the driver that they have come in reference to the repairs being done on the house. Their driver confirms that it is Stoke Moran and shows them the path to take through the wood. Miss Stoner is already on the path, walking toward the house. They hurry to catch up with her.

Section 4 Analysis

In this section, Holmes begins to display his scientific method. First he reviews the facts, using Watson as a sounding board. Holmes develops a theory based on the initial set of facts, but now must seek out additional facts. If the new evidence winds up not matching the theory, Holmes will rework his theory until he has a viable theory which does fit all the facts. This is why Holmes spends a great deal of time pondering. The evidence and facts are not enough; he has to connect the dots. Holmes must deduce and intuit from these facts some logical explanation that fits all the evidence. His theory must be not only plausible, but also provable. So far Holmes has found nothing to contradict his initial theory, that the stepfather hired one of his gypsy friends to kill his stepdaughter. In fact, the evidence of the mother's will provides a strong financial motive for Roylott to kill the women to prevent their marriages.

But Holmes still has no idea *how* the crime was executed. In fact, it is the *how* of these stories that keeps the reader fascinated. Quite often the villain presents himself early in the story; we can guess what he's done, but we certainly can't prove it. Lack of proof is often the bane of law enforcement professionals when they know their suspect's got the motive and the means, but they just can't prove it. At the time these stories were written, law enforcement had not yet developed a great body of forensic knowledge. These were the days before fingerprinting and DNA evidence and certainly before the invention of security cameras. The science of forensics was eventually developed to make better use of evidence and traces found at the crime scene. But in addition to making better use of evidence traces, forensics depends much on a scientific method of deduction. Forensic scientists and detectives use precisely the same kind of deductive reasoning, based on clues left at the scene, which Sherlock Holmes uses so successfully to nab his criminals.

Section 5

Section 5 Summary

Helen greets them eagerly upon the path. She is relieved to inform them that her stepfather has indeed gone to town and is not expected back before evening. Holmes tells her how he and Watson met Grimesby Roylott earlier that day. Helen is horrified to learn she was followed. She expresses her fear of what he might say to her when he returns and explains she's so afraid of him because he's smart and she never knows what he's planning. Holmes assures her that it is her stepfather who should be afraid, because now there's someone smarter than him on his trail. He warns Helen to lock her doors against him tonight in case he becomes violent with her. Wasting no time, Holmes asks to be shown directly to the wing where the bedrooms are.

The manor house is described as a grey crab-shaped building which has fallen into ruin. The central part of the house, the body of the crab, is tall and rises above the tree-line. There are two wings, like claws, curving out from each side of the house. One of the wings is in much better condition than the rest of the house, with blinds in the windows and blue smoke rising from the chimneys. This is obviously the wing in which the family lives. Holmes takes his time pacing every part of the lawn surrounding this wing. He examines the construction scaffolding set up around a hole in the stone wall of the end bedroom; there are no construction workers present. He especially studies the outsides of the three windows leading to the three bedrooms. Holmes asks Helen to verify that the room on the end is hers, the one in the middle was Julia's, and the room closest to the main part of the house is her stepfather's. She concurs, but reminds him that due to the construction on her room, she's now sleeping in Julia's center room. When he remarks the wall doesn't look like it needed repairs, she tells him she believes it was just an excuse to get her to move into Julia's old room. Holmes asks her to go into Julia's room and bar the shutters. Holmes tries very hard to open the metal shutters from outside, but has no success. He is puzzled, because his theory was based on a gypsy intruder gaining entry to the room through the barred window. He decides to examine the inside of the rooms.

They enter the hallway into which the three bedrooms open; Holmes ignores the room on the end and goes right for the center bedroom. The room which had once been Julia's, and is now Helen's, is not much better looking than the rest of the house. Paneled in dark, worm-eaten wood, the room has a brown chest of drawers in one corner, a narrow bed in another corner, a dressing table to the left of the window, two small wicker chairs, and a square of carpeting in the center. Holmes sits quietly in a chair while his eyes roam every inch of the room looking for clues. He notices a bell-rope hanging down from the ceiling and coiling onto the bed, and he asks Helen where the bell sounds. She tells him it leads to the housekeeper's room and was put in only a couple of years ago. Holmes wants to know if Julia had requested it. Helen says no, and in fact, she can't remember Julia ever using it.

Holmes thinks this over while he examines every inch of the walls and every crack in the floorboards. Finally, he comes over to the bed and gives the bell-rope a tug. Nothing happens. Holmes realizes it is a fake. Bell-ropes are designed to attach to wires and cause a bell to ring in the servants' quarters when the master or mistress of the house calls. However, Holmes notes that this one isn't even attached to a wire. In fact, the rope pull is a dead end; it's only attached by a little hook just inside a small ventilator opening in the ceiling. Holmes notices that the ventilator leads not to the outside air, but to the room next door. Helen tells him the ventilator was put in at the same time as the bell-rope.

The next room Holmes searches is Dr. Roylott's bedroom next door. His room is larger, but otherwise humble. It contains a camp bed, a small bookshelf, an armchair by the bed, a wooden chair by the wall, a round table, and a large iron safe. Holmes examines all of these items with interest, then asks Helen what's in the safe. She has only seen inside it once, years ago, and it contained her stepfather's business papers. Holmes asks if it might contain a cat, which she thinks is odd, but then Holmes points out the saucer of milk sitting on top the safe. She tells him they don't have a cat, but reminds him about the cheetah and the baboon. Holmes doesn't think the cheetah would be much satisfied by the small saucer of milk. He says there's something he'd like to determine, and without explaining what, squats down to examine the seat of the wooden chair by the wall. Appearing satisfied, he stands up. Something interesting catches his eye□

Section 5 Analysis

Once again, Watson as narrator faithfully chronicles the investigation without entering into it. He has not said one word in this section, has not asked any questions, has not ventured any opinions. Watson observes and chronicles every detail, but Holmes is always center stage. Conan Doyle makes this narrative technique work because he puts Watson's character in our shoes. We want to figure things out before Holmes does. We want to be as smart as Holmes is. Watson's greatest hobby is to study Holmes' methods, and he is always trying to figure it out before Holmes does. He rarely succeeds, but he knows the way his friend's mind works and can keep up with all the twists and turns in his thinking. The author created, in Watson, a narrator capable of relating events in a way that makes us witnesses to them. Watson puts us on the scene of a crime more effectively than even a surveillance camera could, because Watson can also put us inside Sherlock's head, helping us solve the crime along with the famous sleuth.

The bulk of the evidence is gathered in this section, but only some of the evidence is communicated to the reader. By using Watson as narrator, the author is able to keep some secrets from us about what Holmes is thinking. It makes the puzzling out and solving of the crime a more enjoyable story when we're given just enough evidence to suspect a solution, but the author leaves out a few clues which we're not told until Holmes reveals his solution. This makes for a more interesting narrative as the author can be sure the reader will never get it before his detective does.

"The Adventure of the Speckled Band" is an excellent example of Conan Doyle's typical story structure, used throughout the series of Holmes adventures published in *The Strand* magazine. There is an introduction by Watson, then the narrative told by Holmes' new client; often this takes place in their rooms on Baker Street. Within the client's narrative, frequently the villain can be recognized from the outset. Then Holmes must devise clever and discreet ways of investigating the case, usually with Watson in tow. We get to watch Holmes' deviously clever mind at work, and he usually gets a chance to showcase his physical prowess as well. Holmes is not only brainy, he's also athletic, strong, and a master of disguise. His confidence is supreme; it would seem arrogant except that he can back it up. Perhaps because we see him through Watson's eyes, Holmes is friend to the reader, and the reader takes joy in seeing him take on the bad guys and win.

Section 6

Section 6 Summary

What caught Holmes eye at the end of Section 5 was a small dog leash hanging on a corner of Dr. Roylott's bed. The leash was tied up in the shape of a small hangman's noose. Holmes has apparently drawn an evil conclusion from this bit of evidence. With a grim look on his face, he requests permission from Helen to have another look at the lawn.

Out on the lawn, Holmes paces in silence for a while. Watson and Helen pace quietly by his side, not wanting to break his train of thought. Finally he speaks. Holmes tells Helen she must follow his advice to the letter; her life depends upon it. When she promises to do so, he lays out his plan. Holmes points to the village inn, the Crown, which is visible from the lawn outside the bedroom windows. He and Watson will wait in the Crown for Helen to give the all-clear signal. When Dr. Roylott gets home, Helen is to fake a headache and lock herself in her room. Once she hears Dr. Roylott close his bedroom door for the night, she will put a lighted lamp in the window to signal the men, then she will quietly withdraw to the room which used to be hers, the one on the end with the hole in the wall. Holmes and Watson will secretly spend the night in Julia's old room, the middle room, to investigate the cause of the noises which have frightened Helen. Helen guesses that Holmes has already made up his mind as to the cause of the noises. She begs him to tell her before he leaves, but he insists he wants stronger proof. He does, however, tell her that her sister was not frightened to death, that there was a more concrete cause of death. He and Watson hurry away before Dr. Roylott can return and discover them.

Holmes and Watson obtain rooms at the Crown and begin their stake-out of Stoke Moran. They watch Grimesby Roylott drive up to the house in a carriage at dusk. Roylott yells threatens the young boy driving the carriage so that the horse roars in protest. After the carriage disappears up the path toward the house, they see Roylott's lights go on. As darkness falls, the two friends continue to wait and watch from the Crown. Holmes expresses his concerns about involving Watson in tonight's events, which could be very dangerous. Watson asks if his presence will be helpful. Holmes says yes, so Watson insists on coming.

Watson cannot imagine what the danger might be and suggests Holmes saw more in those rooms than Watson saw. Holmes says no, he was just able to figure out more than Watson from the same visual evidence. The only unusual thing Watson saw was the bell pull, but he has no idea what that could mean. Holmes reviews the contents of the room. He reminds Watson of the tiny ventilator shaft. Cockily, Holmes tells him he knew he'd find a ventilator shaft between Roylott and Julia's bedroom before they ever got to Stoke Moran. He deduced this from the fact that Roylott's cigar smoke irritated Julia when she was locked in her room at night. Holmes further points out the coincidence of dates, that the ventilator and rope bell were added next to the bed just

before Julia died in that bed. Finally, he points out that the bed had been clamped to the floor, a detail Watson had failed to notice. Therefore, the bed could not be moved away from the ventilator or from the rope which was obviously never meant to be a bell-pull. Watson exclaims that he gets what Holmes is hinting at, if only partially. Holmes remarks that it is a subtle crime, and that when a doctor goes bad, he makes an excellent and devious criminal. Holmes encourages Watson to put it out of his mind for a while; the two men smoke their pipes quietly while they wait for Helen to give the signal.

Section 6 Analysis

By alluding to danger but refusing to tip his hand as to the nature of the danger, Holmes has left the reader guessing. We, like Watson, can begin to perceive the nature of the crime, but we don't know the specifics yet. At this point, the reader has been given all the necessary information, but we've also been led astray by several red herrings, or clues planted by the author to lead the reader astray. From the first time we meet Helen Stoner and hear her story, Conan Doyle is already using her to plant red herrings. She buries us in unnecessary, but interesting, detail about the Roylott family history and both the friends and enemies made by Grimesby Roylott. Some of the facts she gives Holmes are pertinent, while others have nothing to do with the crime at hand. The baboon is a fabulous red herring. As Conan Doyle's story seems to be a nod to Edgar Allen Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," this allusion is quite misleading because Poe fans would know that the ape in Poe's story turns out to be the killer. The baboon in "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" is not the killer, though it is one of the pieces of the puzzle which helps Holmes solve the crime.

The author has set the groundwork for a climactic scene in the next section. We are in the eye of the storm with the protagonists, pondering the evidence and waiting for the night's events to reveal both the killer and Holmes' methodology.

Section 7

Section 7 Summary

At eleven o'clock, the signal comes. The two friends jump up, make their excuses to the landlord, and hurry towards Stoke Moran. They enter the grounds through one of the many unrepaired holes in the fencing and move along the dark path. They cross the lawn and make for the open window in Julia's bedroom. Just before they reach it, they are confronted with "a hideous and distorted child, who threw itself upon the grass with writhing limbs, and then ran swiftly across the lawn into the darkness." (pg. 120) They are momentarily terrified by the specter but then realize they've just seen the baboon. Quickly they slip off their shoes and enter through the window before the cheetah finds them, too.

Holmes shutters the windows and examines the room carefully. Everything is just as they left it. He whispers to Watson that the slightest noise will ruin their plan and that they must wait with the light off, because Roylott would see it through the ventilator. Holmes warns his friend that falling asleep could mean death, and that Watson should keep his pistol ready. Holmes tells Watson to wait in one of the two wicker chairs. Holmes sits and waits on the side of the bed. Holmes takes out a long, thin cane and places it on the bed beside him. Next to the cane he lays out a candle and a box of matches. Then he turns out the lamp, and the men wait in darkness.

Watson recounts this terrifying vigil. For over three hours the men sit in silence. The metal shutters on the window completely block out even the smallest sliver of moonlight. But Watson is grateful for those shutters when at some point in the night they hear the whine of the cheetah, apparently just outside. Watson only knows to expect danger, but not what sort of danger. In the darkened room, with a far away church clock striking every quarter hour, the night seems unbearably long and tense to the good doctor.

Suddenly, a gleam of light appears from the direction of the ventilator, but then it is gone. Watson can smell burning oil and hot metal, meaning someone in the next room has lit a lantern and then covered its light. Dr. Watson next hears a soft, soothing sound, like a tea kettle steaming rhythmically. In that instant, Holmes leaps off the bed, strikes a match to the candle, and begins frantically lashing at the bell-rope with his cane.

"'You see it, Watson?' he yelled. 'You see it?'" In the dim candlelight Watson can only see his friend's horrified expression as he lashes out with his cane. But Watson does hear a low whistle like the one Helen reported when Holmes first lights the candle. Holmes abruptly stops his attack and stares up toward the ventilator shaft. A sudden cry pierces the night. Later, villagers will report having been woken from their beds by the power of that unearthly human cry, filled with pain, fear, and anger.

As the evil cry finally fades away, Watson asks Holmes what it all means. It means that it's over. Holmes urges Watson to take his pistol with him as they go into Dr. Roylott's

room. Lighting the lamp, Holmes leads the way down the hall. He pounds twice on the door, but there is no answer. Holmes walks in, Watson hot on his heels with his cocked pistol in hand. Inside the room, in the single beam of light coming from a half-shuttered lantern, lies the open safe. Beside the safe Dr. Grimesby Roylott sits in the wooden chair. He holds the dog leash noose across his lap, and his unblinking eyes stare in horror up towards the ventilator shaft. Around his head is wrapped a strange yellow bandana speckled with brown spots.

Watson steps forward, and the headband moves. A brown and yellow serpent's head rises above the coiling band. Holmes yells that it is a swamp adder, the deadliest snake in India, and that Roylott has died within ten seconds of being bitten. Holmes quickly grabs the dog leash from the dead man's lap and throws the noose around the snake's head. He carries the snake at arms length and throws it into the iron safe, slamming the safe's door shut.

Section 7 Analysis

This section presents the climax of the story. The sense of danger which the author has been building since the first page is finally experienced and revealed. Conan Doyle paints a wonderfully eerie scene. We are waiting in a dark room, waiting for something evil to enter through the ventilator shaft. We are armed with a gun, a cane, and a candle, but like Watson, we don't know what to do with these items, how to defend ourselves, or from what. Conan Doyle has a gift for setting the climactic stage, the props, the actors Watson puts us in the dark room with his narration and supplies the element of fear - for of course, Holmes is fearless. When at last the anticipated events occur, Conan Doyle leaves us literally and figuratively in the dark. We cannot see who or what Holmes is attacking, and we must stand helplessly by, as does Watson, relying on Holmes to save the day.

The deliberate manner in which Holmes faces danger reveals to us his character. Sherlock Holmes is a man who can take on anything and win. Loyal readers come to learn that all danger has passed the moment Holmes agrees to take a case. We can consider the case solved and the potential victims saved. Holmes' confidence is one of his most endearing traits. He is the man who always knows more than anyone else about whatever situation he puts his great mind to. He knows more than the reader, he knows more than Watson, and he certainly knows more than the villain. Cool logic and brilliant deductions keep him at least one step ahead of his quarry at all times.

His narrator, Watson, is in awe of Holmes and tells us repeatedly that Holmes has the superior mind of the two of them. But Watson narrates the story plainly in a way that helps the reader think like a detective, and we are easily able to keep up with Watson's understanding of the matter. And, humble as Watson may behave, he is nonetheless a doctor of medicine and Holmes' valued assistant. Given these two facts, Watson can play as dumb as he likes, but the reader understands him to be an intelligent man. In this way, Arthur Conan Doyle can make the character of Sherlock brilliant, sure of himself, and always right, without annoying the reader or making the reader feel dumb.

Even the brightest bulb would pale in comparison to Holmes' brilliant mind, but we can all be as smart as Doctor Watson.

Section 8

Section 8 Summary

Watson briefly recounts what occurred after the events of the previous section. The men broke the news of her stepfather's death to Helen Stoner, then sent her off by morning train to her aunt's house in Harrow. The narrator informs us that the official inquiry was a slow process and eventually concluded that Roylott was killed while playing carelessly with one of his dangerous pets. Watson then recounts what he learned from Holmes on the ride back to their home the next day.

Holmes begins by chastising himself for jumping to conclusions. His original theory that "the speckled band" referred to the gypsies was wrong. If he had clung to that theory, it could have been dangerous. But Holmes credits himself for quickly adapting and revising his theory once he was personally convinced that no danger could enter the room from the window or the door. His attention was next drawn to the fake bell-pull, which must have been put in for some purpose. Holmes theorized that the rope could be a bridge for some creature, like a snake, to pass through the ventilator shaft from Dr. Roylott's room and come onto the bed in Julia's room. This theory was fueled by his knowledge that Dr. Roylott had a passion for exotic, dangerous animals from his former home, India.

The crime would be so subtle, Holmes continued, that it would be hard for a coroner's office to notice two tiny puncture wounds if they didn't know to look for them. If they looked for poison at all in the body, they would detect no chemical means of foul play. Holmes went on to describe Roylott's next logical step, which would be to train the animal to return to his room before it was discovered in the morning by its intended target. The saucer of milk fit the theory as the snake could have been trained to come get milk whenever Roylott whistled.

This crime was particularly evil because by the time Julia or Helen woke up to the sound of a whistle, they would have already been in bed with a deadly snake for several hours. It was only the whistle calling the snake home that woke them up. Dr. Grimesby Roylott had only to send the snake over each night and bide his time, knowing eventually the serpent would do his dirty work for him.

Holmes brags that he'd figured all this out before he set foot in Grimesby's room. The chair he examined so closely revealed foot prints, which told Holmes Grimesby was in the habit of standing on that chair. The sight of the safe, the saucer of milk, and the noosed dog leash confirmed for Holmes that his second theory was the correct one. The metallic clang was not caused by a gypsy leaving the room through the metal shutters; it was the sound of the safe being closed hurriedly upon its serpentine occupant.

Holmes winds up the tale by stating that his attack on the snake must have angered it. When Roylott heard the ruckus in the other room, he whistled to recall the snake, and the furious swamp adder turned on its master, killing him almost instantly. Holmes accepts part of the blame for Roylott's death, but tells Watson dryly that he doubts it will weigh much on his conscience.

Section 8 Analysis

This final section presents the denouement, or final resolution, of the story. Here Sherlock Holmes ties up all the loose ends and explains away any details the reader may not have understood previously. Although it is Holmes speaking, it is Watson who chronicles his words. Watson supplies a tidy summation and overview of the events, quoting Holmes on the details. Holmes, as always, enlightens Watson by explaining his chain of reasoning. As characters in Sherlock Holmes stories often remark, the detective's knowledge seems almost supernatural, like magic, that is until he explains the logical progression his thoughts followed to arrive at his conclusions. Once explained, the answers are obvious for all to see and no longer seem to have been derived from thin air. Therein lies Holmes' deductive brilliance. It is not that he sees more than anyone else, it's that he notices more about what he sees. Following steps so logical they could be a geometry proof, he uses every fact he notices to construct a solid, unshakeable theory. This, the climactic scene, is in fact the proof of Holmes' theory. Holmes has once again stacked the deck in his favor, then played out his hand to beat the villain at his own game.

Characters

Sherlock Holmes

Sherlock Holmes is one of the most beloved fictional characters of all time. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the famous sleuth brought to the reading audience a higher level of confidence in the emerging science of the day. Holmes' brilliant deductions were always based on the facts of the case. Because he used the scientific method to solve crimes, the reader could always feel sure that justice was done. Holmes always got his man, and Holmes never got the wrong man.

Sherlock Holmes' character is revealed throughout the series of tales spun by Conan Doyle. He is a man deeply passionate about justice, committed to rationalism and factual deductions. Holmes has an amazing grasp of human nature, and therefore, of criminal motives. Ironically, he does not allow himself to experience his own human nature; Sherlock Holmes prides himself on being an emotionless thinker and actually believes emotions clutter the mind and interfere with the deductive process. He is far from heartless, however. He believes strongly in justice and is always willing to be an advocate for the weak against the strong.

Holmes' brilliant mind is hardly his only asset. He also displays heroic strength and an easy athleticism. During an investigation, he is energetic and creative in his methods. When deep in thought, by contrast, he often appears to be sleeping. But regular readers are never fooled by his apparent sleepiness; his closed eyes and slumped posture indicate deep concentration. His intense focus allows him to shut out all distractions, and when he is hot on a theory, he can be quite abrupt and impatient with his fellow human beings. Nonetheless, he is ordinarily quite a gentleman, a paragon of Victorian virtues. He is known for his sure confidence, which in its extremity seems arrogant, but his arrogance is well-earned and the reader is more likely charmed than put off by it. The man is in many ways an enigma, and scholars today enjoy studying his character and trying to get into the mind of the famous fictional character.

Doctor Watson

Watson is an essential character in the Holmes legend. He is fascinated by Holmes' mind, but unable to keep up with the lightning speed of Holmes' deductions. Watson, therefore, is the reader's advocate. Watson asks the questions that are on our minds as we read the stories. Watson's character sheds light on Holmes' methods, and the specific details of every investigation. Watson is often portrayed in films as a man lacking in intelligence, but this reputation is hardly fair to the medical doctor. In fact, his character is highly intelligent, his opinions are valued by Holmes more than anyone else's opinions. Watson's unjust reputation has only come about because, in comparison to the legendary Sherlock Holmes, even Watson's bright mind appears dim.

Watson's and Holmes' association goes back to Watson's bachelor days, when they were roommates on Baker Street. Watson's marriage is referred to often in the stories, as it was a turning point for his character. Once married, Watson moves out of the rooms on Baker Street, opens his own medical practice, and generally has less time for his famous friend. Holmes' character often seems to be a bit jealous about having lost Watson's attention, although he never says a single word against the marriage - in fact Holmes often notes that Watson's marriage has done him good, that he's gained weight and looks happy. Yet we know Holmes to be a man who believes that emotions only distract and slow down the mind. Certainly on some level he seems to feel that Watson's marriage is a bit of a nuisance.

Dr. Grimesby Roylott

The villain in our story. Grimesby's character is plagued with the hereditary violence characteristic of the Roylott men. His stepdaughter believes that Grimesby's long residence in the hot, tropical climate of India has exacerbated his natural violent streak, making him completely impossible to get along with. Notably, Grimesby's only friends are a wandering troupe of gypsies and some exotic, dangerous animals he imports from India. Although Grimesby comes from a noble line, he is not much concerned with his reputation. In fact, Grimesby takes pleasure in terrorizing the local villagers on a regular basis.

Nonetheless, Grimesby Roylott's character is a fascinating window into the history of British nobility. Through this character we learn that noble families are not expected to work, and thus if their family fortunes are depleted - as the Roylott's was by irresponsible heirs - then they are doomed to spend their lives in genteel poverty. Roylott showed independence and initiative by becoming a doctor and working for a living. But he's quick to give up his day job when his wife's untimely death leaves him enough money to live comfortably without working another day. The prospect of losing this income is what motivates him to kill his stepdaughters.

Arthur Conan Doyle, a doctor himself, reveals his understanding of the power doctors have over life and death. In making Dr. Roylott the villain, Conan Doyle presents us with the following comment, made by Sherlock Holmes: "'When a doctor does go wrong, he is the first of criminals.'" (Section 6, pg. 120)

Helen Stoner

Helen is the central figure in the case, but her character is largely undeveloped. Holmes was never overtly condescending to women, but he had little use for the opposite sex, believing affairs of the heart to be detrimental to cool, logical thought. Certainly Holmes' heart, and the reader's, goes out to Helen because of her pitiable state of fear and agitation. However, beyond the fact that she is a damsel in distress, there is very little told of her. We know she loved her twin sister, but does she love her new fiancé? Her stepfather's motive for murder is her marriage to this man, but we learn nothing about

her feelings for her future husband. Is she marrying him out of desperation, to escape her cruel stepfather? Or perhaps she loves him passionately, and if so, does she feel betrayed when her fiancé doesn't take her suspicions seriously? There is much more we could have learned about Helen if the author had been of the mind to tell us. Instead, her character could be described with the same nice, vague words which Conan Doyle, in his memoirs, used to describe his first wife, Louise: "gentle and amiable," nothing more.

Julia Stoner

Helen Stoner's twin sister. Although we never meet Julia, and although her death occurs two years in the past, her death is actually the catalyst which drives Helen to seek help from Sherlock Holmes. Clever murderers like Grimesby Roylott are usually not caught until they've committed multiple homicides. Over time, a pattern reveals itself. When Helen's circumstances start to mirror Julia's, Helen is able to realize her danger in time to seek help. Roylott's scheme was so clever and subtle that Julia didn't stand a chance. Helen was able to save herself only because Roylott stuck to the same modus operandi in his plot against her that he used when he arranged Julia's death.

Objects/Places

Stoke Moran

The ancestral home of the Roylott family; once, a vast estate boasting many acres and a beautiful mansion. Over the years the irresponsible Roylott heirs have whittled the estate down to a few seedy acres, and the mansion itself has become old and decrepit. In 1883, at the time the story takes place, only one wing of the house is inhabitable. Dr. Grimesby Roylott and his stepdaughters, Helen and Julia, live together in this wing. It is here, in a locked bedroom, that Julia's murder takes place.

Baker Street

The residence and offices of Sherlock Holmes. It is a comfortable apartment with a large sitting room where Holmes conducts his business and does some of his best thinking. Prior to Watson's marriage, the two friends shared these rooms, and Watson still drops in often to visit. The landlady is a kindly woman who provides food for the men and is often woken up early or late to let in some desperate visitor in need of Holmes' help.

The Speckled Band

The dying words of Julia Stoner, which initially send Holmes off on a wild goose chase because he thinks the speckled band refers to the headgear the gypsies wear. But Holmes is not one to follow a wrong conclusion too far. Even before he visits Stoke Moran, he has already researched the possibility that the speckled band is a kind of snake, which indeed it is. It is a swamp adder from India.

The Crown

The village inn from which Holmes and Watson stake out the house at Stoke Moran. They wait until dark, when Helen gives the signal by putting a candle in the window, to carry out their plan to catch the evil Dr. Roylott.

Social Sensitivity

"The Adventure of the Speckled Band" focuses on the helplessness of children and women in a society that gives all legal power to adult males.

The Stoner twins' inherited fortunes are controlled by their cruel stepfather, Dr. Grimesby Roylott, and the twins may secure their inheritances for themselves only by marrying. When the marriage of one is soon to occur, she dies horribly, crying to her sister, "Oh, my God! Helen! It was the band! The speckled band!" Two years later, Helen is to be married; she is frightened for her life and asks Sherlock Holmes to help her. This reads like a fairy tale, with Holmes as the gallant knight answering the call of a maiden in distress, but at bottom it is a tale of a powerless woman.

The short story also presents a social theme similar to that in The Hound of the Baskerville (1901). In the novel, the compassionate Sir Charles Baskerville brings order and prosperity to his community by assuming his proper role as baronet of Baskerville Hall. An outsider, Stapleton, creates disorder by trying to acquire the position belonging to Sir Charles — a position to which Stapleton has no right. In "The Adventure of the Speckled Band," Grimesby Roylott assumes his rightful role in the manor house at Stoke Moran but dashes the hopes of the local citizens by ignoring his duties as community leader. He is cruel and brutal, leaving bruises on Helen and terrifying his neighbors. A destructive man, he surrounds himself with disorder and ruin.

Techniques

"The Adventure of the Speckled Band" exemplifies Conan Doyle's formula for the Sherlock Holmes stories.

Miss Stoner tells her tale to Holmes and Watson; Holmes questions her; he and Watson examine the scene of the crime and he devises a plan of action; the murderer is caught in the act; and Holmes explains how he deduced the solution to the mystery. More than in The Hound of the Baskervilles, the pleasure in the short story stems from following Holmes from clue to clue.

Conan Doyle is scrupulously fair in presenting most of the details that Watson observes while he records Holmes's activities. Holmes sees more than Watson, but the basic clues are before the reader prior to the revelation of the mystery's solution. Readers may try to outthink Holmes, and Holmes's explanation may evoke the pleasure of recognition as he sorts out the clues. In addition, the story is a good adventure, populated by gypsies, exotic wild animals roaming freely, and a monstrous villain, with most of the action taking place in a dark old house.

Themes

Chivalry

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, a knight himself, believed firmly in the concept of chivalry. In "The Adventure of the Speckled Band," he gladly takes the case despite Helen Stoner's inability to guarantee payment for his services. Holmes notices the bruises on her wrist and corners her into admitting that her stepfather is violent with her. She is a damsel in distress, with no one else to turn to, so Sherlock Holmes agrees to save the day. When Grimesby Roylott appears in Holmes' office and makes menacing threats, Holmes' interest in the case only grows deeper. Such a man should not be allowed to threaten a lady. The ancient code of chivalry guides many of Holmes' actions, both in this particular story, and in the series overall.

Chivalry demands that a man be noble, upstanding, and always fight for the right. It is somewhat black and white thinking, because chivalry depends on there only being one definition of what is right. Black and white thinking, and the concepts of duty and honor, although noble, can be dangerous beliefs. Human beings experience many shades of grey in their lives, and there is rarely, in reality, one single shining path to glory. To accept the concept of chivalry may require a man, such as Holmes or Conan Doyle, to subjugate his own individuality in the service of a larger cause. While this type of human nobility and willingness to sacrifice for a greater cause has allowed us to create a civilized society, it can also be misused. Sacrificing for a cause which one has been convinced is right, at the expense of one's own heart, can be the death of our individual human natures. Our individuality as human beings is every bit as responsible for the growth of civilization as our ability to sacrifice ourselves for the greater good. Civilization is built on both the individual good and the greater good. Chivalry, noble as it may be, only deals with the greater good. Ironically, the greater good is always defined by the individual.

Death

Death is a recurring theme in the Sherlock Holmes series and was also something that obsessed the author. Certainly it's not unusual for the topic of death to present itself in a detective story. What makes death such a formidable foe to Sherlock Holmes is his lack of belief in anything spiritual. Holmes is the epitome of a rational, scientific man. Particularly in those days, and even today, science was often believed to be the opposite of religion, even the enemy of religion. Science was a way for the human race to gain control of their lives, and the emerging science of forensics in the late 1800's allowed the populace to leave behind some of their more superstitious views on death.

Everything in a Sherlock Holmes story can be explained through rational means. To a rational man, a scientific view of life and death offers comfort because it denies the ancient human superstitions that our lives and deaths are controlled by the whim of

some unseen spiritual hand. This viewpoint, that we could control our lives, led to some astounding scientific advances in medicine.

But science only offers the living control of their lives. Most scientists at the turn of the century did not believe in any afterlife; the human soul could not be proven to exist, and therefore did not exist. For a man of science with such a viewpoint, death becomes the ultimate ending. Beyond death is cold, black, non-existence. Perhaps, then, the scientific method actually increased the fear of death. It is interesting that the author spent many years trying to contact the dead in his practice of Spiritualism. Conan Doyle seemed to contradict his own rationalist views by this practice of Spiritualism, yet it is actually a logical extension of the scientific method. Conan Doyle, like Sherlock Holmes, kept an open mind until all the facts were in.

Heroes and Villains

Good vs. evil has been at the heart of human stories throughout our cultural history. Stories such as "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" have a hero and a villain, in this case, Holmes and Roylott, respectively. There is a broad spectrum in between the two polarities of good and evil, and even in classic detective adventures where the hero is clearly defined as good, and the villain so clearly bad, there are few perfect heroes and few one-hundred percent evil villains. This spectrum has long fascinated storytellers. At what point does a man cross the line from being good to being bad? Is it an inherited trait or something we become?

Helen Stoner's description of our villain, Roylott, suggests that his evil is a result of both nature and nurture - a violent genetic disposition, made worse by his years in the tropical climate. Roylott, a medical man, is a worthy opponent for Holmes. As a villain his strength is almost equal to Holmes' strength as a hero□or so he thinks. When Holmes unbends the iron bar that Roylott had bent with his bare hands, Holmes is symbolically showing that he's as strong as Roylott. Intellectually, Holmes is his superior, just as he is intellectually superior to his friend Dr. Watson. In this story, Watson portrays the type of man Roylott could have been - a good doctor and a decent man, while Holmes embodies the heroic archetype. Though Holmes is not perfect, our reliable narrator believes him to be invincible. His invincibility makes him every bit as heroic as modern day iconic superheroes, such as Superman. Holmes' chivalry also lends him the qualities of ancient heroes like the Arthurian Knights of the Round Table. When we do find human faults in Holmes' character, they only serve to make him seem more accessible, and therefore more likeable, to the reader.

Roylott's world is one of decay. In one wing of his home "the windows were broken, and blocked with wooden boards, while the roof was partly caved in, a picture of ruin." The main section of the house is nearly as decayed, with only one wing properly maintained.

The estate is covered with brambles and surrounded by a wall with "unrepaired breaches." Like the house, Roylott's life has decayed. He has driven away would-be friends, lost his wife, and murdered a stepdaughter. By the time Holmes begins his

investigation, Roylott and his world are in an advanced state of corruption so nearly complete that anything that looks new or repaired becomes a vital clue because it is out of the ordinary.

Conan Doyle often used the theme of decay to suggest that a disordered world is an unhappy and dangerous one. In "The Adventure of the Speckled Band," the decay also suggests something of the villain's spirit. Roylott seems to have brought the decay with him, and therefore the decay seems to be a manifestation of his corrupted conscience; instead of love he manifests greed, and this greed results in a poorly maintained estate, and crumbling home, and the death of a stepdaughter.

Style

Point of View

"The Adventure of the Speckled Band" is written in the first person narrative style. Our faithful and trusted narrator is Holmes' best friend, Dr. Watson. Often with first person narration the reader must be discerning. Not all first person narrators are reliable. A character in a book may be too personally involved to narrate objectively. Some examples of unreliable narrators are found in JimThompson's book, *The Killer Inside Me*, and Brett Easton Ellis' book, *American Psycho*, which are both narrated from the point of view of the murderers. Obviously, looking at a story through the eyes of a killer gives the reader a skewed, unrealistic perspective of the people and events he is narrating.

Dr. Watson is the complete contrast to such an unreliable narrator. Being an ethical man of science, Watson always endeavors to present the most clinically objective point of view of the story he relates. The more Sherlock Holmes stories one reads, the more one comes to trust Dr. Watson's point of view. The only subjectivity Watson shows in his narration is his obvious bias towards Holmes. Watson is Holmes' biggest admirer and always shows Holmes in an positive light. However, even this subjectivity doesn't stretch Watson's credibility as a narrator too far, because the character of Holmes is indeed admirable, and most readers come to admire the great detective, too.

Setting

To modern readers, "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" is a period piece. It takes place in turn of the century England, as all the Holmes adventures do. However, for Arthur Conan Doyle, this was the time when he lived and wrote. Although Conan Doyle continued to write well into the 1920's, the final two decades of the 1800's were his heyday, when he was at the height of his career. Through his loving eyes, the reader can enjoy the beauty of the English countryside and the comforts of an English hearth. Part of what makes England so interesting is its history, which Conan Doyle uses. He sets the scene in the antique, decaying manor house, which symbolizes the rise and fall of the fictional Roylott family.

It was in the early 1880's that Conan Doyle settled permanently in England, having been born, raised, and gone through medical school in Scotland. England is where he was married and his children were born. England is where he first found success as a writer. England is where he died. And he always set his Sherlock Holmes stories in England.

Holmes' famous headquarters on Baker Street were in the heart of London, and most of the stories take place just before the turn of the century. This period in history is remarkable for its lack of forensic knowledge. The Sherlock Holmes stories were on the

forefront of the art and science of forensics. Conan Doyle studied forensic medicine in school and was keenly interested in its application to law enforcement.

Language and Meaning

The language in "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" is lurid and colorful. Conan Doyle does his best to paint vivid, often eerie, and sometimes gruesome images in the reader's mind. His description of Dr. Grimesby Roylott's death cry goes on for an entire paragraph and manages to convey the horrific nature of the death itself, which is never described in the narrative. Conan Doyle's audience when he wrote stories for *The Strand* was middle class British adventure story enthusiasts. The language had to be colorful - such stories were the television shows of their day, but without the visual images available to modern day storytellers. By using vibrant, often shocking descriptions, authors such as Conan Doyle were able to capture the imaginations of the people.

Conan Doyle, however, showed his deeper talents as a wordsmith by going one step further than simply tantalizing the populace with striking imagery. He also created for us, in the characters of Holmes and Watson, a serene island amidst the stormy plot-lines. Holmes' confidence, coupled with the rational worldview he shares with Dr. Watson, provide the reader a calm space to think, an intellectual distance from the clients' troubles. The comfortable rooms on Baker Street symbolize this oasis from chaos. Conan Doyle leaves his reader feeling that any human trouble can be transcended by a rational, orderly mind.

Structure

"The Adventure of the Speckled Band" was written to be serialized in *The Strand* magazine. The plot is chronologically linear, with a few flashbacks into the past provided by the narrator, Watson, and the client, Helen Stoner. The story structure is similar to all the Sherlock Holmes series. The recurring characters of Watson and Holmes, plus their familiar Baker Street address, help the reader feel at home in the story. Conan Doyle does a wonderful job, through Watson, of communicating these fundamental details to the reader, using minimal detail so as not to bore dedicated fans with the same information over and over. Whether you've read one or many Sherlock Holmes stories, you will know the basic details of his life and work. To keep things interesting for repeat readers, Conan Doyle reveals new details about Holmes' character in nearly every story. Finally, within this now established framework, new clients are introduced. Each new short story details another one of Sherlock Holmes' successful investigations.

Given Conan Doyle's heavy reliance on the scientific method, the structure of each Holmes story mimics the structure of a mathematical theorem. First we are given a set of facts, plus some unknown variables, usually provided by Holmes' new client. Holmes uses that information to develop an initial working theory. He supplements his facts with both passive research and active investigation. By reviewing all of these facts and

making a chain of logical deductions, he refines his theory, and finally develops a plan to prove it logically. That final experiment to prove his theory is generally the climax of the story. Throw into this careful planning the variables of human behavior -which Holmes studies and always does his best to take into account - and the results of this semi-controlled experiment are both exciting and intellectually satisfying to the reader.

Quotes

NB: The page numbers refer to the relevant pages in *The Complete Original Illustrated Sherlock Holmes,* published 1978 by Castle Books, a division of Book Sales Inc. of Secaucus, New Jersey.

"She raised her veil as she spoke, and we could see that she was indeed in a pitiable state of agitation, her face all drawn and grey, with restless, frightened eyes, like those of some hunted animal." Section 1, pg. 108

"'Alas!' replied our visitor. 'The very horror of my situation lies in the fact that my fears are so vague, and my suspicions depend so entirely upon small points, which might seem trivial to another, that even he to whom of all others I have a right to look for help and advice looks upon all that I tell him about it as the fancies of a nervous woman.'" Section 1, pg. 109

"'But I have heard, Mr. Holmes, that you can see deeply into the manifold wickedness of the human heart. You may advise me how to walk amid the dangers which encompass me.'" Section 1, pp. 109-110

"'Violence of temper approaching to mania has been hereditary in the men of the family, and in my stepfather's case it had, I believe, been intensified by his long residence in the tropics.'" Section 2, pg. 110

"Sherlock Holmes had been leaning back in his chair with his eyes closed, and his head sunk in a cushion, but he half opened his lids now, and glanced across at his visitor.

'Pray be precise as to details,' said he." Section 2, pg. 111

"'I could not sleep that night. A vague feeling of impending misfortune impressed me. My sister and I, you will recollect, were twins, and you know how subtle are the links which bind two souls which are so closely allied.'" Section 2, pg. 111

"'Oh, my God! Helen! It was the band! The speckled band!' There was something else which she would fain have said, and she stabbed with her finger into the air in the direction of the Doctor's room, but a fresh convulsion seized her and choked her words." Section 3, pg. 112

"'Sometimes I have thought that it was merely the wild talk of delirium, sometimes that it may have referred to some band of people, perhaps to these very gypsies in the plantation. I do not know whether the spotted handkerchiefs which so many of them wear over their heads might have suggested the strange adjective which she used.'

Holmes shook his head like a man who is far from satisfied." Section 3, pg. 113

"A large face, seared with a thousand wrinkles, burned yellow with the sun, and marked with every evil passion, was turned from one to the other of us, while his deep-set, bile-

shot eyes, and his high thin fleshless nose, gave him somewhat the resemblance to a fierce old bird of prey." Section 4, pg. 114

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

My friend smiled.

'Holmes the busybody!'

His smile broadened.

'Holmes the Scotland-yard Jack-in-office!'

Holmes chuckled heartily." Section 4, pg. 115

"He must guard himself, for he may find that there is someone more cunning than himself upon his track." Section 5, pg. 116

"For example, what a fool a builder must be to open a ventilator into another room, when, with the same trouble, he might have communicated with the outside air!" Section 5, pg. 117

"Goodbye, and be brave, for if you will do what I have told you, you may rest assured that we shall soon drive away the dangers that threaten you." Section 6, pg. 118

"'You speak of danger. You have evidently seen more in these rooms than was visible to me.'

'No, but I fancy that I may have deduced a little more. I imagine that you saw all that I did.'" Section 6, pg. 119

"How shall I ever forget that dreadful vigil? I cold not hear a sound, not even the drawing of a breath, and yet I knew that my companion sat open-eyed, within a few feet of me, in the same state of nervous tension in which I was myself." Section 7, pg. 120

"They say that away down in the village, and even in the distant parsonage, that cry raised the sleepers from their beds. It struck cold to our hearts, and I stood gazing at Holmes, and he at me, until the last echoes of it had died away into the silence from which it rose." Section 7, pg. 121

"'I had,' said he, 'come to an entirely erroneous conclusion, which shows, my dear Watson, how dangerous it always is to reason from insufficient data.'" Section 8, pg. 122

"'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 Dr.

Grimesby Roylott's death, and I cannot say that it is likely to weigh very heavily upon my conscience.'" Section 8, pg. 123

Adaptations

Please see the "Adaptations" section of the entry on The Hound of the Baskervilles for an accounting of the adaptations of the Sherlock Holmes stories.

Key Questions

The Sherlock Holmes stories continue to be among the most widely read fiction of our time. Fans of the Holmes stories are among the most devoted followers ever for a literary figure.

Their clubs seem to be everywhere, they publish newsletters, and they even hold conventions. It may be asking too much of one story to reveal the fundamental reasons for creating legions of fanatical followers, but "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" is highly suggestive. It presents a threatening, mysterious world that is brought to rights by a determined, logical investigator. One of the enduring myths of the modern age is that science can answer all questions; "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" and the other Holmes stories offer readers vicarious satisfaction of that myth. Our world really is dark and mysterious for most of us; injustice seems to run loose without fear; yet, Holmes shows how a scientific and disciplined mind can illuminate the darkness and drive away injustice. A discussion might well begin with the issue of justice through courageous application of a rational mind and then work its way deeper in the world in which Holmes operates.

Another, somewhat lighter, approach to generating a discussion might begin with Conan Doyle's insistence throughout his career that the Holmes stories were insignificant entertainments. Why would he say so? Did he accidentally make a series of stories that have a universal appeal, transcending eras and national boundaries? Was he right; are the stories merely light reading, nothing more? If "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" was his favorite Holmes story, what makes it exceptional? Is it truly representative of the Holmes canon?

1. One of the most extraordinary aspects of the popularity of Sherlock Holmes is that many people think he is a real person. The business at the 221 Baker Street address in London employs secretaries whose job it is to answer the mail written to Holmes from around the world. Many of the letters are pleas for Holmes's help. Some Holmes fans seem quite sincere (although many write tongue in cheek) when they insist that he was an historical figure. In spite of all this, he was no more (and no less) than a creation of Conan Doyle's imagination — a fictional character. Why would people think Holmes was a real person? Is it wishful thinking — a desire to have some towering figure of truth to appeal to in a corrupt world? Is there some aspect of the way Conan Doyle develops him that makes him seem among the living when the vast majority of fictional characters do not? Are there any other fictional figures who are also thought by some to be alive? If so, what do they have in common with Holmes?

2. Speculate as to why Conan Doyle chose "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" as his favorite Sherlock Holmes story. What about it would have satisfied him as an author? Do you agree with his choice?

3. "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" has elements of the popular form of the gothic romance in it: a mysterious house, a mysterious death, an abusive father-figure, and a young woman threatened by an unknown evil.

Conan Doyle takes this situation and alters it by giving the young woman a rational recourse for help — Sherlock Holmes. Logic and science defy overheated gothic emotions and the dark mystery of a decaying house; fear gives way to knowledge and understanding.

What ideas is Conan Doyle trying to convey by injecting Holmes into this gothic situation? How do the story's characters respond to the mystery of the speckled band? What do their responses tell us about them and about Conan Doyle's authorial goals?

4. The characterization of Sherlock Holmes seems to have several sources, including Conan Doyle, himself. While Conan Doyle physically looked the part of Dr. Watson and like Watson was a physician, studies of his life reveal a man with a keenly evaluative mind. He applied the techniques for diagnosing illnesses that he had learned in medical school to the solving of mysteries in the larger world. A good diagnostician often pulls together seeming unrelated details to form a diagnosis, a process which Sherlock Holmes follows. In real life, Conan Doyle solved baffling mysteries worthy of Homes. A fun discussion could focus on these real-life mysteries and their solutions. Discussion group members would have to research Conan Doyle's life in order to find these mysteries, but Conan Doyle led an interesting life, and most people will find the research interesting and entertaining.

5. In "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" there seems little doubt as to who the villain is. How does Conan Doyle maintain suspense?

6. How fair is Conan Doyle in presenting the clues to the solution of the mystery?

7. Much of the premise for "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" depends on the position of the stepdaughter in Victorian society. Could the short story take place today?

8. Mysteries often have red herrings, clues and characters intended to mislead readers away from the real clues and villains. What kinds of red herrings are to be found in "The Adventure of the Speckled Band"? Can you identify them all? Do they succeed in making the mystery more cloudy? Are they fair to the reader?

9. Holmes prefers to take cases that he finds particularly interesting, rather than just any case that comes his way.

What does he find particularly appealing about the mystery in "The Adventure of the Speckled Band"?

10. What are the various social evils, a few of them subtle, in "The Adventure of the Speckled Band"? Which of them are resolved at the story's end?

Which will persist after the story is over?

Topics for Discussion

Why do you think Holmes values Watson's input so highly?

Discuss the parallels between Holmes' method of solving crimes and the methodology used by modern day forensic scientists.

Describe the scientific method which Holmes uses to arrive at his solutions.

What quality of Sherlock Holmes do you find the most interesting? How was it demonstrated in this story?

Would you say that Watson is Holmes' intellectual equal? Why or why not?

What was Holmes' motivation(s) for getting involved with the investigation?

Why do you think the coroner's inquest ruled the murdering Roylott's death to be an accident? Do you think this is beneficial or harmful to Helen's future life?

Literary Precedents

Conan Doyle was well read in the field of mysteries and drew on many sources for his own well-wrought stories. The most important precedents for the Holmes adventures were the tales of "ratiocination" of Edgar Allan Poe and the novels of Wilkie Collins. Poe's tales feature the great detective Auguste Dupin, a Frenchman who uses his intellect to solve bewildering crimes. As in the Holmes stories, someone brings Dupin a mystery; then Dupin sifts through the clues and devises a plan to unmask the villain.

Conan Doyle's stories follow this pattern, even making Holmes analytical and arrogant like Dupin.

In his two best novels, The Woman in White (1859) and The Moonstone (1868), Collins tells the stories through the letters and diaries of the characters.

This technique creates a tone of immediacy, as if the reader were seeing the narrative unfold moment by moment.

In addition, the mystery is enhanced because the reader can know no more than the characters. Yet, all the clues are presented: The reader may sift through them and try to be a step ahead of the characters. In the Holmes adventures, Watson provides a firsthand account of events, almost as if he were writing a diary. In addition, Collins mixed the Gothic atmosphere of the supernatural into his fiction, thus making everyday scenes and events seem full of suspense and threatening doom. "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" also uses this technique, making even quiet evenings in the country seem ominous and dangerous. Some critics have gone so far as to assert that Sergeant Cuff from Collins's The Moonstone is the model for Sherlock Holmes because both men look alike, are analytical, and retire to the country, Cuff to raise roses and Homes to keep bees.

Whatever the sources for the Holmes adventures, their ingenuity, blend of crime and day-to-day life, and their clear narratives make them original and engrossing reading.

Related Titles

Although The Hound of the Baskervilles is the most popular of the Holmes adventures, the series consists primarily of short stories, with only four novels.

The short stories are consistently entertaining and each Holmes enthusiast has his own favorite. The one that is most often included in anthologies and textbooks is "The Adventure of the Speckled Band," because it was Conan Doyle's favorite Holmes story, and teachers think it is a good example of Conan Doyle's style and skill in plotting. Nearly every story is told in the first person by Watson (a few of the later ones are in the third person), and Watson tends to take an active role in helping Holmes. In most of the stories, the plot is set in motion much as it is in "The Adventure of the Speckled Band," with a potential client bringing an unusual mystery to Holmes, although Holmes sometimes stumbles on to a mystery, and his restless spirit sometimes presses him to seek out an interesting mystery. Throughout the stories, Holmes is a dedicated rationalist who refuses to accept supernatural explanations for events; he is also rude, remains reclusive, and while protective of women, remains somewhat bemused by them. On the other hand, he matures as the stories progress. At first addicted to cocaine, with the help of Watson he eventually rids himself of the drug. In one of the first stories, "A Scandal in Bohemia" (1891) Holmes falls in love with his adversary Irene Adler, who outwits him, and he seems to remain wistful about her as learns how to deal better with women in later stories. An important and usually overlooked aspect of Holmes's development throughout the stories is that he ages as Conan Doyle ages, and although popular imagination may have Holmes forever locked in the Victorian era, Holmes actually lives into the 1920s, adapting to changing times and technology, and solving mysteries through World War I to his last adventure, published in 1928.

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Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

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