



The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure X -- The Adventure of the Speckled Band

This is a funny one really because though I enjoyed re-reading the story very much, I can't really think of much to say about it, writes Charlotte Anne Walters.

I suppose there is lots to say about the stories I love and plenty to get off my chest about those I don't like, but this one comes somewhere in the middle. Plus, it's wages day today at work and I've been staring at a spread-sheet all day so my brain feels too stuck in the 21st century to really loose itself in the 19th. That's one of the things that made writing my Holmes novel difficult, switching between two eras when my job firmly places me in the modern world of prestige-cosmetics recruitment, a million miles from Victorian London. Some weekends I'd be sitting there writing about foggy cobbled streets with hansom cabs rattling along, then I'd get a phone call about epic staffing disasters on the YSL counter in Selfridges and be pulled abruptly back into the 21st century. Sometimes it was hard to make my way back.



So what can I say about the Speckled Band? It certainly draws you in and all seems very plausible at the time, but when you think about it afterwards, some things do seem unrealistic. Holmes was very lucky not to have been bitten by the snake (the speckled band) as he thrashed it with his stick and I doubt you can train a snake to return to you with a whistle and the promise of a saucer of milk. Also, could someone really have kept a baboon and a cheetah strolling around their gardens?

But, as I say, this doesn't distract from the enjoyment as you read the story. It is one of the only short stories where I have found myself working things out ahead of Watson but it still kept me gripped all the way home on the train, I nearly missed my stop because I was so lost in the tale of poor Miss Stoner and her evil step-father. Conan Doyle clearly has little regard for step-fathers as they are generally portrayed as eager to get their hands on their charge's money by any means.

In this case, by sending a poisonous snake into Miss Stoner's room at night then calling it back with the aforementioned whistle and milk.

Once again Holmes seems to genuinely care about his client and it is interesting to read the stories back like this and see the kindness and sensitivity Holmes was capable of. He is also quite protective of Watson in this story, pointing out the danger they will face and thanking him for agreeing to spend the night with him in the room where the first snake-victim met their end. When they cross the grounds to the house and encounter the baboon, Holmes grabs Watson's wrist to stop him walking on further. He is also careful to position Watson in a chair away from the bed whilst Holmes himself sits on the bed next to the rope which the snake will descend.

Enjoyable and diverting, but a little unrealistic – 6 out of 10.

Charlotte Anne Walters

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