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AudioBooks

CLASSIC  
FICTION

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

# The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes I

Read by **David Timson**

THE  
COMPLETE  
CLASSICS

UNABRIDGED



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## **The Adventure of the Speckled Band**

1	Early morning in Baker Street	4:07
2	'It is not cold which makes me shiver...'	3:54
3	'My name is Helen Stoner...'	8:19
4	'I could not sleep that night...'	7:15
5	'This is very deep business...'	3:14
6	A huge man and an iron bar	3:50
7	A will, and a journey to Stoke Moran	13:26
8	'I have never seen my friend's face look so grim...'	6:37
9	A night visit to the Manor House	3:14
10	A dreadful vigil	5:40
11	'Such are the true facts...'	4:29

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## **The Adventure of the Stock-Broker's Clerk**

12	At my practice in Paddington	5:37
13	Mr Hall Pycroft	10:54
14	'Next day, I was off to Birmingham'	9:08
15	To the company's offices	6:48
16	'Pooh! All that is clear enough,' said Holmes impatiently	8:40

## **The Adventure of the Copper Beeches**

17	Breakfast at Baker Street	6:52
18	Miss Violet Hunter begins her story	8:17
19	A persuasive letter	5:30
20	A prediction fulfilled	2:14
21	Miss Hunter's account of curious happenings	7:44
22	'I shall try not to miss anything of importance'	7:07
23	The warning was no idle one	5:51
24	In the deserted rooms	9:19
25	We reach the Copper Beeches	5:19
26	Mrs Toller explains	3:44

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## **The Adventure of the Red-Headed League**

27	An elderly gentleman with fiery red hair	7:04
28	Mr. Jabez Wilson laughed heavily	5:27
29	The Red-Headed League	10:11
30	Abbots, Archery, Armour, Architecture – and a curt announcement	7:58
31	A visit to Saxe-Coburg Square	3:52
32	A concert before the crime	7:06
33	Down in the dark cellar	6:20
34	A lurid spark	3:56
35	‘You see, Watson...’	5:16

**Total time: 3:44:38**

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Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

# The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes I

**The Adventure of the Speckled Band • The Adventure of the Stock-Broker's Clerk  
The Adventure of the Copper Beeches • The Adventure of the Red-Headed League**

In 1891, Arthur Conan Doyle was struggling to make his name as a doctor; renting two rooms in fashionable Wimpole Street for use as a consulting room and waiting room. As he ruefully remarked in later years: 'I was soon to find that they were both *waiting* rooms.' Medicine's loss was literature's gain, and whilst waiting for patients he dabbled with writing fiction, and had the inspiration of his life: 'I felt that Sherlock Holmes, whom I had already handled in two little books, would easily lend himself to a succession of short stories.'

It was the age of the short story; new magazines were springing up in abundance, and they needed material. *The Strand* magazine was one such. Doyle tentatively sent his first efforts at short story writing, **A Scandal in Bohemia** and **The Adventure of the Red-Headed League**, to the editor of *The Strand*,

Greenhough Smith, who was delighted: 'What a God-send to an editor jaded with wading through reams of impossible stuff!' he later recalled. It was the beginning of a partnership that would last the rest of Doyle's professional life. Immediately six stories were commissioned, for each of which Doyle received £35. They were sensationally successful, and Doyle wrote modestly to his mother: 'Sherlock Holmes appears to have caught on'.

Encouraged by the public's response, he decided to 'throw physic to the dogs' and become a full-time author.

## **THE ADVENTURE OF THE SPECKLED BAND**

Following hard upon the success of the first set of Holmes short stories in 1891, Greenhough Smith, the editor of *The Strand*, eagerly commissioned six more. They were written at white-hot speed

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by Conan Doyle, in a matter of weeks, among them was a small masterpiece: **The Adventure of the Speckled Band**. Along with a later gem **The Adventure of Silver Blaze**, it has probably appeared in more anthologies of short stories than any other Holmes story. It was in fact Doyle's own favourite story; he put it first in a list he compiled of the twelve best Holmes stories for *The Strand* in 1927.

The story is set in Surrey, which seems to be a particularly unlawful county, as Doyle set no less than five stories there. **The Adventure of the Speckled Band** possesses one of the most odious villains in all the canon, Dr Grimesby Roylott. Holmes later comments that 'when a Doctor goes wrong he is the first of criminals', and cites as examples Dr William Palmer who poisoned a friend, for which he was executed in 1856; and the Glasgow practitioner Edward Pritchard, who killed his wife and mother-in-law and was hanged in 1865.

Violence is second nature to Roylott, who famously took the poker in the Baker Street rooms and 'bent [it] into a curve with his huge brown hands'.

He intimidates his step-daughters, even threatening them with a deadly snake, that is the 'speckled band' of the title. Zoologists have had difficulty in identifying this snake. Holmes at a glance describes it as 'a swamp adder – the deadliest snake in India'; but this is not a type recognised by students of the snake. The puff-adder might be a contender, but is a native of Africa, not India. The banded krait is venomous, but its alternate rings of black and yellow are hardly to be described as 'speckled'. The cobra seems the most likely, having the colouration, and ability to rear itself when roused, though its venom could not kill in ten seconds. Experts too find difficulty with Dr Roylott's ability to whistle his venomous pet back and reward him with a saucer of milk as snakes are stone-deaf and loathe milk! Once again it is evidence of Conan Doyle's habitual lack of research in his stories; but why should we quibble when it is such a cracking tale!

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## THE ADVENTURE OF THE COPPER BEECHES

Miss Violet Hunter, the client of this story, is the prototype of the Conan Doyle Sherlockian heroine. The stories contain a veritable 'bunch' of Violets: she shares her name with the athletic Miss Smith in **The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist**, (see Naxos *The Return of Sherlock Holmes Vol. 2*), the tragic Miss Westbury in **The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans** and the infuriating Miss de Merville in **The Adventure of the Illustrious Client**. The latter is described as a 'wonder woman', and Miss Hunter is no shrinking Violet. Her no-nonsense, practical approach to her situation, not to mention her courage, impress Holmes who praises her as a 'quite exceptional woman'. Some commentators go so far as to suggest the attraction was mutual, and that her exhortation in her letter to Holmes, 'Do come!' is more of a personal, even romantic appeal, than a matter of business. Miss Hunter would have been far too 'modern' for Dr Watson's tastes no doubt, but he expresses regret that Holmes did not take an interest in the

girl once the case was over, and took the trouble to note her subsequent career: 'she is now the head of a private school at Walsall'.

Did the name have some significance perhaps for Conan Doyle, as it is always attached to young women with great strength of character; or is it merely coincidence, as every tenth woman in Victorian England was called Violet!

It is worth noting that before he wrote this story, Conan Doyle was already beginning to have murderous intentions towards his creation, and it was only his mother's suggestion for the plot of **The Adventure of the Copper Beeches** that earned Sherlock Holmes a reprieve.

## THE ADVENTURE OF THE STOCKBROKER'S CLERK

This story takes place in the months just after Watson's marriage to Mary Morstan, whom he had met in the first case he chronicled, **The Sign of Four**. He had established himself in a practice in Paddington, then still a fashionable part of London, despite the proximity of the railway station where Watson is

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called to attend to the young engineer's thumb in the adventure of the same name. Watson is all optimism, happily married and convinced that his 'youth and energy' will enable him to make a success of a dwindling practice. So how and why has he moved back into Baker Street by the time we hear of **The Adventure of the Copper Beeches**? It is one of the enduring puzzles: had his wife left him, or died? No convincing explanation is ever given by Dr Watson.

The eponymous Hall Pycroft seems a very modern young man to us – he is from humble origins, building a reputation on the stock exchange, like so many young high fliers today, so it is no wonder he is eager to take on the dubious job offered him by 'Mr Pinner' at the Franco-Midland Hardware Company at the extraordinary salary of £500 a year. Like Mr Jabez Wilson in **The Adventure of the Red-Headed League**, it is the financial inducement that persuades him, despite having to take up residence in Birmingham. It is nostalgic to think that despite it being 1889, when Holmes and Watson alighted at New Street station

they would have been greeted by cobbled streets, eighteenth-century houses and a town still largely undeveloped. Such quaintness did not survive the bombs of World War II, or twentieth-century planning.

### **THE ADVENTURE OF THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE**

Mr Jabez Wilson, who brings this 'three-pipe problem' to Holmes' attention, is set the elaborate task of copying out the entire Encyclopaedia Britannica to apparently satisfy the curious whim of Mr Ezekiah Hopkins, an eccentric American millionaire. Dazzled by the lure of easy money (£4 a week for an undemanding task), he is completely taken in by the inventive criminals. In fact so enthusiastic is he for his new job, that after eight weeks' progress on the As, he hoped ere long to move on to the Bs. Wishful thinking: the first volume of the Encyclopaedia (1875 edition) is 928 pages long, and the article on 'Attica' referred to by Wilson is a further 794 pages in to Volume 2! That would mean that in eight weeks, working merely four hours a day, to reach 'Attica'



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he would have had to copy 33,435 words an hour!! It was an understatement by Holmes that Mr Wilson 'has done a considerable amount of writing lately'.

To assist him to 'introspect', Holmes goes with Watson to hear the internationally-renowned violinist Pablo Sarasate (1844–1908), performing a concert of largely German music, which would no doubt have also included pieces of his own composition, such as *Gypsy Airs* which he recorded in the early years of the phonograph. Holmes may have felt a particular affinity with Sarasate, as they both were fortunate enough to own violins made by the master, Stradivarius.

John Clay, the villain in this story, is described by Holmes as 'the fourth smartest man in London'. Professor Moriarty was no doubt the first; his right-hand man, Colonel Moran, whom Holmes encounters in **The Adventure of the Empty House** (see NAXOS *The Return of Sherlock Holmes Vol. 1*) was probably the second, but as to the third it is anyone's guess. However, a likely contender must surely be Charles Augustus Milverton, the arch-blackmailer (see NAXOS *The*

*Return of Sherlock Holmes Vol. 2*). For Clay to be included in such a list shows that he must be a very dangerous man. He had committed murder according to Detective Jones, and may have got rid of Jabez Wilson, Holmes' client, who unaccountably disappears from the story. Clay's smartness is testified to by the ingenious way he was able to dig a tunnel, single-handed, without arousing the suspicion of his master, and only using basic tools! Holmes may also have deduced that such an exceptional opponent was most probably a leading figure in Professor Moriarty's criminal network. The quote from Flaubert that ends this tale that has required considerable brainpower on the part of Holmes translates aptly as: 'The man is nothing, the work is everything'.

**Notes by David Timson**

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**The music on this recording is taken from the  
NAXOS and MARCO POLO catalogues**

**The Adventure of the Speckled Band**

**BELLA** STRING QUARTET IN E MINOR

8.223839

Moyzes Quartet

**BELLA** NOTTURNO FOR STRING QUARTET

8.223839

Moyzes Quartet

**The Adventure of the Stock-Broker's Clerk**

**BELLA** STRING QUARTET IN C MINOR

8.223658

Moyzes Quartet

**The Adventure of the Copper Beeches**

**GRIEG** STRING QUARTET IN G MINOR

8.550879

Oslo String Quartet

**The Adventure of the Red-Headed League**

**BELLA** STRING QUINTET IN D MINOR

8.223658

Moyzes Quartet / František Magyar, 2nd viola

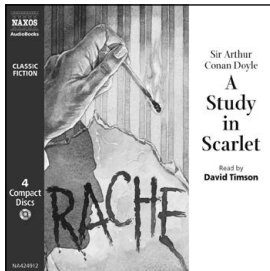
**Music programming by Sarah Butcher**

Cover picture: *Sherlock Holmes*, as portrayed by actor William Gillette.

Courtesy of Mary Evans Picture Library, London.

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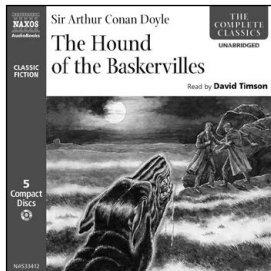
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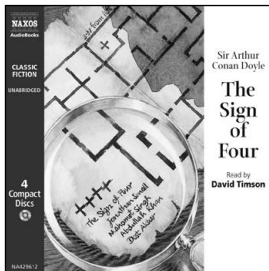
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Sir Arthur Conan Doyle  
**The Adventures  
of Sherlock Holmes I**

**The Adventure of the Speckled Band • The Adventure of the Stock-Broker's Clerk  
The Adventure of the Copper Beeches • The Adventure of the Red-Headed League**

Read by **David Timson**

In this collection are four of the finest cases of Mr Sherlock Holmes, narrated by his faithful friend and admirer Dr Watson. What was the horror of *The Speckled Band* or the secret behind the curious legacy for men of red hair? These and other puzzles are solved by this bloodhound of a genius.



David Timson has performed in modern and classic plays across the country and abroad, including *Wild Honey* for Alan Ayckbourn, *Hamlet*, *The Man of Mode* and *The Seagull*. He has been seen on television in *Nelson's Column* and *Swallows and Amazons* and in the film *The Russia House*. A familiar and versatile audio and radio voice, he reads *The Middle Way* and performs in *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Naxos AudioBooks.

*"The reading by David Timson is simply superb, matching Conan Doyle's narrative pace. Each character is defined as an individual and sounds right... I have heard Sherlock Holmes stories read by a lot of fine actors; David Timson is right up there with the best of them. Highly recommended."*

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Total time  
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