



The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXXX -- The Adventure of the Second Stain

There is a confusing chronology about this one, writes Charlotte Anne Walters.

It is not clear when Watson is writing the Second Stain or when the events actually occurred. All we know is that this is meant to be the last published account of Holmes' work because he has now retired to his cottage on the Sussex Downs and 'Notoriety has become hateful to him'. So what has happened to Watson by this point? We knew that Holmes asked him to move back to Baker Street after his re-appearance from the dead and that Watson sold his medical practise, so what did he do when Holmes retired? Perhaps the answers will become clearer as we work through the next compilation – His Last Bow. They certainly don't present themselves in this tale.

Holmes gives his permission to Watson for this story to be published only because it is the most important international case he has ever solved. And the client is the Prime Minister of England no less!

The drama centres on a letter from a foreign royal personage who fired off an angry, hot-headed, note about British colonial interests in a moment of madness which, if made public, could result in war between the two countries. It is stolen from the despatch-box of the Right-Honourable Trelawney Hope, Secretary for European Affairs. Through various twists and turns, it becomes clear to Holmes that it is Mrs Hope who has taken the letter and persuades her to return it to her husband's despatch-box before any harm is done. Watson spends a whole paragraph describing her beauty and has evidently developed a bit of a crush – bless him.



We don't know the date when the incidents took place as Watson wanted to be discrete, but as he is

living at Baker Street it must be either in the early days of his association with Holmes or when he returned to live in his old rooms after the Empty House. I would argue it would more likely be the latter as Holmes' reputation in the early days would not have been strong enough to secure the trust of the Prime Minister.

It's so strange to think of Holmes as retired, tating around with his bees all alone. And this image is juxtaposed with the energetic Holmes in this story – running around London for days chasing up all possible options of where this sensitive letter could have gone, barely eating or sleeping, turning up back at home looking moody and scrapping away on his violin before dashing off out again and ultimately, triumphantly, gaining high praise from the Prime Minister. But still Holmes remains un-phased by the importance of his client and stands up to the premier during their initial meeting when he refuses to reveal the contents of the letter. Holmes makes it clear that he would rather walk away from such a high-profile case than not be trusted completely. And ultimately, he does his usual trick of choosing to keep secrets himself in order to protect the foreign secretary's wife and avoid a scandal.

It is certainly a case of great international importance and a satisfying example of Holmes at his best, but personally I prefer the smaller, but more unusual cases such as the Six Napoleons. However, I certainly did enjoy following Holmes on this case as he shone light into what appeared to be total, and impossible, darkness.

A well-deserved 8 out of 10.

Charlotte Anne Walters

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