



The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XL -- The Adventure of the Second Stain

First published in:

The Strand Magazine, December 1904 and *Collier's Weekly*, January 28, 1905

Time frame of story (known/surmised):

Unclear. Dates disguised by Watson for confidentiality. Most likely late 1880's.

Holmes & Watson living arrangements:

Holmes & Watson at 221B. Note: When Watson finally wrote this story, Holmes had retired to bee-keeping upon the Sussex Downs.

Opening scene:

The Prime Minister Lord Bellinger, and the European Secretary Trelawney Hope, called upon Holmes & Watson.

Client:

The British Prime Minister

Crime or concern:

Disappearance and presumed theft of a letter from a foreign potentate, that if made public would likely lead to war. Murder of one of the suspects, Lucas the blackmailer.



Villain:

The European Secretary's wife, who had a beautifully coloured exquisite head, stole the treaty and gave it to another villain, Eduardo Lucas, who was blackmailing her over an indiscreet letter from her past.

Motive(s):

European Secretary's Wife: to avoid exposure. Blackmailer Lucas, aka M. Henre Fournay: foreign intrigue, sell the letter. Lucas' wife from Paris, where she was known as Mme. Fournaye: frenzied jealousy (she was a hot-blooded Creole).

Logic used to solve:

Holmes knew who the big-time spies were, and named the only 3 men in London capable of playing so bold a game. Watson sees in the paper that one of the three had been murdered that very night, so Holmes concentrates on him, noting that the odds of it being a coincidence are so enormous no figures could express them.

“Only one important thing has happened in the last three days, and that is that nothing has happened.” – Holmes (Stolen document did not surface.)

The chairs in the murder room were all swept over yonder, and the floor under the carpet blood-stain was not stained, however, the floor under the opposite corner was.

Policemen:

Inspector Lestrade who took Holmes into his confidence on the murder of Lucas. Constables Barrett and MacPherson.

Holmes' fees:

“If by the aid of the powers which you are said to possess you can find such an envelope as I describe with its enclosure, you will have deserved well of your country, and earned any reward which it lies in our power to bestow.” – Lord Bellinger, Premier of Britain, spoken to Holmes.

Holmes may have lost his chance at a very big fee by pretending the letter had never really disappeared in the first place.

Transport:

Holmes & Watson put on their hats and and strolled down together to Westminster.

Food:

In the 2 days following the murder, Holmes devoured sandwiches at irregular hours.

Drink:

None mentioned

Vices:

After the initial interview, the 2 officials left, and Holmes lit his pipe and sat lost in deepest thought. In the 2 days following the murder, Holmes smoked incessantly, while not eating sandwiches.

Other cases mentioned:

ABBE, and the woman at Margate.

Notable Quotables:

Holmes to the PM: "You think, sir, that unless this document is recovered there will be war?"

PM: "I think it is very probable." Holmes: "Then, sir, prepare for war."

"Now, Watson, the fair sex is your department" – Holmes
Holmes did not understand women. He said "The motives of women are so inscrutable. You remember the woman at Margate whom I suspected for the same reason. No powder on her nose — that proved to be the correct solution. How can you build on such a quicksand? Their most trivial action may mean volumes, or their most extraordinary conduct may depend upon a hairpin or a curling tongs."

"It is a capital mistake to theorize in advance of the facts." – Holmes. (A favorite principle.)

Other interesting:

This was Holmes' most important case. He prevented a war. It certainly represented the crowning glory of his career.

Remarkable similarity to the story and plot of NAVA.

Lestrade and the police were investigating the murder of Lucas, but they did not know about the more serious problem, the theft of the letter and the international threat.

When all was said and done:

Mrs. Hope gave the letter to Lucas, and saw where he hid it. Then Lucas' hot-blooded wife showed up from Paris and killed him. Holmes realized from the stains that Constable MacPherson had let someone to the crime scene, and confronted Mrs. Hope. She gave Holmes the letter, and he hid it back in Hope's box, implying it had been there all along. The Prime Minister could tell something fishy had happened, but was so relieved to get the letter back, he let it go.

McMurdo's Camp