



Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia

The Return of Sherlock Holmes Adventure XL -- The Adventure of the Second Stain

SUMMARY (Diogenes Club)

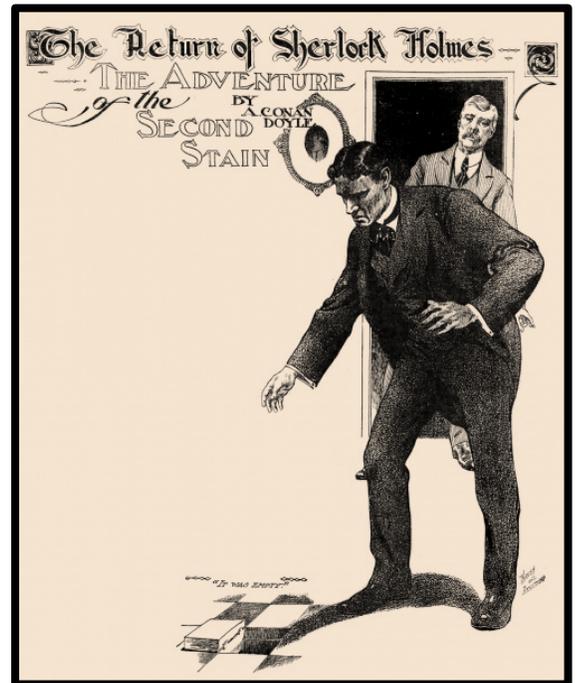
Watson is living at Baker Street.

Lucas leads a double life – part time in London and part time in Paris. He has a wife in Paris who is emotionally unstable.

Lucas is in possession of an embarrassing letter written by Hilda in her youth. Through an informant he learns of an important letter which Trewlaney Hope has received from a foreign potentate. If this letter were made public, war would result. He threatens to make Hilda's letter public if she does not steal the potentate's letter for him.

Trewlaney keeps his political affairs private from his wife and she does not realize the immense importance of the letter, so she has a duplicate key made for her husband's dispatch box and steals the letter from it.

She takes the letter to Lucas' London home and they trade. Mrs. Fournay has developed suspicions about her husband and has followed him to London. She sees Hilda go into the house and rushes in (the servants are out to assure Hilda of privacy but she leaves the door open as she does not want to be alone with Lucas). Lucas just has time to hide the letter in a secret compartment beneath the rug before Madame Fournay is upon him. Hilda sees where he hides it and then flees. Madame Fournay grabs a knife from the wall and kills Lucas. She then returns to Paris.



Holmes is consulted by Hope and Bellinger to recover the letter. He feels that one of the three international agents must have it.

Nothing happens – the letter is not made public – no war – nothing. Several days pass.

Mrs. Fournay flips her lid and all are sure she murdered her husband, but the official police do not know of the stolen letter.

Lestrade contacts Holmes and asks him to come to Lucas' house. There is a large blood stain on his carpet – a loose drugget – but the corresponding stain on the floor beneath it – the second stain – is 90 degrees away. Someone has rotated the carpet.

Holmes immediately solves the case. He finds a secret compartment in the floor but it is empty.

He learns that Hilda visited the house and by plying her feminine wiles on constable MacPherson, gained admittance to the murder room where she pretended to faint. The constable went to get her some water but when he returned, she was gone. During MacPherson's absence, Hilda opened the secret compartment and took the letter but in her haste turned the carpet so the stains did not correspond.

Holmes confronts Hilda in her home. She confesses. Holmes replaces the letter in the dispatch box and stuffs it between some other papers. He tells Hope and Bellinger that since no international incident has developed, he is convinced the letter never left the house. Hope searches the box again and finds the missing letter.

Holmes does not expose Hilda. Bellinger knows something is not quite right but is not sure what.

SUMMARY (ACD Encyclopedia)

Lord Bellinger, a former prime minister, and Trelawney Hope, Secretary for European Affairs, show up at Baker Street about a case they want neither the police nor the public to be aware of. A critically important letter from a foreign potentate, which Hope had been keeping in his personal safe, has disappeared. Holmes knows of three international secret agents who would be interested in obtaining this document: Oberstein, La Rothière and Eduardo Lucas. He therefore intends to question them, but learns that Lucas has been murdered in his home. Meanwhile, Lady Hilda, Hope's wife, visits Holmes and begs him to reveal to her the contents of the letter. Holmes, who promised to the officials that he would keep the secret, refuses, which leaves Lady Hilda desperate.

A few days later, the press reveals that Lucas lead a double life and shared his time between London and Paris, where he was called Henri Fournaye and was married to a very jealous woman. She'd been seen around Lucas's home the night he was murdered and is naturally suspected.

Lestrade asks Holmes to come to Lucas's home to see something that puzzles the inspector: The blood stain on the carpet and the one on the floor don't match. The carpet has then been turned round after the murder, which, Holmes points out, means the constable must have let someone come in the house. While Lestrade interviews the constable, Holmes inspects the floor and finds an empty box in a cavity under the floor. He returns it to its hiding place before Lestrade reenters the room with the constable, who confesses that he left a young woman alone a little while in the room.

Holmes then goes and sees Lady Hilda and enjoins her to hand the stolen letter over to him. She bursts into tears and explains that Lucas was blackmailing her and demanded she give him the letter he knew Hope was hiding. Owing a key to the safe, she complied, but saw where the scoundrel hid the letter. When she heard he had been murdered, she rushed to Lucas's house and tricked the constable in order to get the document back.

Holmes helps Lady Hilda by replacing the letter and convincing Hope that it never actually left the safe.

SUMMARY (Wikipedia)

Lord Bellinger, the Prime Minister, and the Right Honourable Trelawney Hope, the Secretary of State for European Affairs, come to Holmes in the matter of a document stolen from Hope's dispatch box, which he kept at home in Whitehall Terrace when not at work. If divulged, this document could bring about very dire consequences for all of Europe, even war. They are loath to tell Holmes at first the exact nature of the document's contents, but when Holmes declines to take on their case, they tell him it was a rather injudicious letter from a foreign potentate. It disappeared from the dispatch box one evening when Hope's wife was out at the theatre for four hours. No one in the house knew about the document, not even the Secretary's wife. None of the servants could have guessed what was in the box.

Holmes decides to begin with some spies known to him and is then astonished to hear from Dr. Watson that one of those that he names, Eduardo Lucas, has been murdered. Before Holmes has a chance to act, Lady Hilda Trelawney Hope, the European Secretary's wife, arrives unexpectedly at 221B Baker Street. She asks Holmes insistently about the stolen document's contents, but Holmes only reveals there would be regrettable consequences if the document were not found. Lady Hilda also begs Holmes to tell her husband nothing of her visit. Holmes's spy hunt does not go well. Four days after the murder, French police arrest the probable culprit of it, a woman whom Lucas has married in Paris under an alias. She was seen in London near Lucas's house the night of the crime, but she is now useless as a witness because she has gone insane.

Inspector Lestrade calls Holmes to the murder scene to examine something odd. Lucas bled over a drugget, and the blood soaked through it, but curiously there is no bloodstain on the floor under the drugget. However, there is one under the opposite edge of the carpet. It can only mean that the constable guarding the crime scene has been foolish enough to let someone in and leave them alone while they moved things in the room, including the carpet. Holmes tells Lestrade to take the constable to a back room and obtain a confession, which he does vigorously. Meanwhile, Holmes pulls the unfastened carpet aside and quickly finds a hiding place in the floor, but it is empty. The errant constable tells Holmes that the unauthorized visitor was a young woman. She apparently fainted at the sight of the blood but had left while the constable went out to fetch some brandy to revive her. As Holmes is leaving Lucas's house, he shows the constable a photograph, and he recognizes it as the visitor.

Holmes goes to the Hope household and confronts Lady Hilda, accusing her of the theft. At first, she denies everything but is forced to admit her wrongdoing under the threat of certain scandal. Lady Hilda admits Lucas was blackmailing her with a compromising letter written by her years earlier and demanded the contents of her husband's dispatch box for the return thereof (an unnamed spy within her husband's own office had made Lucas aware of the document). Lady Hilda went to Lucas's house to do the business when, as it happened, his wife from Paris showed up and confronted him about his affair, believing Lady Hilda was his mistress. Lady Hilda hurriedly left. However, she returned to fetch the stolen document after her visit to Holmes convinced her she needed to do so. She hands the document to Holmes. At Holmes's suggestion, the document is put back in the dispatch box using Lady Hilda's duplicate key.

When Hope arrives back home with the Prime Minister, Holmes pretends to believe that the evidence has convinced him that the document must still be in the box. It is soon found, and Hope rejoices that it was only a mistake. In this way, the lost document is restored without Lady Hilda's part in the affair being revealed, though at the possible price of making her husband look a bit stupid. The Prime Minister, however, is no fool. He can see an underlying story, but Holmes responds, "We also have our diplomatic secrets."