



The Adventure of the Second Stain

B1 Version

Part 1: A Matter of State

Holmes received two of the most important visitors of his career on an autumn morning. The first was Lord Bellinger, the Prime Minister — the head of the British government. The second was Trelawney Hope, the Secretary for European Affairs — the minister responsible for relations with the countries of Europe. Both men were pale and agitated.

A letter had been stolen. It was a private letter written by a foreign ruler — a king or emperor — who had been angered by recent British colonial policy and had written in reckless, inflammatory language. The letter had not gone through official diplomatic channels; the ruler's own ministers knew nothing of it. But if the letter were published, it would cause such public outrage in Britain that war between the two countries would be almost inevitable within a week. The letter had been kept in a locked despatch-box — a strong metal document case — in Hope's bedroom, where he had verified its presence when dressing for dinner. By morning it was gone.

Holmes questioned Hope closely. No one outside the Cabinet — the small group of senior ministers who govern with the Prime Minister — had known of the letter's existence. His wife had not been told. The despatch-box had stood all evening on the dressing table while the Hopes dined out and attended the theatre. Holmes immediately

identified three international secret agents in London capable of handling such a document: Oberstein, La Rothiere, and Eduardo Lucas of Godolphin Street, near Westminster.

Part 2: A Murder and a Lady

Before Holmes could act, Watson showed him the morning newspaper. Eduardo Lucas had been stabbed to death in his Godolphin Street house the previous night, with a curved Indian dagger taken from the wall. Holmes recognised immediately that this was no coincidence — Lucas lived a ten-minute walk from Whitehall Terrace where Hope resided, making him the most convenient of the three agents. The murder and the theft must be connected.

More unexpectedly, Lady Hilda Trelawney Hope — a beautiful, aristocratic woman, daughter of a duke — arrived at Baker Street shortly afterwards. She asked Holmes, with evident agitation and concealed anxiety, whether her husband's career would suffer from the loss of the document and whether public consequences would follow. Holmes confirmed that they would be serious. She left without explaining why she had come.

Holmes watched her carefully. He noted that she had positioned herself with the light behind her so her face would be harder to read; that she had asked not about the letter itself but about its consequences; and that she had urged Holmes urgently not to tell her husband she had visited. He was intrigued but not yet certain of her role.

Part 3: The Second Stain

Three days passed with no progress. Then Inspector Lestrade summoned Holmes to Godolphin Street with an interesting discovery. When the police lifted the small square carpet — called a druggel — in Lucas's sitting room to clean the floor beneath, they found something puzzling. The bloodstain on the upper surface of the carpet had soaked through, as one would expect, but there was no corresponding stain on the white wooden floor beneath it. Instead, there was a second bloodstain some feet away — and if the carpet was turned around, the two stains aligned perfectly. Someone had turned the carpet after the murder.

Holmes immediately understood the significance. He sent Lestrade to interrogate the constable who had been guarding the room. The moment Lestrade left, Holmes tore up the carpet, found a hinged section of the wooden floor, and prised it open to reveal a small hidden compartment. It was empty. Someone had already retrieved whatever was hidden there.

From Lestrade's subsequent interview with the constable, Holmes learned that a tall, well-dressed young woman had come to the door the previous evening claiming to be looking for an address, had charmed her way in, and had fainted dramatically when she saw the bloodstain. While the constable fetched brandy, she had recovered, moved the carpet, retrieved the letter from its hiding place, replaced the carpet imperfectly, and left.

Part 4: Confronting Lady Hilda

Holmes went directly to Whitehall Terrace. Lady Hilda received him with indignation, but Holmes told her calmly that he knew of her visit to Lucas, her delivery of the document,

her return to Godolphin Street, and her recovery of the letter from beneath the floor. Her courage held briefly, then failed entirely. She fell to her knees.

The explanation was one Holmes had half-anticipated. Before her marriage, as a young woman, Lady Hilda had written a letter to a man she admired — nothing criminal, nothing vicious, but imprudent enough that if her husband read it he would never forgive her, for he held his own honour to an impossibly high standard. Lucas had obtained this letter and blackmailed her with it: bring him the diplomatic document from her husband's despatch-box, or he would show her letter to the minister. She had made an impression of her husband's key, had a duplicate made, and had taken the letter to Lucas. He had given her back her own letter — and then his jealous wife had arrived and stabbed him, dying later of madness in Paris.

Lady Hilda had taken back the diplomatic letter while the constable was fetching brandy. She had intended to destroy it but had not yet done so.

Holmes moved with extraordinary speed. He took the despatch-box from the bedroom, slipped the blue envelope deep into the stack of papers inside, locked it again, and returned it to its place — all in the few minutes before Hope was due home. When Hope and the Prime Minister arrived and opened the box together, the letter was found — apparently overlooked all along. Holmes gracefully maintained the fiction that it had never really been missing.

The war was averted. Hope's career was undamaged. Lady Hilda's secret was safe. As Holmes and Watson left, the Prime Minister looked at him with knowing eyes and said, 'I think there is more in this than meets the eye.' Holmes smiled, picked up his hat, and simply said: 'We also have our diplomatic secrets.'