

A STUDY GUIDE TO SHERLOCK HOLMES

By William S. Dorn



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

THE SECOND STAIN
DATE OF THE ADVENTURE*
(Date when Holmes returned the missing letter
to the despatch-box)

CLUES:

1. In “The Naval Treaty” Watson says, “The July which immediately succeeded my marriage was made memorable by three cases ... recorded in my notes under the headings of ‘The Adventure of the Second Stain’ ... “(447)
2. Watson was married late in 1888 or early in 1889
3. Watson says, “It was, ... one Tuesday morning ... “ (650)
4. Watson says, “So for three mornings the mystery remained ... “ (658)
5. On the day of the announcement of Eduardo Lucas’s murder, Holmes went to the site of the murder and then immediately to Trelawney Hope’s residence to confront Lady Hilda Trelawney Hope. (659 to 664)
6. Holmes returned the letter to the despatch-box when he visited Lady Hilda. (664)
7. Lucas had “Sometimes ... visited Paris for three months on end ... “ (658)
8. Lucas was married to Mme. Fournaye and lived with her in Paris. (659)
9. On July 15, 1889 the French Chamber of Deputies voted 58 million Francs to increase the French naval forces.[#]
10. July 15, 1889 was Monday

*The story may contain other clues to the date of the adventure. However, use only the clues shown here. Your only goal should be to use logical reasoning to find a date based on the clues shown here.

[#] Source: Christ, Jay Finley, *An Irregular Chronology of Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street* (The Fanlight House, Chicago, 1947) [Reprinted by Magico Magazine, P O Box 156, New York, NY 1983] p. 55

CONCLUSIONS:

- A. 1 and 2 imply that the case took place in July of 1889
- B. 3 implies that the case began on Tuesday
- C. B and 4 imply that the next actions took place on Friday following the opening of the case
- D. C, 5 and 6 imply Holmes returned the letter to the despatch-box on Friday
- E. 7 and 8 imply that Lucas had dealings and might have sold secrets to the French government.
- F. E and 9 imply that the French government increased its naval force because of warnings that Lucas had something to sell to them that might precipitate a conflict with Britain.
- G. F, 9 and 10 imply that the case started on Monday, July 15, 1889
- H. D and G imply that Holmes returned the letter to the despatch-box on Friday, July 19, 1889

**Holmes returned the letter to the despatch-box
on Friday, July 19, 1889**

THE SECOND STAIN VOCABULARY WORDS

- betaken (650) – **caused himself to go or move**
peremptorily (650) – **without allowing contradiction or refusal**
settee (651, 654) – **small or medium-sized sofa**
gaunt (651) – **haggard or drawn**
ascetic (651) – **showing a life of self-discipline and self-denial**
ferment (653) – **state of agitation or of turbulent change**
transpired (655) – **became known**
frou-frou (657) – **rustling sound, as of silk**
tenacity (657) – **being exceptionally persistent**
caste (657) – **social class separated from others by distinctions
of hereditary rank**
curling tongs (657) – **tongs used to curl the hair**
reveries (657) – **daydreams**
indefatigable (658) – **incapable of being fatigued; tireless**
Creole (659) – **of European descent but born in the West
Indies or Latin America**
drugget (660, 661, 665) – **coarse rug of heavy felted fabric (wool
or wool and cotton) and made in
India**
sumptuous (660) – **suggesting great expense; lavish**
paroxysm (661) – **sudden outburst of emotion**
languidly (661) – **showing little or no spirit; listless**
sidled (661) – **advanced in a furtive way**
Queer Street (662) – **imaginary place where people in financial
difficulty lived**
genteel (662) – **well-bred and polite**
mantle (662) – **loose, sleeveless coat worn over outer garments;
a cloak**
morning-room (662) – **sitting room used in the early part of the
day**

The Return

forborne (663) – **held back; refrained**

ingenious (663) – **inventive or cunning**

supplication (663-664) – **humbly and earnestly begging**

farcical (666) – **ludicrous or absurd**

THE SECOND STAIN OPEN QUESTIONS

1. During the initial discussion with Lord Bellinger, the Prime Minister, and Trelawney Hope, Holmes “ ... wrote a name (of the supposed writer of the missing letter) upon a slip of paper and handed it to the Premier” (653) Why didn’t Holmes simply say the name aloud? After all, the only one in the room who didn’t know the name was Watson?

Holmes probably did say the name aloud. Writing on a slip of paper might have been a literary device used by Watson to avoid giving the name in the story.

2. Lord Bellinger says to Trelawney Hope, “ ... No one can blame you (for the theft of the letter). There is no precaution which you have neglected.” (653) But Hope had put the incriminating letter in his despatch-box in his bedroom – hardly a secure hiding place compared to the safes in the Prime Minister’s office. What could the Prime Minister have meant?

The British must have had preciously little confidence in the security of their safes. Not only did Hope take this letter home, but Alexander Holder took a precious coronet home for safekeeping (“The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet”).

3. Holmes says, “The odds are enormous against its (Lucas’s murder) being coincidence.” (655) But it was a coincidence as the events as related by Lady Hilda Trelawney Hope on page 665 show. Was Holmes wrong in his estimate of the odds?

Holmes was right about the odds against it being a coincidence, but he was wrong in dismissing coincidence as a possibility. It was a good thing Holmes acted on his supposition that the murder was not a coincidence, otherwise he would not have solved the case.

4. When she had recovered the missing letter, why didn't Lady Hilda Trelawney Hope replace it in the despatch-box herself?

Lady Hilda was out of her element becoming involved in the exchange with Lucas. She was acting in a heightened state of anxiety and unable to think clearly.

5. Holmes asks Lestrade, “ ... has that constable (McPherson) ... been in charge of the place all the time?” To which Lestrade replies, “Yes, he has.” (661) Was Scotland Yard so strapped for help that they could not relieve McPherson of that boring duty for even one day?

One possibility is that Lestrade didn't have much help to call upon. Another is that McPherson wasn't capable of much more responsibility. As a matter of fact, McPherson wasn't even up to the responsibility that Lestrade had given him in this case.

6. When the British government first received the incriminating letter, why wasn't it simply destroyed – by burning it for example – rather than risk it being stolen by a foreign agent as it was?

Destroying the letter would have been a good option, but the British government either didn't think of it or thought that destroying the letter didn't fit in with the British sense of fair play.

THE SECOND STAIN SIMPLE QUIZ*

1. Where was the first stain?
 - a. on the carpet
 - b. on the drapes
 - c. on the table cloth
 - d. none of the above

2. Where was the missing letter hidden?
 - a. in a secret compartment under the floor
 - b. in a secret safe hidden behind a picture
 - c. in the pages of a book in the bookcase
 - d. none of the above

3. Who took the missing letter from the despatch-box?
 - a. the Hope's butler
 - b. Lady Trelawney Hope
 - c. Eduardo Lucas
 - d. none of the above

* The Simple Quiz is designed to determine if the student has read the story. Anyone who has read the story through should have no trouble in completing this quiz. The Intermediate and Advanced Quizzes are more challenging.

THE SECOND STAIN INTERMEDIATE QUIZ[#]

1. Where had Trelawney Hope put the letter for safekeeping before it was discovered to be missing?
 - a. in a drawer of his bedroom dresser
 - b. in the right-hand drawer of the desk in his bedroom
 - c. in a despatch-box in his bedroom
 - d. none of the above

2. What was the name of the foreign agent who had the missing letter?
 - a. Eduardo Lucas
 - b. La Rothiere
 - c. Oberstein
 - d. none of the above

3. Where did Trelawney Hope finally find the missing letter?
 - a. on his desk at the Admiralty
 - b. in his despatch-box
 - c. under a cushion on his sofa
 - d. none of the above

4. Who retrieved the missing letter from its hiding place in the foreign agent's house?
 - a. Sherlock Holmes
 - b. Dr. Watson
 - c. Lady Trelawney Hope
 - d. none of the above

[#] The Intermediate Quiz is designed to test whether the student has read the story with reasonable attention to detail. The Simple Quiz is an easier test while the Advanced Quiz is much more challenging.

THE SECOND STAIN ADVANCED QUIZ [&]

1. What did Watson say he intended to be the last exploit of Sherlock Holmes that he would write?
 - a. The Adventure of the Abbey Grange
 - b. The Adventure of the Copper Beeches
 - c. The Final Problem
 - d. none of the above

2. What government position did Trelawney Hope hold?
 - a. Secretary of the Navy
 - b. Secretary of European Affairs
 - c. Private secretary to the Prime Minister
 - d. none of the above

3. What was the name of the Prime Minister?
 - a. Lord Bellinger
 - b. Lord Damery
 - c. Lord Holdhurst
 - d. none of the above

4. What was Eduardo Lucas' address in London?
 - a. 3 Brixton Road
 - b. 13 Caulfield Gardens
 - c. 16 Godolphin Street
 - d. none of the above

[&] The Advanced Quiz is designed for aficionados of the Canon. The questions are quite challenging. The Intermediate and Simple Quizzes are designed for the more casual reader of the stories.

ANSWERS TO QUIZZES FOR THE RETURN

QUESTION	1	2	3	4
Empty House				
Simple	c	c	c	xx
Intermediate	a	b	c	c
Advanced	c	a	a	b
Norwood Builder				
Simple	c	a	b	xx
Intermediate	a	a	b	c
Advanced	a	a	a	b
Dancing Men				
Simple	b	b	a	xx
Intermediate	b	c	a	a
Advanced	b	b	a	b
Solitary Cyclist				
Simple	a	c	c	xx
Intermediate	b	c	c	b
Advanced	b	c	a	c
Priory School				
Simple	b	a	c	xx
Intermediate	c	b	a	b
Advanced	d	a	c	b
Black Peter				
Simple	b	a	c	xx
Intermediate	b	c	b	c
Advanced	b	c	b	d
Charles Augustus Milverton				
Simple	b	a	a	xx
Intermediate	c	c	a	b
Advanced	b	c	b	a

QUESTION	1	2	3	4
Six Napoleons				
Simple	a	c	c	xx
Intermediate	b	b	c	b
Advanced	c	a	a	b
Three Students				
Simple	c	a	d	xx
Intermediate	a	b	c	b
Advanced	b	c	a	b
Golden Pince-Nez				
Simple	a	b	a	xx
Intermediate	c	c	c	a
Advanced	b	b	c	c
Missing Three-Quarter				
Simple	b	c	b	xx
Intermediate	b	a	b	c
Advanced	a	c	b	a
Abbey Grange				
Simple	a	c	c	xx
Intermediate	c	b	b	c
Advanced	b	b	a	b
Second Stain				
Simple	a	a	b	xx
Intermediate	c	a	b	c
Advanced	a	b	a	c