



An Inquiry into: "The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax"

"The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax," was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in December 1911. It is part of *His Last Bow*.

The chronology for this case is most certainly not unanimous. The various estimates can be seen on the table,

and they considerably differ. Out of sheer personal preference, and with nothing else to sustain it, I shall go with Baring-Gould's estimate.

So, if the case took place in 1902, as he concluded, then at the time Holmes was 48 years old and Watson 50.

Notable Quotes:

"One of the most dangerous classes in the world is the drifting and friendless woman. She is the most harmless, and often the most useful of mortals, but she is the inevitable inciter of crime in others."

"Single ladies must live, and their pass-books are compressed diaries."

"Besides, on general principles it is best that I should not leave the country. Scotland Yard feels lonely without me, and it causes an unhealthy excitement among the criminal classes."

"And a singularly consistent investigation you have made, my dear Watson. I cannot at the moment recall any possible blunder which you have omitted. The total effect of your proceeding has been to give the alarm everywhere and yet to discover nothing."

The Lonesome Lady

Whenever we look into this case, I am always puzzled by the fact that, according to Holmes, Lady Frances Carfax was so alone. He describes her to us as "a beautiful woman, still in middle age."

Even if there had been a falling out between her and all of her family, why is it that a good-looking gentlewoman of some means would have been so lacking in friends—both male and female—and admirers, to the point she was limited to corresponding with her old former governess. From every-

The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax

<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>1890 or later</i>
<i>Baring-Gold</i>	<i>Tuesday, July 1, 1902</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Summer 1895</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>Spring 1896</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>Summer 1899</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Wednesday, September 2, 1903</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Summer 1897</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>July 1901</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>Summer 1901</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Saturday, July 26, 1902</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1901</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>August 1895 or 1897-1901</i>

thing we have been told about her, there was no scandal or even the hint of one to taint her reputation. But, although she seems to be inclined to talk to and mingle with people, she was unusually alone. Why?

A Stray Ruminatiion

Holmes describes the Lady Frances in the following manner: “A rather pathetic figure, the Lady Frances, a beautiful woman, still in fresh middle age, and yet, by a strange change, *the last derelict of what only twenty years ago was a goodly fleet.*” (*Italics mine.*)

It is probably somewhat of a stretch, but I wonder if our sleuth was referring to what was back then ironically called, “The Fishing Fleet.”

Britain’s colonial reign seemed to be limitless, with India as the Imperial Crown’s sparkling jewel. This led many of Her Majesty’s best and brightest young men to depart for the Raj to make their careers and their fortunes as bureaucrats, soldiers, and businessmen. But this left behind countless young ladies who, suddenly bereft of eligible bachelors, found themselves facing an uncertain future.

With nothing to lose and everything to gain, some of these women decided to follow suit and abandon the Motherland for India’s exotic glamour (and better possibilities). Over there, with men outnumbering women by roughly four to one, there was a splendid chance to find a suitable husband.

It must be noted that, overwhelmingly, these ladies were not at the same level of some of the Wild West’s “mail-order brides.” While there may have been a few who sailed hoping to leave a slightly compromised past behind, many were women of good family often like Lady Frances, whose parents’ deaths and a surfeit of brothers often left them in a—if not penurious—limited financial situation. Notice what Holmes says of her: “She was left with limited means, but with some very remarkable old Spanish jewellery of silver and curiously cut diamonds to which she was fondly attached. . . .” only to shortly after add after that “The family are anxious, *and as they are exceedingly wealthy no sum will be spared if we can clear the matter up.*” (*Italics mine.*)



However, to argue against my own point, just how limited were her resources? Consider that she



gave her maid, Marie Devine £50 (≈\$20,000) as a wedding gift! And Watson tells us that “Two days later found me at the Hotel National at Lausanne, where I received every courtesy at the hands of M. Moser, the well-known manager.” If M. Moser was “the well-known manager” it had to be The

Grand Hotel National, a 5-Star luxury hotel in Lucerne, founded in 1870. So how poor could the lady have been if she remained there “several weeks”? Could her “poverty” have been a matter of

perception rather than fact? To some of the poorest, living in Third World Countries, all Americans are “rich.”

Holmes' Sources

It would be interesting to find out just what kinds of sources Holmes had to obtain information which even the official police might have had problems in obtaining, whether it be the content of a telegram or the status of someone's bank account. Much like us (but with greater success) Victorians worshipped their privacy and gave a new meaning to “tight-lipped” when it came to their personal lives. Let us recall that Watson did not learn until much later that Mycroft even existed—and then from necessity!

The same reticent existed in what might be termed semiprivate affairs, such as one's bank account. Even the lady's family could not have obtained information about her account from the bank. How did Holmes do it?

Watson's Strange Reaction

This is one of the few times in the Canon, I think, in which Holmes was justified in reading the riot act to his friend as far as his success in getting information for the Great Detective was concerned. Holmes joking? And about something as serious as an investigation about a life-or-death matter? How could Watson, knowing Holmes' personality and habits as he did by then, have ignored his telegram asking for information regarding Schlesinger's left ear? Where in the entire published Canon do we see Holmes engaging in practical joking? Really, Doctor!

The Peculiar Attire

When Philip Green was venting his anger on poor Watson, Holmes rescued his friend through a judicious application of a cudgel. That being said, why the disguise?



Many students of the Sacred Writings have wondered why Holmes disguised himself as an *ouvrier*. As far as he knew, Lady Carfax was headed for London with “Holy” Peters, and unless Watson edited out something from his story, there shouldn't have been anyone in Montpellier that Holmes would have wanted to conceal himself from. So why bother?

Yet another Delicate Lady

We find in this case another of those hyper-delicate creatures who must have all their lives been sheltered from all of the world's nastiness. Green tells our friends that as a young man he led a wild life; thus, even though he and Lady Frances were deeply in love, her delicacy prevented her from continuing the relationship. As he put it, “...her mind was as pure as snow. She could not

bear a shadow of coarseness. So, when she came to hear of things that I had done, she would have no more to say to me.”

There is no question that, measured against their counterparts of other eras, Victorian ladies were delicate. However, this surely has a limit. Lest we forget, these ladies accompanied their fathers, husbands, and brothers everywhere in an Empire the majority of whose territories weren't exactly civilized or pacified. But in her case, because (we are told) she evidently loved him so much, she was unable to even look at another man for all these years, in spite of Green's repelling coarseness.

Thus the question we must ask ourselves is what could have Green have possibly done to turn her away from him yet leave her love untouched? What does it mean to be “coarse”? I suppose that it might entail forgetting one's manners to the extent of picking one's nose at the dinner table or disposing of troublesome cockroaches with well-directed streams of tobacco juice; however, all this falls quite far from being someone who is cruel or a felon.

No Fences in London?

It always troubles me that such a professional criminal as we are told Holy Peters was would go to a pawnbroker to dispose of Lady Frances' jewelry. It is no news to anyone that pawnbrokers tend to be under the eye of the local constabulary. Surely he had to have known at least one fence who could have disposed of the jewels in a far more confidential manner and give him a far better price as well.

Perhaps the criminal world knew—somehow—that he was a target of Sherlock Holmes and this made him too “hot” to handle?

The Chloroformed Lady



Having had to once assist in administering the stuff, I must say that my prognosis for Lady Frances' well-being is extremely pessimistic; we were in a large room and still the fumes affected me. I find it extremely difficult to believe that with her head “all wreathed in cotton-wool, which had been soaked in the narcotic,” lying in a hermetic (it had to be so, nobody smelled the chloroform until the lid was opened), air-limited coffin Lady Frances could have lasted more than a few minutes. Based on the difficulties Watson encountered in bringing her back, it is very probable that she would have emerged from that coma with crippling brain damage.

What else happened in 1902:

Empire



First celebration of Empire Day (renamed “Commonwealth Day” in 1959).

First meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence in London.

◀ Joseph Chamberlain advocates return to Protection and Imperial Preference.

Anglo-German fleet seizes Venezuelan fleet to recover debts and reparations.

Peace of Vereeniging, ends Boer War.

Britain

Salisbury resigns, succeeded as PM by Arthur Balfour.

Anglo-Japanese Treaty, for mutual defense and to maintain status quo in Far East, recognizes the independence of China and Korea.

Institution of the Order of Merit by King Edward for distinguished service to the state; limited to 24 holders at one time.



◀ Sir Giles Gilbert Scott designs Liverpool Cathedral.

Education Act abolishes School Board system. Local control goes to town and county councils.

Secondary Education authorized out of rates.

British Academy granted Royal Charter.

Esperanto introduced to England.

Establishment of Metropolitan Water Board, supplying London.

Boer War casualties: 5,774 British and 4,000 Boers killed.

Arthur Conan Doyle is knighted.

World

Franco-Italian secret treaty; Italy to remain neutral if France were attacked by a third power.

Failure of second Belgian General Strike.

Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria, Italy) renewed to 1914.

Italian designs on Tripoli conditionally approved by France and Austria.



Russo-Japanese Convention, Russia agrees to evacuate Manchuria in 18 months.

Leon Trotsky escapes from Siberia, settles in London.'

◀ Martinique volcanic eruption destroys town of St. Pierre.

Coal strike in U.S.A.

National bankruptcy declared in Portugal.

French work day reduced to 9 1/2 hours.

U.S.A. acquires perpetual control over Panama

Canal. Control is held until 1977, when President Jimmy Carter turned the canal over to Panama, which assumed final control in 1999.

Public Health Act in France improves artisan living conditions.

White settlement of Kenya begins.

Aswan Dam opened.

St. Pierre, Martinique, destroyed by earthquake.

Abdul Hamid gives Germany concessions to build railway to Baghdad; rail system to stretch from Hamburg to the Persian Gulf.

Tientsin Sanitary Police established; first Chinese public health measure.

F.A. Krupp takes over Germania shipbuilding yard at Kiel; great armaments firm develops.

Art

Conan Doyle publishes *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.



Kipling publishes *Just So Stories*.

Arthur Edward Woodley Mason publishes *The Four Feathers*.

Beatrix Potter publishes *Peter Rabbit*.

◀ Enrico Caruso makes his first gramophone record—154 recordings in all.

Elgar composes the first of his *Pomp and Circumstance* marches.

Monet, *Waterloo Bridge*.

Gauguin, *Riders by the Sea*.

Gauguin paints *The Call*.

Debussy composes *Pelléas et Mélisandé*.

Picasso paints *Nude, Back View*.

Elgar composes *Coronation Ode*.

Science and Technology

Wireless telegraphy applied to ships.

Oliver Heaviside, English physicist, reveals the existence of an atmospheric layer which aids the conduction of radio waves.

Trans-Pacific Cable laid.

Completion of Aswan Dam in Egypt.

Next week's case: DYIN

Respectfully submitted,

Murray, the Courageous Orderly

(a.k.a. Alexander E. Braun)

"I should have fallen into the hands of the murderous Ghazis had it not been for the devotion and courage shown by Murray, my orderly..."

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