



His Last Bow

Adventure XL – The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax

Lady Frances Carfax was almost alone in the world, the drifting remnant of an aristocratic family. When her father, the Earl of Rufton, died she was left without very much in the way of financial resources. Yet her inheritance, such as it was, was sufficient to enable her to roam about the Continent with her personal maid Marie Devine, never staying for more than a few weeks in any one place. Then she vanished. She dismissed her maid for unknown reasons, and no one saw any more of Lady Frances once she left Lausanne, Switzerland, with a huge, black-bearded ruffian, described as “a veritable savage,” on her track. Her concerned relatives turned to Sherlock Holmes for assistance.

This is a good story, although perhaps a bit overlong. I think Holmes exaggerates, however, when he describes the concept of burying two persons in one coffin under one death certificate as “new to me in the annals of crime,” given his studies in “Sensational Literature.” Watson describes his knowledge of the subject as “Immense. He appears to know every detail of every horror perpetrated in the century.” And does anyone agree with me that the Hon. Philip Green is not a very sympathetic figure as the heroic champion of a damsel in danger?

My latest reading of LADY started out with a series of questions: Who might have shared Watson’s cab? How does one tie a shoelace into a double bow? Why is a friendless woman often “...the most useful of mortals?” Could anyone just “glance over” another person’s bank records without the consent of the account holder?



And isn't it curious that "...it had been remarked by the servants that the heavy trunk in the lady's bedroom was always scrupulously locked?" How would the servants know this unless they had tried to open it? Was there some system in place among London pawnbrokers whereby they could be alerted to be on the watch for certain items which might be pawned? And was the system so efficient that suspect items could be reported to the authorities within the time frame allowed in this story?

Holmes accused Watson of bungling his end of the investigation, yet he sent Watson to Lausanne while the real source of pertinent information, Susan Dobney, was in England. In the absence of the assistance Miss Dobney could provide, how else could Watson have proceeded, other than as he did?

When the coffin was brought out of the house on Poultny Square, Watson says that it was "supported by three men." That seems to be an unusual number of pallbearers. And, given that the coffin actually contained not only the wasted body of Rose Spender but of Lady Frances also, might the combined weight of coffin and contents have been greater than could be borne by only three men? And what was it about the coffin-lid that required the combined strength of three or more men to remove it once the lid had been unscrewed?

Steve Clarkson

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