



**The Hounds of the Internet**

"A singular set of people, Watson."

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

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"The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax," was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in December 1911. The first American publication was in *American Magazine* the same month and year. It is part of *His Last Bow*.

As in many of the other cases, we do not have a unanimous chronology. As I usually do, when estimates are so

inconclusive, I default to the sainted Baring-Gould's scholarship, whose estimate in this instance is 1902. Therefore, if the case took place then, as he concluded, at the time Holmes was 48 years old and Watson 50.

**Main Characters:**

Lady Frances Carfax, a solitary noble woman of modest means; the Honorable Philip Green, an Englishman whose love was refused by Lady Frances, and left to make his fortune in South Africa; Dr. Shlessinger, dangerous confidence man posing as a convalescent missionary recently returned from South America; Mrs. Shlessinger, his wife; Marie Devine, Lady Frances' maid; Jules Vibart, Devine's fiancé.

<i>The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>1890 or later</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</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>

Please note that Canon chronologists may differ on pivotal dates and comparative periods between cases, thus a simple majority is not necessarily correct. Most Canon scholars settle on a single chronologist's results for their research framework.

**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. She is helpless. She is migratory. She has sufficient means to take her from country to country and from hotel to hotel. She is lost, as often as not, in a maze of obscure pensions and boardinghouses. She is a stray chicken in a world of foxes. When she is gobbled up she is hardly missed."

"Single ladies must live, and their passbooks are compressed diaries."

“You know that I cannot possibly leave London while old Abrahams is in such mortal terror of his life. 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 Peculiar Lady Frances Carfax*

Even considering her from the perspective of the *zeitgeist* of Victorian Era—the milieu in which she was raised and in which she lived practically all of her life, the Lady Frances Carfax comes out as a bewildering person. Here is a woman of gentle birth, who is described to us as being “beautiful . . . still in middle age,” who obviously has seen a bit of the world, and although not ostentatiously wealthy has no economical problems; she is, in fact, quite well off.



One must therefore wonder why she would prefer to isolate herself from a family who obviously cared for her enough to give Holmes *carte blanche* to find her (“The family are anxious, and as they are exceedingly wealthy no sum will be spared if we can clear the matter up”). However, she chooses to limit her regular human contact solely to an elderly former governess. From everything we are told about her, there was no scandal or even the hint of one to taint her reputation. It would therefore seem unlikely that such a person would be so lacking in friends and admirers. Even if one were to concede the seemingly very shaky

grounds that led her to refuse the Honorable Philip Green’s advances—regardless of her deep love for him—it still seems profoundly strange that she would be so lacking in company, regardless of gender.

Strangely enough, although she seems to be inclined to talk to and mingle with people, she chooses to live so unusually isolated from her fellow creatures. Why?

According to her rejected suitor, Philip Green, he had been “a wild youngster” when she rejected him supposedly for his coarseness. If Lady Frances was now in her forties, that might imply a passage of time of about twenty years.

Not to sound cynical, but whatever happened to “Time heals all wounds”? Perhaps the lady had some psychological problems that were left unmentioned.

## *The Most Coarse Honorable Philip Green*

Philip Green regretfully confesses that the wild life that he had been leading led to Lady France's ending their relationship. Supposedly, this was because, 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."

We are left to wonder what the nature of this "coarseness" could have been, especially because the term itself is left nebulously undefined. Whatever could he have done that so outraged and repulsed her? Did he blow his nose on the napkin at dinner? Was he too fond of sherry? Did he pinch her under the table? (Come to think of it, crinolines did not exactly foster that habit—but I digress.)

The "wild life" that the poor man allegedly had as a young man is left too widely open to interpretation. Just what did that entail? Gambling and womanizing? Hardly shocking, considering that the highest in the land (HRH the Prince of Wales, for instance) were very publicly well-known for such indulgences, often to scandalous levels.

While it is true that pointing to the bad conduct of one's betters to excuse one's own bad behavior is an unacceptable justification, and the mind of a Victorian lady was expected to be ". . . as pure as snow," for the most part this *beau idéal* was often a not-too-thick coat of paint over the reality of life.

If, indeed, "She could not bear a shadow of coarseness" and

"when she came to hear of things that I had done, she would have no more to say to me," then this can only be the result of one of two things. First, Philip's behavior would have truly had to have been indescribably coarse, vulgar, and repugnant, eventually forcing his flight to South Africa. It is interesting to note, however, that we do not learn of him outraging anyone else or being condemned by society at large. Second—and this seems the most likely answer—the lady had exaggerated feelings of delicacy elevated to an almost psychotic level. Otherwise, what could have moved her to refuse him, yet still love him to the point of never even glancing at another man or marrying someone else.

Undeniably, if measured against their counterparts of other eras, Victorian ladies were delicate. However, there were limits. One ought to remember that these delicate ladies accompanied their fathers, husbands, and brothers everywhere in an Empire in which the majority of its territories weren't exactly civilized or pacified. Like the delicate ladies of the United States who travelled west with their families, these delicate flowers of Empire could ride like amazons and shoot like Annie Oakley.

## *How Modest are "Modest Means?"*

Although by that time laws and manners had changed considerably, it was not unusual for a woman of good family, like Lady Frances might have been left in a—if not penurious—certainly limited fi-



nancial situation through the deaths of parents and a surfeit of brothers in line to inherit. 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 add after that 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.]

It seems in this case that “limited” is a term ruled by perspective. If you earn \$500,000 a year, and I am a multimillionaire, I might look upon you as a person of “limited means,” a poor yatchless wretch who does not own even one Lear Jet. In Lady Carfax case, her limited resources were ample enough



**The Hotel National, Switzerland.**

for her to give Marie Devine, her maid, £50 (≈\$20,000) as a wedding gift!

According to Watson, “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 most likely had to refer to The Grand Hotel National, a 5-Star luxury hotel in Lucerne, founded in 1870. It was not unusual for a hotel of that renown to charge £1 to £2 (≈\$380 to ≈\$760) a day just for a room, with food and the other amenities extra.

So how poor could the lady have been if she remained there “several weeks”? Could her “poverty” have been more a matter of perception rather than fact?

### *Holmes’ Sources*

One cannot but marvel at Holmes’ knack for getting difficult-to-obtain information which even the official police would have had trouble in getting a hold of, whether it is the contents of someone else’s

telegram or the status of a bank account. Much like us (but with far greater success—no Internet) Victorians worshipped their privacy and gave meaning to the expression “tight-lipped” where it concerned their personal lives. Remember that Watson did not learn until much later in their relationship that our sleuth had an elder brother names Mycroft—and then out of necessity!

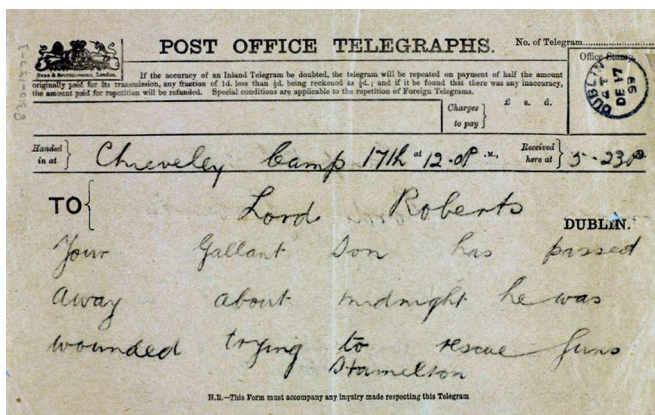
The same reticent existed in what might be termed semiprivate affairs, such as one’s bank account. Even the lady’s family could not have obtained information about her account from the bank. How did Holmes manage it?

### *Watson’s Atypical Reaction*

In all of the Sacred Writings, this undoubtedly is one of the very few times in which Holmes was justified in reading the riot act to his friend and colleague regarding his success in getting information for him.

Regarding Holmes’ telegram of inquiry about Shlessinger’s ear Watson comments, not without an

excess of asperity, that “Holmes’s ideas of humour are strange and occasionally offensive, so I took no notice of his ill-timed jest.” Where did that conclusion originate? Where, in all of the Sacred Writings, do we encounter Sherlock Holmes’ offensive humor? To what could Watson have been referring to?



Whatever could have made him think that Holmes would send him a telegraphed joke during the course of 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 Schlessinger’s left ear? Where in the entire published Canon do we see Holmes engaging in practical joking? Really, Doctor!

### *No Fencing in London?*

I am perennially puzzled over how it is possible that a crook of Holy Peter’s stripe—a thoroughly professional criminal—was unable to find a fence choosing instead a pawnbroker to dispose of Lady Frances’ jewelry. It is difficult to believe that he did not know at least one fence (or someone who could put him touch with one) who could have disposed of the jewels in a far more confidential manner and give him a far better price as well. Besides, it is no news to anyone that pawnbrokers tend to be under the eye of the local constabulary.



A possible, but unlikely, explanation might be that the criminal world knew—somehow—that he was a target of Sherlock Holmes and this made him too “hot” to handle.

## *The Miraculous Chloroformed Lady*

I once had to assist in administering the stuff which convinces me that Lady Frances' prognosis for her well-being would have had have been extremely pessimistic. We were in a large room with open windows and still the fumes made me wobbly.

Watson tells us that when they opened the coffin Lady Frances' head was "all wreathed in cotton-wool, which had been soaked in the narcotic"; yet, after artificial respiration and an injection of ether our Aesculapius brought her back from the Brink. Truly miraculous!



I once queried a forensic doctor (a rabid Holmesian!) about this and he slowly shook his head. "Ether doesn't act instantaneously," he said. "All those instances in literature or the movies where someone is attacked from behind and a cloth saturated in ether is put over the face and he immediately becomes unconscious are sheer nonsense. It takes some good five or more minutes for the stuff to work, and you must keep dripping more of it on the cloth. In Lady Frances' case, con-

sidering she was placed in a hermetic coffin and she was practically floating on ether, she couldn't possibly have lasted more than a very few minutes. Of course," he added judiciously, "she should thank her lucky stars that Watson was such an exceptional physician."

Perhaps our biographer exaggerated the circumstances in a fit of dramatic license.

## *He Has Done Better*

Although Holmes' deductive genius at times brightly shines as he reaches for the solution to this case, paradoxically the actual results leave much to be desired. Yes, in the end Holmes does find Lady Frances and saves her life; however, two dangerous and heartless criminals manage to escape Dame Justice's blade, to doubtless to continue their sinister careers. Holmes himself admits this when he concludes that, "If our ex-missionary friends escape the clutches of Lestrade, I shall expect to hear of some brilliant incidents in their future career." Although nothing else is said, it is almost a dead certainty that the nefarious pair managed to elude good old Lestrade.



At the case's very beginning our detective's customary brilliance seems reduced to a mere twinkling. For example, his deduction of Watson's visit to the Turkish bath, based on the different way in which his boots were been tied although accurate, could have borne different explanations; he might have just been trying on new shoes. The same goes for his conclusion that our medico had had company in his hansom ride because of splashes on the left sleeve and shoulder of his coat, showing that he sat at one side instead of the middle. In such a conveyance—lacking in shock absorbers and seat belts—one tends to gravitate to one side for comfort and something to grab a hold of.

Our sleuth's appearance in the Continent is also a bit puzzling and unexpected. Consider—he first sends Watson to investigate alone because he had to keep an eye on old Abrahams who feared for his life. Even assuming that whatever made his client fearful had been taken care of by Holmes, why leave London at this time? By then, the Good Doctor had already informed him that Lady Frances Carfax had left for London with the Shlessingers. And, regardless of his unkind remarks to Watson, his amanuensis had already uncovered enough facts to point Holmes in the right direction towards Holy Peters and wife.

In my opinion, as he almost always does, Watson performed well in seeking the information that



Holmes sent him off to find out. The only thing that might be held against him was his failure to inquire about Holy Peter's left ear and his attributing it to some kind of a pawky jest. In his defense, however, the great Detective could have been a trifle more explicit in his telegram.

Strangely enough, regardless of his reliance on the Good Doctor it almost seems as if at times Holmes does not trust him. In the present case, it appears that after sending off his colleague alone to gather information our sleuth did not really trust him. This observation is based on his providential intervention at the moment it seemed that Green would choke the life out of Watson—it is almost as if he had been following his friend, watching him as he conducted his inquiries.

This, in turn, raises questions about his appearance. Why the disguise? A French *ouvrier* in a blue blouse? How soon after Watson left did Holmes follow? It would have taken a good two to three days of avoiding the razor for him to acquire an “unshaven” appearance.

Perhaps the Great Detective had a matter unconnected to this case, unrevealed to us, which he needed to pursue in France and, once he had accomplished what he had set out to do, decided to join Watson in the latter's pursuits.

Perhaps he simply wanted to display his prowess at coming up with varied disguises.

In any case, his stinging rebuke to his friend, “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” is completely beyond the pale.



## *What else happened in 1902:*

### *Empire*

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

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.

◀ Sir Giles Gilbert Scott designs Liverpool Cathedral.

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

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.

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.

Italian designs on Tripoli conditionally approved by France and Austria.

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

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

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

French work day reduced to 9½ hours.

Public Health Act in France improves artisan living conditions.

White settlement of Kenya begins.

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.

### *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.

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.

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..."

*All Sherlock Holmes photos have been published by courtesy of ITV Granada.*

**If you would like to join the Hounds of the Internet, email us at [CourageousMurray@aol.com](mailto:CourageousMurray@aol.com).**

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