



His Last Bow

Adventure XLV -- The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax

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The Strand Magazine, December 1911; *American Magazine*, December 1911. (Called “The Disappearance of Lady Carfax” in *American Magazine*)

Time frame of story (known/surmised):

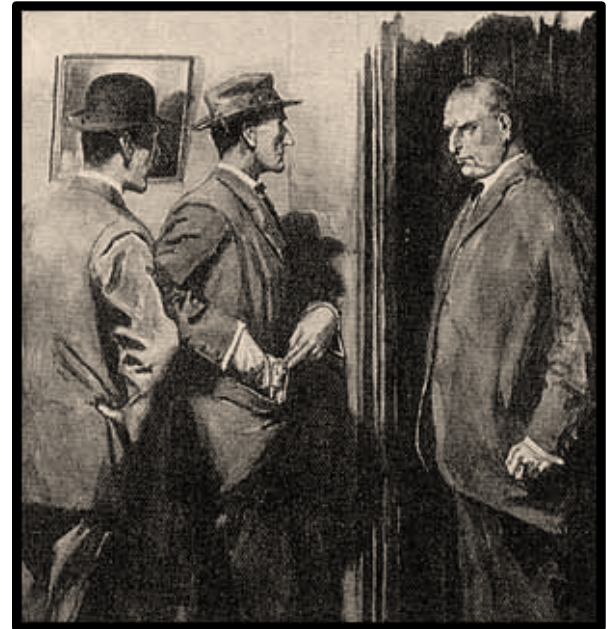
No clear indication. Probably around 1900.

Holmes & Watson living arrangements:

Not clearly stated, but seemed to be together at 221B.

Opening scene:

Holmes made some observations and deductions regarding mud, shoelaces, and the Turkish bath. He then offered Watson a trip to the Swiss resort town of Lausanne — first-class tickets and all expenses paid on a princely scale. Holmes was not immediately able to leave London, so he sent Watson to investigate the concern.



Client:

Miss Susan Dobney, the long retired governess of Lady Frances Carfax.

Crime or concern:

The disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax, a drifting and friendless woman. Lady Francis was helpless, migratory, and had sufficient means to take her from country to country and from hotel to hotel, lost, as often as not, in a maze of obscure pensions and boarding-houses, a stray chicken in a world of foxes. She was a person of precise habits, and for four years it had been her invariable custom to write every second week. Nearly five weeks passed without a word, so Miss Dobney consulted Holmes.

Villain:

Holy Peters, a big, clean-shaven bald-headed man with a large red face, and a disfigured left ear which had been badly bitten in a saloon-fight at Adelaide in '89. He had pendulous cheeks, and a general air of superficial benevolence which was marred by a cruel, vicious mouth. His companion was his so-called wife, an Englishwoman named Fraser, a worthy helpmate. They were a most infernal couple, who would stick at nothing.

Motive:

Peters' particular specialty was the beguiling of lonely ladies by playing upon their religious feelings, and he made his living by it. He portrayed himself as a missionary. In this case he was after Lady Carfax's jewels and money.

Logic used to solve:

Holmes knew of Peters and his M.O. Holmes enlisted an admirer of Lady Carfax to watch the pawn-shops for her jewels back in London. Once the connection was made, he traced her to Peters' house. There were preparations for the burial of an unrelated woman, but Holmes determined the coffin to be used was unusually deep. Peters was planning to bury two people (the other one being Lady Frances) in a single coffin using one death certificate.

Policemen:

Insp. Lestrade

Holmes' fees:

Not detailed, but Lady Carfax's family were anxious, and as they were exceedingly wealthy no sum would be spared to clear the matter up.

Transport:

Lots of travel. Watson travelled to Lausanne in Switzerland by unspecified means, and then to Baden, Germany, and Montpellier in southern France. Holmes then travelled from England to Montpellier, connected with Watson, and they returned to Baker St, all by unspecified means.

Back in England, Holmes & Watson took a cab from Kennington to Brixton. From Baker St., they drove past the Houses of Parliament and over Westminster Bridge to Poultny Square to the house of Holy Peters, aka Schlessinger. Then they drove to Brixton Workhouse Infirmary, and on to Scotland Yard.

At 7:25 the next morning Holmes & Watson were flying in a hansom down Baker Street after Holmes had figured it all out. As the coffin was being removed from Peters' house, Lestrade was driven up in a cab.

Food, drink, vices:

Holmes figured it out overnight. Watson had left him smoking hard, with his heavy, dark brows knotted together, and his long, nervous fingers tapping upon the arms of his chair.

Other cases mentioned:

That of old Abrahams, who was in mortal terror of his life. The case kept Holmes in London.

Notable Quotables:

"Should you care to add the case to your annals, my dear Watson," said Holmes that evening, "it can only be as an example of that temporary eclipse to which even the best-balanced mind may be exposed. Such slips are common to all mortals, and the greatest is he who can recognize and repair them. To this modified credit I may, perhaps, make some claim. My night was haunted by the thought that somewhere a clue, a strange sentence, a curious observation, had come under my notice and had been too easily dismissed. Then, suddenly, in the gray of the morning, the words came back to me. It was the remark of the undertaker's wife." (about the unusual coffin)

Other interesting:

Watson's investigation on the continent was not helpful. Holmes evaluation of his performance: "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." Watson was bitter.

Holy Peters and his wife were described by Holmes as being from South America. . . . “an exceptionally astute and dangerous man. The Rev. Dr. Shlessinger, missionary from South America, is none other than Holy Peters, one of the most unscrupulous rascals that Australia has ever evolved” Was there some geographic mix-up here, or was he simply an Australian posing as a South American?

When all was said and done:

Lady Frances was in the coffin but was not quite dead. She had been chloroformed, but recovered with Dr. Watson’s help.

McMurdo’s Camp