

# The Seventeen Steps

*Discussion questions for investigating Mr. Sherlock Holmes*

## His Last Bow

### Adventure XLV – The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax

*Seventeen thoughts for further ponderance of "The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax" by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.*

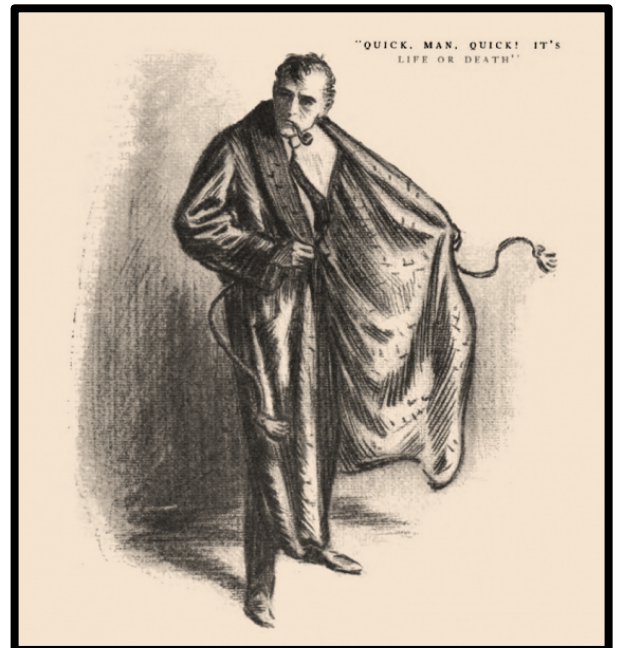
#### 1. The Watson Influence On Holmes

"The bath!" Holmes corrects Watson, then asks, "Why the relaxing and expensive Turkish rather than the invigorating home-made article?"

Sometimes one has to wonder if Holmes is simply posing these questions so he can impress Watson with the deduction that follows, especially with the abbreviated, "But why Turkish?" that precedes it. Was that the case this time? Or was Holmes really wondering, and used Watson's opinion to persuade him into the Turkish bath at the start of "Illustrious Client"? When did the Turkish bath fall out of fashion?

#### 2. And We Won't Mention Watson's Other Friends

"It belongs to the same elementary class of deduction which I should illustrate if I were to ask you who shared your cab in your drive this morning," Holmes says. Yet Watson never bothers to mention who it was that shared his cab. Was it someone he'd rather not mention to Holmes? Might Holmes have not gotten along with Watson's other friends? Might his opinion of them been so low that it was better Watson didn't bring them up?



#### 3. Getting Watson Out Of England

Holmes has sent Watson on missions before, but to Europe? We have also seen Holmes send Watson on trips when the detective has an ulterior motive in mind . . . was this another? Could Watson have been

sharing his cab with a woman Holmes didn't particularly approve of, and the trip to Europe in pursuit of a single woman was Holmes's best way to get her out of her clutches?

#### **4. And On Display At Silvester's Bank . . .**

"She banks at Silvester's. I have glanced over her account."

What would it take to get the accounts manager at Silvester's to let one look over another person's account? Was Holmes's reputation what got him that look? Would he have been able to bribe a bank clerk? Or are those entrusted with such great funds anyway unbribable?

#### **5. One More Victorian Celebrity**

We've discussed celebrity bankers of the Victorian era before, but celebrity hotel managers? Watson writes:

"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."

Is the fact that a French hotel manager is well known to him a sign of the social circles Watson travels in these days? Or is this just another celebrity people read of in Strand Magazine or some other publication?

#### **6. Travel Agents Along The Way**

"This much I gathered from the manager of Cook's local office," Watson reports, after visiting the local Cook's Tourist Office, said by Tracy's Encyclopaedia Sherlockiana to be a chain of travel agents and money changers.

What sort of clientele did Cook's have, and would Watson have been using them for this trip? Was this a part of his arrangements on a "princely" scale?

#### **7. The Victorian Holiday Inn**

"Lady Frances had stayed at the Englischer Hof for a fortnight."

Wait a second ... wasn't there an "Englischer Hof" in Meiringen in "The Final Problem"? Was this another chain, or merely a coincidence?

#### **8. A Map-Maker A Long Way From The Map's Target**

"Dr. Shlessinger" was supposedly "preparing a map of the Holy Land, with special reference to the kingdom of the Midianites, upon which he was writing a monograph."

Why would a sham South American missionary choose the kingdom of the Midianites to impress his prey with his scholarship? Is there anything about that topic to especially make the ladies more sympathetic to him?

### **9. A Gray-Eyed Vision In Blue**

Watson is wrestling with Philip Green when “an unshaven French ouvrier in a blue blouse darted out from a cabaret opposite, with a cudgel in his hand” leaping to Watson’s aid.

As perhaps Holmes’s most colorful disguise, the unshaven French workman may have been the disguise that most modern women would find sexy . . . is it? What else would have made up his costume, besides that blue blouse?

### **10. Rolling Back To London On The Express**

“I rather think you had better come back with me to London by the night express. . . . Now, Watson, if you will pack your bag I will cable to Mrs. Hudson to make one of her best efforts for two hungry travellers at 7:30 to-morrow.”

If they were taking the night express, how much time was spent travelling to get them home by 7:30 P.M. the next day? What would the differences have been between this trip and Watson’s original two days to Lausanne, in time, distance, and route?

### **11. Apparently Gregson Got The First Shift Job**

Holmes says, “Later in the evening I will stroll down and have a word with friend Lestrade at Scotland Yard.”

If it’s 7:30 when they arrive home and start eating supper, how late is Holmes expecting Lestrade to be at Scotland Yard? What sort of workday did a Scotland Yarder put in in those days?

### **12. Now You Tell Us, Watson!**

“For two days the Hon. Philip Green (he was, I may mention, the son of the famous admiral of that name who commanded the Sea of Azof fleet in the Crimean War) brought us no news.”

Why this last minute insertion of Green’s bonafides? Watson has insulted the man’s appearance, accosted him in the street, and holds back Green’s famous father until deep into the story -- was this a sign of the point where Watson was finally taking a shine to him?

### **13. If Only She Had Met Lestrade First**

Annie Peters is described by Green as “a tall, pale woman, with ferret eyes.”

What is it with Victorians and ferrets? Everybody seems to use them as a frame of reference. First we get ol’ “ferret-face” Lestrade, and now this. Were ferrets common wildlife along the English countryside? Popular household pets? Herded by fur farmers?

### **14. Great Club Name: The Usual Irregulars**

“Now, Watson,” Holmes announces as Green departs for the Yard, “he will set the regular forces on the move. We are, as usual, the irregulars, and we must take our own line of action.”

If you’re a usual irregular, does that make you a regular?

(Sorry, just had to ask.)

### **15. Maybe Diamonds Aren’t Forever**

Holy Peters complains: “Once in London, she gave us the slip, and, as I say, left these out-of-date jewels to pay her bills.”

How could jewels ever be “out-of-date”? Do they lose any value just because they’re set in a style gone out of fashion?

### **16. Two Hardcases, Looking For Trouble**

In one of my favorite Canonical quips, Holmes advises Peters, ““My companion is also a dangerous ruffian. And together we are going through your house.”

Did Watson at all look the part, or was Holmes enjoying casting Watson against type? Would we qualify Watson as “a dangerous ruffian” given his experiences with Holmes?

### **17. Best Reception A Burglar Ever Got From The Police**

“Bless you, sir, we know you very well,” says the sergeant who interrupts Holmes’s burglary. Why such a pleasant reception from the constabulary? Was Holmes’s reputation now *that* good with the police, were these some avid reader cops, or had Holmes actually met the sergeant before and forgotten?

## **18. Watson Brings The Lady Back**

“And then, at last, with artificial respiration, with injected ether, with every device that science could suggest, some flutter of life, some quiver of the eyelids, some dimming of a mirror, spoke of the slowly returning life.”

In a scene that might be in a Victorian version of “ER,” Dr. Watson uses a battery of methods to bring Lady Frances back to consciousness. Would he have carried his medical bag with him often (though unmentioned) when accompanying Holmes? Would ether have been a common part of its contents? What sort of “artificial respiration” might he have been using?

And even after she’s revived, “what with actual suffocation, and what with the poisonous fumes of the chloroform,” as Watson writes, wouldn’t the lady have most likely suffered brain damage?

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