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The Holladay Case

A Mystery Of Two Continents

By **BURTON E. STEVENSON**

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But it seemed that she had either improved or changed her mind, for two days later a note, which her maid had written for her, came to Mr. Graham asking him to call upon her in the course of the next twenty-four hours, as she wished to talk over some matters of business with him. It struck me as singular that she should ask for Mr. Graham, but our senior called a cab and started off at once without comment. An hour later the door opened and he entered the office with a most peculiar expression of countenance.

"Well, that beats me!" he exclaimed as he dropped into his chair.

Our junior wheeled around toward him without speaking, but his anxiety was plain enough.

"To think that a girl as level headed as Frances Holladay has always been should suddenly develop such whimsicalities. Yet I couldn't but admire her grasp of things. Here have I been thinking she didn't know anything about her business and didn't care, but she seems to have kept her eyes open."

"Well?" asked Mr. Royce as the other paused.

"Well, she started out by reminding me that her property had been left to her absolutely, to do as she pleased with, a point which I, of course, conceded. She then went on to say that she knew of a number of bequests her father had intended to make before his death, and which he would have made if he had not been cut off so suddenly; that the bequests were of such a nature that he did not wish his name to appear in them, and that she was going to undertake to carry them out anonymously."

"Well?" asked our junior again.

"Well," said Mr. Graham slowly, "she asked me to dispose of one of such of her securities as I thought best in order that I might place in her hands by tomorrow night \$100,000 in cash—a cool hundred thousand!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"A HUNDRED thousand dollars!" ejaculated Mr. Royce, and sat staring at his chief.

"A hundred thousand dollars! That's a good deal for a girl to give away in a lump, but she can afford it. Of course we've nothing to do but carry out her instructions. I think both of us can guess what she intends doing with the money."

The other nodded. I believed that I could guess too. The money, of course, was intended for the other woman. She was not to suffer for her crime after all. Miss Holladay seemed to me in no little danger of becoming an accessory after the fact.

"She seems really ill," continued our senior. "She looks thinner and quite careworn. I commended her resolution to seek rest and quiet and change of scene."

"When does she go, sir?" asked Mr. Royce in a subdued voice.

"The day after tomorrow, I think. She did not say definitely. In fact, she could talk very little. She's managed to catch cold—the grip, I suppose—

was very hoarse. It would have been cruelty to make her talk, and I didn't try."

He wheeled around to his desk and then suddenly back again.

"By the way," he said, "I saw the new maid. I can't say I wholly approve of her."

He paused a minute, weighing his words.

"She seems careful and devoted," he went on at last, "but I don't like her eyes. They're too intense. I caught her two or three times watching me strangely. I can't imagine where Miss Holladay picked her up, or why she should have picked her up at all. She's French, of course. She speaks with a decided accent. About the money, I suppose we'd better sell a block of U. P. bonds. They're the least productive of her securities."

"Yes, I suppose so," agreed Mr. Royce, and the chief called up a broker and gave the necessary orders. Then he turned to other work, and the day passed without any further reference to Miss Holladay or her affairs.

The proceeds of the sale were brought to the office early the next afternoon, a small packet neatly sealed and docketed—100 thousand dollar bills. Mr. Graham turned it over in his hand thoughtfully.

"You'll take it to the house, of course, John," he said to his partner. "Lester'd better go with you."

So Mr. Royce placed the package in his pocket, a cab was summoned, and we were off. The trip was made without incident, and at the end of half an hour we drew up before the Holladay mansion.

It was one of the old style brown stone fronts which lined both sides of the avenue twenty years ago. It was no longer in the ultra fashionable quarter, which had moved up toward Central park, and shops of various kinds were beginning to encroach upon the neighborhood, but it had been Hiram Holladay's home for forty years, and he had never been willing to part with it. At this moment all the blinds were down and the house had a deserted look. We mounted the steps to the door, which was opened at once to our ring by a woman whom I knew instinctively to be the new maid, though she looked much less like a maid than like an elderly working woman of the middle class.

"We've brought the money Miss Holladay asked Mr. Graham for yesterday," said Mr. Royce. "I'm John Royce, his partner." And without answering the woman motioned us in.

"Of course we must have a receipt for it," he added. "I have it ready here, and she need only attach her signature."

"Miss Holladay is too ill to see you, sir," said the maid, with careful enunciation. "I will myself the paper take to her and get her signature."

Mr. Royce hesitated a moment in perplexity. As for me, I was ransacking my memory. Where had I heard that voice before? Somewhere, I was certain—a voice low, vibrant, repressed, full of color. Then, with a

start, I remembered. It was Miss Holladay's voice as she had risen to welcome our junior that morning at the coroner's court. I shook myself together, for that was nonsense.

"I fear that won't do," said Mr. Royce at last. "The sum is a considerable one and must be given to Miss Holladay by me personally in the presence of this witness."

It was the maid's turn to hesitate. I saw her lips tighten ominously.

"Very well, sir," she said. "But I warn you she is most nervous, and it has been forbidden her to talk."

"She will not be called upon to talk," retorted Mr. Royce curtly, and without answering the woman turned and led the way up the stair and to her mistress' room.

Miss Holladay was lying back in a great chair with a bandage about her head, and even in the half light I could see how changed she was. She seemed much thinner and older and coughed occasionally in a way that frightened me. Not grief alone, I told myself, could have caused this breakdown; it was the secret weighing upon her. My



"I have brought the money you ask for," companion noted the change, too, of course—a greater change perhaps than my eyes could perceive—and I saw how moved and shocked he was.

"My dear Miss Holladay," he began, but she stopped him abruptly with a little imperative motion of the hand.

"Pray do not," she whispered hoarsely. "Pray do not."

He stopped and pulled himself together. When he spoke again it was in quite a different tone.

"I have brought the money you asked for," and he handed her the package.

"Thank you," she murmured.

"Will you verify the amount?"

"Oh, no; that is not necessary."

"I have a receipt here," and he produced it and his fountain pen. "Please sign it."

She took the pen with trembling fingers, laid the receipt upon her chair arm without reading and signed her name with a somewhat painful slowness. Then she leaned back with a sigh of relief and buried her face in her hands. Mr. Royce placed the receipt in his pocketbook and stopped, hesitating. But the maid had opened the door and was awaiting us. Her mistress made no sign; there was no excuse to linger. We turned and followed the maid.

"Miss Holladay seems very ill," said Mr. Royce in a voice somewhat tremulous as she paused before us in the lower hall.

"Yes, sir; ver' ill."

Again the voice! I took advantage of the chance to look at her intently. Her hair was turning gray, certainly; her face was seamed with lines which only care and poverty could have graven there, and yet, beneath it all, I fancied I could detect a faded but living likeness to Hiram Holladay's daughter. I looked again—it was faint, uncertain—perhaps my nerves were overwrought and were deceiving me. For how could such a likeness possibly exist?

"She has a physician, of course?" asked my companion.

"Oh, yes, sir."

"He has advised rest and quiet?"

"Yes, sir."

"When do you leave for the country?"

"Tomorrow or the next day after that, I think, sir."

He turned to the door and then paused, hesitating. He opened his lips to say something more—his anxiety was clamoring for utterance—then he changed his mind and stepped outside as she held the door open.

"Good day," he said, with stern repression. "I wish her a pleasant journey."

The door closed after us, and we went down the steps.

"Jenkinson's the family doctor," he said. "Let's drive around there and find out how ill Miss Holladay really is. I'm worried about her, Lester."

"That's a good idea," I agreed and gave the driver the address. Jenkinson was in his office and received us at once.

"Dr. Jenkinson," began our junior without preamble, "I am John Royce, of Graham & Royce. You know, I suppose, that we are the legal advisers of Miss Frances Holladay."

"Yes," answered Jenkinson. "Glad to meet you, Mr. Royce."

"In consequence we're naturally interested in her welfare and all that concerns her, and I called to ask you for some definite details of her condition."

"Her condition? I don't quite understand."

"We should like to know, doctor, just how ill she is."

(To be Continued.)

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