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**The Holladay Case**

A Mystery Of Two Continents

By **BURTON E. STEVENSON**

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"It is true that I need advice," he was saying as he slowly exhaled a great puff of smoke which he had drawn deep into his lungs. "My name is Martigny—Jasper Martigny—I nodded by way of salutation—and I am from France, as you have doubtless long since suspected. It is my desire to become a citizen of America."

"How long have you been living in America?" I asked.

"Since two months only. It is my intention to establish here a business in wines."

"Well," I explained, "you can take no steps toward naturalization for three years. Then you go before a court and make a declaration of your intentions. Two years later you will get your papers."

"You mean," he hesitated, "that it takes so many years?"

"Five years' actual residence—yes."

"But," and he hesitated again, "I had understood that—that?"

"That it was easier? There are illegal ways, of course, but you can scarcely expect me to advise you concerning them, Mr. Martigny."

"No. Of course, no!" he cried hastily, waving his hand in disclaimer. "I did not know—it makes nothing to me—I will wait—I wish to obey the laws."

He picked up a fresh cigarette, lit it from the other and tossed away the end.

"Will you not try one?" he asked, seeing that my pipe was finished, and I presently found myself enjoying the best cigarette I had ever smoked. "You comprehend French—no?"

"Not well enough to enjoy it," I said.

"I am sorry. I believe you would like this book which I am reading," and he pulled a somewhat tattered volume from his pocket. "I have read it, oh, ver' many times, as well as all the others, though this, of course, is the masterpiece."

He held it so that I could see the title. It was "Monsieur Lecoq."

"I have read it in English," I said.

"And did you not like it—yes? I am ver' fond of stories of detection. That is why I was so absorbed in that affair of Mees—Mees—ah, I have forgotten! Your names are so difficult for me."

"Mees Holladay," I said.

"Ah, yes. And has that mystery ever arrived at a solution?"

"No," I said. "Unfortunately we haven't any M. Lecoqs on our detective force."

"Ah, no," he smiled. "And the young lady—in her I conceived a great interest, even though I did not see her. How is she?"

"The shock was a little too much for her," I said. "She's gone out to her country place to rest. She'll soon be all right again, I hope."

He had taken a third cigarette and was lighting it carelessly with his face half turned away from me. I noticed how flushed his neck was.

"Oh, undoubtedly," he agreed after a moment; "at least I should be most sad to think otherwise. But it is late; I perceive that you are weary; I thank you for your kindness."

"Not at all," I protested. "I hope you'll come in whenever you feel like it."

"...that you say is ver' true," he said. "It shows that you have given to the case much thought. I believe that you also have a fondness for crimes of mystery," and he smiled at me. "Is it not so, Mistr Lester?"

"I had never suspected it," I laughed. "until this case came up, but the microscope seems to have bitten me."

"Ah, yes," he said doubtfully, not quite understanding.

"And I've rather fancied at times," I admitted, "that I should like to take a hand at solving it—though, of course, I never shall. Our connection with the case is ended."

He shot me a quick glance, then lighted another cigarette.

"Suppose it were assigned to you to solve it," he asked, "how would you set about it?"

"I'd try to find the mysterious woman."

"But the police, so I understand, attempted that and failed," he objected. "How could you succeed?"

"Oh, I dare say I shouldn't succeed," I laughed, his air striking me as a little more earnest than the occasion demanded. "I should probably fail, just as the police did."

"In France," he remarked, "it is not in the least expected that men of the law should—"

"Nor is it here," I explained. "Only, of course, a lawyer can't help it sometimes. Some cases demand more or less detective work and are yet too delicate to be intrusted to the police."

"It is also the fault of our police that it is too fond of the newspapers, of posing before the public. It is a fault of human nature, is it not?"

"You speak English so well, Mr. Martigny," I said, "that I have wondered where you learned it."

"I was some years in England—the business of wine—and devoted myself seriously to the study of the language. But I still find it sometimes very difficult to understand you Americans—you speak so much more rapidly than the English and so much less distinctly. You have a way of running your words together, of dropping whole syllables—"

"Yes," I smiled, "and that is the very thing we complain of in the French."

"Oh, our elisions are governed by well defined laws which each one comprehends, while here—"

"Every man is a law unto himself. Remember it is the land of the free!"—

"And the home of the license, is it not?" he added, unconscious of irony.

Yes, I decided, I was very fortunate in gaining Martigny's acquaintance. Of course after he opened his business he would have less time to devote to me, but nevertheless we should have many pleasant evenings together, and I looked forward to them with considerable anticipation. He was interesting in himself—entertaining, with that large tolerance and good humor which I have already mentioned and which was one of the most striking characteristics of the man. And then—shall I admit it?—I was lonely, too, sometimes, as I suppose every bachelor must be, and I welcomed a companion.

It was Monday, the fourteenth day of April, and we had just opened the office, when a clerk hurried in with a message for Mr. Royce.

"There's a man out here who wants to see you at once, sir," he said. "He says his name's Thompson and that he's Miss Frances Holladay's butler."

Our junior half started from his chair in his excitement; then he controlled himself and sank back into it again.

"Show him in," he said, and sat with his eyes on the door, haggard in appearance, pitiful in his eagerness. Not until that moment had I noticed how the past week had aged him and worn him down. His work of course might account for part of it, but not for all. He seemed almost ill.

The door opened in a moment and a gray haired man of about sixty entered. He was fairly gasping for breath and plainly laboring under strong emotion.

"Well, Thompson," demanded Mr. Royce, "what's the trouble now?"

"Trouble enough, sir!" cried the other. "My mistress has been made away with, sir. She left town just ten days ago for Belair, where we were all waiting for her, and nobody has set eyes on her since, sir."

CHAPTER X.

MR. ROYCE grasped the arms of his chair convulsively, and remained for a moment speechless under the shock. Then he swung around toward me.

"Come here, Lester," he said hoarsely. "I needed you once before, and I need you now. This touches me so closely I can't think consecutively. You will help, won't you?"

There was an appeal in his face which showed his sudden weakness—an appeal there was no resisting, even had I not myself been deeply interested in the case.

"Gladly," I answered from the depths of my heart, seeing how overwrought he was. "I'll help to the very limit of my power, Mr. Royce."

He sank back into his chair again and breathed a long sigh.

"I knew you would," he said. "Get the story from Thompson, will you?"

I brought a chair and sat down by the old butler.

"You have been in Mr. Holladay's family a great many years, haven't you, Mr. Thompson?" I asked to give him opportunity to compose himself.

"Yes, a great many years, sir—nearly forty, I should say."

"Before Miss Holladay's birth, then?"

"Oh, yes, sir; long before. Just before his marriage Mr. Holladay bought the Fifth Avenue house he lived in ever since, and I was employed then, sir, as an underservant."

"Mr. Holladay and his wife were very happy together, weren't they?" I questioned.

He was looking at me thoughtfully.

(To be Continued.)

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