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The Holladay Case

A Mystery Of Two Continents

By BURTON E. STEVENSON

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"Oh, it's not the ocean!" I protested, and—what with the moonlight and the soft night and the opportunity—the time and the place and the loved one, all together—would have uttered I know not what folly had she not sprung suddenly forward with a sharp cry of alarm.

"Mr. Royce!" she cried. "Mother!" They stopped and turned toward her just as a heavy spar crashed to the deck before them.

CHAPTER XV.

I UNDERSTOOD in a flash what had happened and sprang up the stairs to the upper deck, determined to have it out with our enemy once for all. I searched it over thoroughly, looking in and under the boats and behind funnels and ventilators, but could discover no sign of any one. When I got back to the promenade a little crowd had gathered, attracted by the noise of the falling spar, which a dozen members of the crew were busy hoisting back into place.

"I do not see how those lashings could have worked loose," said the officer in charge.

I took a look at the lashings. They had not been cut, as I expected to find them, but had been untied. Martigny had doubtless worked at them while we sat there talking.

"Well, luckily, there's no damage done," observed Mr. Royce, with affected lightness, "though it was a close shave. If Miss Kemball hadn't called to us the spar would have struck us."

Mrs. Kemball closed her eyes with a giddy little gesture at the vision the words called up, and the officer frowned in chagrin and perplexity. Just then the captain came up, and the two stepped aside for a consultation in voices so low that only an excited word of French was now and then audible.

I turned to Miss Kemball, who was leaning against the rail with white face and eyes large with terror.

"But it was not an accident, Mr. Lester," she whispered. "I saw a man leaning over the spar."

"I needed. 'I don't doubt it in the

least. But don't tell your mother. It will only alarm her needlessly. We'll talk it over in the morning."

"She said good night and led her mother away toward their stateroom. I went at once in search of the ship's doctor and met him at the foot of the saloon staircase.

"How is Martigny, doctor?" I asked.

"Worse, I fear," he answered hurriedly. "He has just sent for me."

"Which room has he?"

"He's in 375, an outside room on the upper deck."

I went forward to the smoking room and looked over the colored plan of the ship posted there. A moment's inspection of it showed me how easily Martigny had eluded pursuit. He had only to walk twenty feet, open a door and get into bed again.

When I sat down next morning beside Miss Kemball she closed her book and turned to me with a very determined air.

"Of course, Mr. Lester," she began, "if you think any harm can come from telling me, I don't want you to say a word, but I really think I'm entitled to an explanation."

"So do I," I agreed. "You've proved yourself a better guard than I. I'd forgotten all about Martigny. I was thinking—well, of something very different. I had no thought of danger."

"Nor had I," she said quickly. "But I chanced to look up and see that dark figure bending over them, and I cried out, really, before I had time to think."

"It was just that which saved them."

"Yes; but, oh, I could think afterward! I'd only to close my eyes last night to see him there yet, peering down at us, waiting his opportunity. And then, of course, I puzzled more or less over the whole thing."

"You shan't puzzle any more," I said. Then I laid the case before her, step by step. She listened with clasped hands and intent face, not speaking till I had finished. Then she leaned back in her chair with a long sigh.

"Why, it's horrible!" she breathed.

"But you haven't given me your explanation yet, Mr. Lester."

"I haven't any explanation," I said

helplessly. "I've built up half a dozen theories, but they've all been knocked to pieces, one after the other. I don't know what to think, unless Miss Holladay is a victim of hypnotism or dementia of some kind."

"Sometimes she's nice and at other times she's horrid. It recalls 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,' doesn't it?"

"Yes, it does. Only, as I say, such an explanation seems absurd."

"There's one theory which might explain it—part of it. Perhaps it wasn't Miss Holladay at all who returned from Washington square with the new maid. Perhaps it was the other woman, and the barred windows were really to keep Miss Holladay a prisoner."

"But she wasn't there!" I protested. "We saw her when we gave her the money."

"Yes, in a darkened room, with a bandage about her forehead, so hoarse she could scarcely speak."

I stopped a moment to consider. "Remember, that would explain something which admits of no other reasonable explanation," went on my companion—"the barred windows and the behavior of the prisoner."

"It would explain that, certainly," I admitted, though at first thought the theory did not appeal to me. "You believe, then, that Miss Holladay was forcibly abducted?"

"Undoubtedly. If her mind was going to give way at all it would have done so at once and not two weeks after the tragedy."

"But if she had brooded over it," I objected.

"She wasn't brooding—at least she had ceased to brood. You have Mr. Royce's word and the butler's word that she was getting better, brighter—quite like her old self again. Why should she relapse?"

"I don't know," I said helplessly. "That affair last night has upset me so that I can't think clearly. I feel that I was careless—that I wasn't doing my duty."

"I shouldn't worry about it; though, of course," she added a little severely, "you've realized by this time that you alone are to blame for Martigny's presence on the boat."

"But I had to go to the Jourdain's," I protested, "and I couldn't help their going to him. To have asked them not to go would have made them suspect me at once."

"Oh, yes; but at least you needn't have sent them. They might not have gone at all—certainly they wouldn't have gone so promptly—if you hadn't sent them."

"Sent them?" I repeated, and stared at her in amazement, doubting if I had heard aright.

"Yes, sent them," she said again emphatically. "Why do you suppose they

went to the hospital so early the next morning?"

"I suppose they had become suspicious of me."

"Nonsense! What possible reason could they have for becoming suspicious of you? On the contrary, they went after the key to those padlocks on the window shutters. Of course Martigny had it."

For a moment I was too nonplused to speak. I could only stare at her.

"Well, I was a fool, wasn't I?" I demanded finally. "To think that I shouldn't have foreseen that! I was so worked up over my discovery that night that I couldn't think of anything else. Of course, when they asked for the key, the whole story came out."

"I shouldn't blame myself too severely," laughed Miss Kemball as she looked at my rueful countenance. "I myself think it's rather fortunate that he's on the boat."

"Fortunate! You don't mean that?"

"Precisely that. Suppose the Jourdain's hadn't gone to him. He'd have left the hospital anyway in two or three days. He isn't the man to lie inactive when he knew you were searching for the fugitives. He'd have returned then to his apartment next to yours; your landlady would have told him that you had called for Europe, and he had only to examine this boat's passenger list to discover your name."

"But, at any rate," I pointed out, "he would still have been in America. He couldn't have caught us."

"He couldn't have caught you, but a cablegram would have passed you in midocean warning his confederates. If they have time to conceal their prisoner, you'll never find her. Your only hope is in catching them unprepared. And there's another reason—since he's on the boat, you've another opportunity. Why not go and have a talk with him—that battle of wits you were looking forward to?"

"I'd thought of that," I said, "but I'm afraid I couldn't play the part."

"The part?"

"Of seeming not to suspect him. It's too great a risk."

"The advantage would be on your side," she pointed out. "You could tell him so many things which he already knows and which he has no reason to suspect you know he knows. It sounds terribly involved, doesn't it? But you

(To be Continued.)

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