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The Holladay Case

A Mystery Of Two Continents

By BURTON E. STEVENSON

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He did not answer for a moment, and I took advantage of the opportunity to select a second cigarette and light it. I dared not remain unoccupied.

"That," he began slowly at last, "seems to me a most—ah!—deeficult affair, Mistair Lester—to search for three people through all France. There seems little hope of success. Yet I should think it most likely that they have gone to Paris."

I nodded. "That was my own theory," I agreed, "but to find them in Paris seems also impossible."

"Not if one uses the police," he said.

"But, my dear sir," I protested, "I can't use the police. Miss Holladay at least has committed no crime. She has simply chosen to go away without informing us."

"You will permit me to say then, Mistair Lester," he observed, with just a touch or irony, "that I fail to comprehend your anxiety concerning her."

I felt that I had made a misstep; that I had need to go carefully.

"It is not quite so simple as that," I explained. "The last time we saw Miss Holladay she told us that she was ill and intended to go to her country home for a rest. Instead of going there she sailed for France without informing any one—indeed, doing everything she could to escape detection. That conduct seems so eccentric that we feel in duty bound to investigate it; besides, two days before she left she received from us a hundred thousand dollars in cash."

I saw him move uneasily on his bed. After all this advantage of mine was no small one.

"Ah," he said softly, and again, "ah! Yes, that seems peculiar, yet perhaps if you had waited for a letter"—

"Suppose we had waited and there had been no letter—suppose, in consequence of waiting, we should be too late?"

"Too late? Too late for what, Mistair Lester? What is it you fear for her?"

"I don't know," I answered, "but something—something. At least, we could not assume the responsibility of delay."

"No," he agreed, "perhaps not. You are doubtless quite right to investigate. I wish you success. I wish that I myself might aid you, there is so much of interest in the case to me, but I fear that to be impossible."

And he breathed a sigh, which was doubtless genuine enough.

"Will you go to Paris?" I asked.

"Oh, no; not at once. At Havre I shall meet my agent and transact my affairs with him. Then I shall seek some place of quiet along the coast."

"Yes," I said to myself, with leaping heart, "Etretat!" But I dared not speak the word.

"I shall write to you," he added, "when I have settled. Where do you stay at Paris?"

"We haven't decided yet," I said.

"We?" he repeated.

"Didn't I tell you? Mr. Royce, our junior partner, is with me."

"It is no matter where you stay," he said. "I shall write to you at the poste restante. I should like both you and your friend to be my guests before you return to America."

There was a courtesy, a cordiality in his tone which almost disarmed me. Such a finished scoundrel!

"We shall be glad to accept," I answered, knowing in my heart that the invitation would never be made.

I was ready to go. I had accomplished all I could hope to accomplish. If I had not already disarmed his suspicions, I could never do so.

"I am tiring you," I said, starting up.

"No," he protested, "no." But his voice was almost inaudible.

"I will go," I said. "You must pardon me. I hope you will soon be better," and I closed the door behind me with his murmured thanks in my ears.

It was not till after dinner that I found opportunity to relate to Miss Kemball the details of my talk with Martigny.

"Why did you change your mind?" she asked.

"The adventure tempted me. Those are your own words. I thought perhaps I might be able to throw Martigny off the track."

"And do you think you succeeded?"

"I don't know," I answered doubtfully. "He may have seen clear through me."

"Oh, I don't believe him superhuman! I believe you succeeded."

"We shall know tomorrow."

"Yes, and you must keep up the deception till the last moment. Remember, he will be watching you."

"I'll do my best," I said.

"And don't make mountains out of molehills. You see, you've been distrusting yourself needlessly. One mustn't be too timid."

We found our way blocked by a uniformed official.

"Do you think I'm too timid?" I demanded.

But she saw the light in my eyes, I suppose, for she drew away, almost imperiously.

"Only in some things," she retorted.

The evening passed and the last day came. We sighted land soon after breakfast, the high white cliffs of Cape La Hague.

I was standing at the rail beside Miss Kemball.

of our imminent goodby, when she turned to me suddenly.

"Don't forget Martigny," she cautioned. "Wouldn't you better see him again?"

"I thought I'd wait till we landed," I said, "then I can help him off the boat and see him well away from the station. He's too ill to be very lively on his feet."

"Yes, and be careful. He mustn't suspect Etretat. And now we must say goodby."

"Indeed not!" I protested. "See, there go your mother and Royce. They're evidently expecting us to follow. We'll have to help you with your baggage."

"Our baggage goes through to Paris."

"At least, I must take you to the train."

"You are risking everything!" she cried. "We can say goodby here as well as on the platform."

"I don't think so," I said.

"I have already said goodby to all my other friends."

"But I refuse to be treated just like all the others," and I started with her down the gang plank.

She looked at me from the corner of her eyes.

"Do you know," she said deliberately, "I am beginning to fear that you are obstinate."

"I'm not at all obstinate," I objected. "I'm simply contending for my rights."

"Your rights?"

"My right to be with you as long as I can, for one."

"Are there others?"

"Many others. Shall I enumerate them?"

"No," she said, "we haven't time. Here is mother."

They were to take the company's special train to Paris, which was waiting on the wharf 200 feet away, and we slowly pushed our way toward it. In the clamor and hurry and confusion wholly Latin there was no chance for intelligent converse. Suddenly we found our way blocked by a uniformed official, who demanded to see our tickets.

"You can't come any farther, I'm afraid," said Mrs. Kemball, turning to us. "We'll have to say goodby." And she held out her hand. "But we'll soon see you both again in Paris. You have the address?"

"Oh, yes!" I assured her.

"Very well, then, we shall look for you." And she shook hands with both of us.

For an instant I felt another little hand in mine, a pair of blue eyes smiled up at me in a way—

"Goodby, Mr. Lester," said a voice. "I shall be all impatience till we meet again."

"So shall I." And I brightened. "That was nice of you, Miss Kemball."

"Oh, I shall be anxious to hear how you succeeded," she retorted. "You will bring Miss Holladay to us?"

"If we find her, yes."

"Then, again, goodby."

She waved her hand, smiling, and was lost in the crowd.

"Come on, Lester," said Mr. Royce's voice. "There's no use standing staring here."

Suddenly I remembered Martigny.

"I'll be back in a minute," I called, and ran up the gang plank. "Has M. Martigny left the ship yet?" I inquired of the first steward I met.

"Martigny?" he repeated.

"The sick gentleman in 375," I prompted.

"Oh, yes," he said. "I do not know."

"Well, no matter. I'll find out myself."

I mounted to the upper deck and knocked at the door of 375. There was no response. After a moment I tried the door, but it was locked. The window, however, was partly open, and, shading my eyes with my hands, I peered inside. The stateroom was empty.

A kind of panic seized me as I turned away. Had he indeed seen through my artifice? In attempting to blind him had I merely uncovered my own plan, or—and my cheeks burned at the thought—was he so well intrenched that he had no fear of me? Were his plans so well laid that it mattered not to him whither I went or what I did?

I passed a moment of heartrending uncertainty. I saw quite clearly what a little, little chance of success we had. But I shook the feeling off, sought the lower deck and inquired again for Martigny. At last the ship's doctor told me that he had seen the sick man safely to a carriage and had heard him order the driver to proceed to the Hotel Continental.

"And frankly, Mr. Lester," added the doctor, "I am glad to be so well rid of him. It is most fortunate that he did not die on the voyage."

I turned away with a lighter heart. From a dying man there could not be much to fear. So I hunted up Mr. Royce and found him, finally, endeavoring to extract some information from a supercilious official.

(To be Continued.)

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