

The Holladay Case

A Mystery Of Two Continents

By BURTON E. STEVENSON
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CHAPTER I.

THE atmosphere of the office that morning was a shade less genial than usual. We had all of us fought our way down town through such a storm of wind, snow, slush and sleet as is to be found nowhere save in mid-March New York, and our tempers had suffered accordingly. I had found a cab uncomfortable and there was, of course, the inevitable jam on the elevated, with the trains many minutes behind the schedule. I was some half hour late in consequence, and when I entered the office I was surprised to find Mr. Graham, our senior, already at his desk. He nodded good morning a little curtly.

"I wish you'd look over these papers in the Hurd case, Lester," he said, and pushed them toward me.

I took them and sat down, and just then the outer door slammed with a violence extremely unusual.

I had never seen Mr. Royce, our junior, so deeply shaken, so visibly distracted, as he was when he burst in upon us a moment later, a newspaper in his hand. Mr. Graham, startled by the noise of his entrance, wheeled around from his desk and stared at him in astonishment.

"Why, upon my word, John," he began, "you look all done up. What's the matter?"

"Matter enough, sir," and Mr. Royce spread out the paper on the desk before him. "You haven't seen the morning papers, of course. Well, look at that!" and he indicated with a trembling finger the article which occupied the first column of the first page, the place of honor.

I saw our senior's face change as he read the headlines, and he seemed positively horror-stricken as he ran rapidly through the story which followed.

"Why, this is the most remarkable thing I ever read!" he burst out at last. "Remarkable!" cried the other. "Why, it's an outrage, sir! The idea that a gentle, cultured girl like Frances Holladay would deliberately murder her own father, strike him down in cold blood, is too monstrous, too absolutely preposterous, too—too—"

"And he stopped, fairly choked by his emotion. The words brought me upright in my chair. Frances Holladay accused of—Well, no wonder our junior was upset!

But Mr. Graham was reading through the article again more carefully, and while he nodded sympathetically to show that he fully assented to the other's words, a straight, deep line of perplexity, which I had come to recognize, formed between his eyebrows.

"Plainly," he said at last, "the whole case hinges on the evidence of this man Rogers, Holladay's confidential clerk, and from what I know of Rogers I should say that he'd be the last man in the world to make a willful misstatement. He says that Miss Holladay entered her father's office late yesterday afternoon, stayed there ten minutes and then came out hurriedly. A few minutes later Rogers went into the office and found his employer dead. That's the whole case, but it'll be a hard one to break."

"Well, it must be broken!" retorted the other, pulling himself together with a supreme effort. "Of course I'll take the case."

"Of course!"

"Miss Holladay probably sent for me last night, but I was out at Babylon, you know, looking up that witness in the Hurd affair. He'll be all right, and his evidence will give us the case. Our answer in the Brown injunction can wait till tomorrow. That's all, I think."

The chief nodded.

"Yes, I see the inquest is to begin at 10 o'clock. You haven't much time."

"No, I'd like to have a good man with me," and he glanced in my direction. "Can you spare me Lester?"

My heart gave a jump. It was just the question I was hoping he would ask.

"Why, yes, of course," answered the chief readily. "In a case like this, certainly. Let me hear from you in the course of the day."

Mr. Royce nodded as he started for the door.

"I will. We'll find some flaw in that fellow's story, depend upon it. Come on, Lester."

I snatched up pen and paper and followed him to the elevator. In a moment we were in the street. There were cabs in plenty now, disgorging their loads and starting back uptown again. We hailed one, and in another moment were rattling along toward our destination with such speed as the storm permitted. There were many questions surging through my brain to which I should have welcomed an answer. The storm had cut off my paper that morning, and I regretted now that I had not made a more determined effort to get another. A glance at my companion showed me the folly of attempting to secure any information from him, so I contented myself with reviewing what I already knew of the history of the principals.

I knew Hiram W. Holladay, the murdered man, quite well, not only as every New Yorker knew that multitu-

dinal as one of the most successful operators in Wall street, but personally as well, since he had been a client of Graham & Royce for twenty years and more. He was at that time well on toward seventy years of age. I should say, though he carried his years remarkably well. His wife had been long dead, and he had only one child, his daughter Frances, who must have been about twenty-five. She had been born abroad and had spent the first years of her life there with her mother, who had lingered on the Riviera and among the hills of Italy and Switzerland in the hope of regaining a health which had been failing, so I understood, ever since her daughter's birth. She had come home at last, bringing the black-eyed child with her, and within the year was dead.

Holladay's affections from that moment seemed to grow and center about his daughter, who developed into a tall and beautiful girl—too beautiful, as was soon apparent, for our junior partner's peace of mind. He had met her first in a business way, and afterwards socially, and all of us who had eyes could see how he was eating his heart out at the knowledge that she was far beyond his reach, for it was evident that her father deemed her worthy of a brilliant marriage—as indeed she was. I sometimes thought that she held herself at a like value, for though there was about her a constant crowd of suitors none of them seemingly could win an atom of encouragement. She was waiting, I told myself, waiting; and I had even pictured to myself the grim irony of a situation in which our junior might be called upon to arrange her marriage settlements.

The cab stopped with a jolt, and I looked up to see that we had reached the Criminal Courts building. Mr. Royce sprang out, paid the driver and ran up the steps to the door. I after him. He turned down the corridor to the right and entered the room at the end of it, which I recognized as the office of Coroner Goldberg. A considerable crowd had already collected there.

"Has the coroner arrived yet?" my companion asked one of the clerks.

"Yes, sir; he's in his private office."

"Will you take him this card and say that I'd like to see him at once, if possible?"

The clerk hurried away with the card. He was back again in a moment.

"This way, sir," he called.

We followed him across the room and through a door at the farther side.

"Ah, Mr. Royce, glad to see you," cried the coroner as we entered. "We tried to find you last night, but learned that you were out of town, and I was just calling up your office again."

"Miss Holladay asked for me, then?"

"Yes, at once. When we found we couldn't get you, we suggested your senior, but she said she'd wait till you returned."

I could see our junior's face crimson with pleasure.

"You didn't think it necessary to confine her, I trust?" he asked.

"Oh, no. She wasn't disturbed. She spent the night at home—under surveillance."

"That was right. Of course it's simply absurd to suspect her."

Goldberg looked at him curiously.

"I don't know, Mr. Royce," he said slowly. "If the evidence turns out as

"I should like to see Miss Holladay before the examination begins," he said. "Is she present?"

"She's in the next room, yes. You shall see her, certainly, at once. Julius, take Mr. Royce to Miss Holladay," he added to the clerk.

I can see her yet, rising from her chair with face alight, as we entered, and I saw instantly how I had misjudged her. She came a step toward us, holding out her hands impulsively; then, with an effort, controlled herself and clasped them before her.

"Oh, but I'm glad to see you!" she cried in a voice so low I could scarcely hear it. "I've wanted you so much!"

"It was my great misfortune that I could come no sooner," said my chief, his voice trembling a little despite himself. "I—I scarcely expected to see you here with no one—"

"Oh," she interrupted, "there was no one I cared to have. My friends have been very kind—have offered to do anything—but I felt that I wanted to be just alone and think. I should have liked to have my maid, but—"

"She's one of the witnesses, I suppose," explained Mr. Royce. "Well, now that I'm here, I shall stay until I've proved how utterly ridiculous this charge against you is."

She sank back into her chair and looked up at him with dark, appealing eyes.

"You think you can?" she asked.

"Can! Certainly I can! Why, it's too preposterous to stand for a moment! We've only to prove an alibi—to show that you were somewhere else, you know, at the time the crime was committed—and the whole business falls to pieces in an instant. You can do that easily, can't you?"

The color had gone from her cheeks again, and she buried her face in her hands.

"I don't know," she murmured indistinctly. "I must think. Oh, don't let it come to that!"

I was puzzled, confounded. With her good name, her life perhaps, in the balance, she wanted time to think! I could see that my chief was astonished too.

"I'll try to keep it from coming to that, since you wish it," he said slowly. "I'll not be able to call you, then, to testify in your own behalf—and that always hurts—but I hope the case will break down at once. I believe it will. At any rate, don't worry. I want you to rely on me."

She looked up at him again, smiling.

"I shall," she murmured softly. "I'm sure I could desire no better champion!"

Well, plainly, if he won this case he would win something else besides. I think even the policeman in the corner saw it, for he turned away with a discretion rare in policemen and pretended to stare out of the window.

I don't know what my chief would have said. His lips were trembling so he could not speak for the moment, and just then there came a tap at the door, and the coroner's clerk looked in.

"We're ready to begin, sir," he said.

"Very well," cried Mr. Royce. "I'll come at once. Goodbye for the moment, Miss Holladay. I repeat, you may rely on me," and he hastened from the room as confidently as though she had given him the battle. Instead, I told myself, she had bound him hand and foot before casting him down into the arena.

CHAPTER II.

THE outer room was crowded from end to end and the atmosphere reeked with unpleasant dampness. Only behind the little railing before the coroner's desk was there breathing space, and we sank into our seats at the table there with a sigh of relief.

One never realizes how many newspapers there are in New York until one attends an important criminal case—that brings their people out in droves and swarms. The reporters took up most of the space in this small room. Paper and pencils were everywhere in evidence, and in one corner there was a man with a camera stationed, determined, I suppose, to get a photograph of our client should she be called to the stand, since none could be obtained in any other way.

I saw Singleton, the district attorney, come in and sit down near the coroner, and then the jury filed in from their room and took their seats. I examined them, man by man, with some little anxiety, but they all seemed intelligent and fairly well to do. Mr. Royce was looking over their names, and he checked them off carefully as the clerk called the roll. Then he handed the list up to the coroner with a little nod.

"Go ahead," he said. "They're all right I guess—they look all right."

"It's a good jury," replied the coroner as he took the paper. "Better than usual. Are you ready, Mr. Singleton?"

"Yes," said the district attorney. "Oh, wait a minute," he added, and he got up and came down to our table. "You're going to put Miss Holladay on the stand, I suppose—"

"And expose her to all this?" And our junior looked around the room. "Not if I can help it!"

"I don't see how you can help it. An alibi's the only thing that can save her from being bound over."

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it," retorted Mr. Royce. "I think the case against her will soon die of inanition."

"Oh, very well." And Singleton abruptly went back to his desk, biting his mustache thoughtfully. He had made something of a reputation, since his election a year before, as a solver of abstruse criminal problems and had secured a conviction in two or three capital cases which had threatened for a time to buffet the police. He evidently scented something of the same kind here or he would have trusted the case to one of his as-

stants. It might be added that, while his successes had made him immensely popular with the multitude, there had been about one or two of them a hint of unprofessional conduct, which had made his brethren of the bar look rather askance at him.

He nodded to the coroner after a moment, the room was called to order and the first witness summoned.

It was Rogers, the confidential clerk. I knew Rogers, of course; had talked with him often in a business way and had the highest respect for him. He had been with Mr. Holladay much longer than I had been with Graham & Royce and had, as Mr. Graham had pointed out, an unimpeachable reputation.

There were the usual preliminaries—name, age, residence, and so on, Coroner Goldberg asking the questions. He was a really good cross-examiner and soon came to the core of the matter.

"What is the position of your desk in Mr. Holladay's office?" he asked.

"There is an outer office for the clerks; opening from that a smaller room, where my desk is placed. Opening from my room was Mr. Holladay's private office."

"Had Mr. Holladay's office any other door?"

"No, sir."

"Could entrance be had by the windows?"

"The windows open on the street side of the building. We occupy a part of the eighth floor."

"The fire escapes—"

"Are at the back of the building—there are none on the street side—nothing but a sheer wall."

"So that any one entering or leaving the private office must necessarily pass by your desk?"

"Necessarily; yes, sir."

"Could any one pass without your seeing him?"

"No, sir; that would be quite impossible."

The coroner leaned back in his chair. There was one point settled.

"Now, Mr. Rogers," he said, "will you kindly tell us, in your own way and with as much detail as possible, exactly what happened at your office shortly before 5 o'clock yesterday afternoon?"

I could see that Rogers was deeply moved. His face was very white, he moistened his lips nervously from time to time, and his hands grasped convulsively the arms of his chair. Plainly the task before him was far from an agreeable one.

"Well, sir," he began, "we had a very busy day yesterday and were at the office considerably later than usual, but by 5 o'clock we had closed up work for the day, and all the other clerks, with the exception of the office boy, had gone home. I had made some notes from Mr. Holladay's dictation and had returned to my desk to arrange them when the outer door opened, and Mr. Holladay's daughter came in. She asked me whether her father was engaged, and upon my saying no she opened the inner door and entered his office. She remained, I should think, about ten minutes, then she came out again, walked rapidly past without looking at me and, I suppose, left the building. I finished arranging my notes and then entered Mr. Holladay's office to ask if he had any further instructions for me, and I found him lying forward on his desk with a knife sticking in his neck and the blood spurting out. I summoned aid, but he died without regaining consciousness. I should say he was practically dead when I found him."

I felt rather than heard the little stir which ran through the room. There was an indefinable horror in the story and in the conclusion to which it inevitably led.

"Now, let us go back a moment," said the coroner as Rogers stopped and mopped his forehead feverishly. "I want the jury to understand your story thoroughly. Mr. Holladay had been dictating to you?"

"Yes."

"And was quite well?"

"Yes; as well as usual. He'd been suffering with indigestion for some time past."

"Still he was able to attend to business?"

"Oh, yes, sir. There was nothing at all serious in his illness."

"You then left his office and returned to your own. How long had you been there before the outer door opened?"

"Not over five minutes."

"And who was it entered?"

"Miss Frances Holladay, the daughter of my employer."

"You're quite sure? You know her well?"

"Very well. I've known her for many years. She often drove to the office in the evening to take her father home. I supposed that was what she came for yesterday."

"You looked at her attentively?"

Rogers hitched impatiently in his chair.

"I glanced at her as I always do," he said. "I didn't stare."

"But you're quite sure it was Miss Holladay?"

"Absolutely sure, sir. Do you suppose I'd make an assertion like that if I wasn't absolutely sure?"

"No," said the coroner soothingly. "No, I don't suppose any such thing, not for a moment. Mr. Rogers, only I want the jury to see how certain the identification is. Shall I proceed?"

"Go ahead, sir," said Rogers. "I'll try to hold myself together a little better, sir."

"I can see what a strain this is for you," said the coroner kindly, "and I'll spare you as much as I can. Now, after Miss Holladay entered the inner office, how long did she remain there?"

"About ten minutes, I should say. Not longer than that, certainly."

"Did you hear any sound of conversation or any unusual noise of any kind?"

"No, sir. It would have been a very

assistant's office has heavy woods and a double door which completely shut off all sounds from within."

"Miss Holladay then came out?"

"Yes, sir."

"And walked past you?"

"Yes, sir; walked past me rapidly."

"Did you not think that peculiar?"

"Why, sir, she didn't often stop to speak to me. I was busy, and so thought nothing particularly about it."

"Did you notice her face? Did she seem perturbed?"

"No, sir; I didn't notice. I just glanced up and bowed. In fact, I didn't see her face at all, for she had lowered her veil."

"Her veil?" repeated the coroner. "You hadn't mentioned that she wore a veil."

"No, sir; when she came into the office she had lifted it up over her hat brim—you know how women do."

"Yes—so you saw her face distinctly when she entered?"

"Yes, sir."

"But when she went out she had lowered her veil. Was it a heavy one?"

"Why, sir," the witness hesitated, "just an ordinary veil, I should say."

"But still heavy enough to conceal her face?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

The coroner nodded. "Now, Mr. Rogers, how long a time elapsed after

"Is this the knife?" he asked.

the departure of the woman before you went back into the inner office?"

"Not more than three or four minutes. I thought perhaps Mr. Holladay was getting ready to accompany his daughter, and I didn't wish to detain him."

"And you found him, as you say, lying forward across his desk with a knife in his throat and the blood spurting out. Did you recognize the knife?"

"Yes, sir. It was his knife—a knife he kept lying on his desk to sharpen pencils with and erase and so on."

"Sharp, was it?"

"It had one long blade, very sharp, sir."

The coroner picked up a knife that was lying on the desk before him.

"Is this the knife?" he asked.

Rogers looked at it carefully.

"That's the knife, sir," he said, and it was passed to the jury. When they had finished with it, Mr. Royce and I examined it. It was an ordinary one-bladed erasing knife with ivory handle. It was open, the blade being about two inches and a half in length, and, as I soon convinced myself, very sharp indeed.

"Will you describe Mr. Holladay's position?" continued the coroner.

"He was lying forward on the desk, with his arms outstretched and his head to one side."

"And there was a great deal of blood?"

"Oh, a great deal! Some one apparently had attempted to check it, for a little distance away there was a handkerchief soaked in blood."

The coroner picked up a handkerchief and handed it to the witness.

"Is that the handkerchief?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Rogers, after a moment.

"Is it a man's or a woman's handkerchief?"

"Oh, a woman's, undoubtedly!"

The jury examined it, and so did we. It was a small square of fine cambric, with no mark that I could see, soaked through and through with blood—unquestionably a woman's handkerchief. Then Rogers told the rest of the story—how he had summoned aid and informed the police.

"Now, Mr. Rogers," said the coroner, when he had finished, "there is one point more. Has there been anything in your knowledge of Mr. Holladay or his business to suggest the idea of suicide?"

The witness shook his head decidedly.

"Nothing whatever, sir," he said positively. "His business was prospering, he was happy and contented—why, he was planning for a trip abroad with his daughter."

"Let us suppose for a moment," continued Goldberg, "that he did actually stab himself in his daughter's presence. What would you naturally expect her to do?"

"I should expect her to give the alarm—to summon aid," replied Rogers.

"Certainly—unquestionably." And Goldberg nodded to my chief. "I turn the witness over to you, Mr. Royce."

"Now, Mr. Rogers," began our junior impressively, "you know, of course, that this whole case hinges at present on your identification of the woman who, presumably, was in Mr. Holladay's office when he was stabbed. I

want to be very sure of your identification. Will you tell me how you were dressed?"

The witness paused for a moment, thought.

"She wore a dress of very dark red," he said at last, "with some sort of narrow dark trimming—black, possibly. That's all I can tell you about it."

"And the hat?"

"I didn't notice the hat, sir. I only glanced at her."

"But in that glance, Mr. Rogers, did you see nothing unusual, nothing which suggested to your mind that possibly it might not be Miss Holladay?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Some change of demeanor, perhaps, of expression?"

"The witness hesitated.

"I thought she was looking not quite so well as usual," he said slowly. "She seemed a little pale and worried."

"Ah! It was dark in the office, was it not, at 5 o'clock yesterday afternoon?"

"We had turned on the lights half an hour before, sir."

"Is your office well lighted?"

"I have a light over my desk, sir, and there's another on the wall."

"So you could not see your visitor's face with absolute clearness?"

"No, sir, but quite clearly enough to recognize her," he added doggedly.

"Yet you thought her looking pale and worried?"

"Yes, sir; that was my impression."

"And when she asked for Mr. Holladay did she use the words 'my father,' as your evidence would suggest?"

Again the witness hesitated in the effort at recollection.

"No, sir," he answered finally. "The words, I think, were, 'Is Mr. Holladay engaged at present?'"

"Is this Miss Holladay's voice?"

"I could not say, sir," answered the witness, again mopping the perspiration from his forehead. "I have no wish to incriminate Miss Holladay unnecessarily. I'm not sufficiently well acquainted with her voice to swear to it."

"Well, when you answered her question in the negative, did she hesitate before entering the private office?"

"No, sir; she went straight to it."

"Is there any lettering on the door?"

"Oh, yes, the usual lettering, 'Private Office.'"

"So that, even if she were not acquainted with the place, she might still have seen where to go?"

"Yes, sir; I suppose so."

"And you stated, too, I believe, that you could have heard no sound of an altercation in the private office had one occurred?"

"No, sir; I could have heard nothing."

"You have been with Mr. Holladay a long time, I believe, Mr. Rogers?"

"Over thirty years, sir."

"And you are intimately acquainted with his affairs?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, Mr. Rogers, have you ever, in all these years, run across anything—any item of expenditure, any correspondence, anything whatever—which would lead you to think that Mr. Holladay was a victim of blackmail or that he had ever had a liaison with a woman?"

"No, sir," cried the witness. "No, sir! I'm willing to swear that such a thing is not possible. I should inevitably have found it out had it existed."

"That will do for the present," said Mr. Royce. "I shall want to recall the witness, however, sir."

The coroner nodded, and Rogers stepped down, still trembling from the effects of his last outburst. I confess that, for my part, I thought we were very deep in the mire.

The office boy was called next