

# The Holladay Case

## A Mystery Of Two Continents

BURTON E. STEVENSON

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ment."

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"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, Mistrust 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 least 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, "Etréat!" 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, blushing 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 going," 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 dis-

trusting yourself needlessly. One mustn't be too timid."

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

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

"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 goodbye, 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 Etréat. And now we must say goodbye."

"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 goodbye here as well as on the platform."

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

"I have already said goodbye 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 goodbye." 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—

"Goodbye, 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, goodbye."

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 been seen through my artifice? In attempting to blind him had I merely revealed my own plan, or—and my cheeks burned at the thought—had he seen my intention that he had no fear of me? Were his plans so well laid that he mattered not to him whether I went or what I did?

I passed a moment of hesitating uncertainty. I saw quite clearly what a little, little chance of success we had. But I shook the feeling off, went to lower deck and again peered into Martigny's. At last the sick man's door was ajar, and I saw him sitting in 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.

It was, it seemed, a somewhat complicated proceeding to get to Etréat. In half an hour a train would leave for Beuzeville, where we must transfer to another line to Les Iles. There a second transfer would be necessary before we could reach our destination. How long would it take? Our informant shrugged his shoulders with fine nonchalance. It was impossible to say. There had been a heavy storm two days before, which had blown down wires and damaged the little spur of track between Les Iles and the sea.

Amid this jumble of uncertainties one definite fact remained—a train was to leave in half an hour, which we must take. So we hurried back to the boat, and finally were shut into a compartment two minutes before the hour.

Then, in that first moment of inactivity, the fear of Martigny came back upon me. Had he really gone to the hotel? Had he deemed us not worth watching, or had he watched? Was he on the train with us? Was he able to follow?

I looked out cautiously from the window, up and down the platform, but saw no sign of him, and in a moment more we rattled slowly away over the switches.

Continued

He motioned me to a seat.

ment—the need was very sudden, as I have said. I had not time to engage a stateroom."

"That explains it. Well, the doctor told me that you were bed fast."

"Yes; since the voyage began I have not left it."

I watched him as he went through the familiar motion of lighting a second cigarette from the first one. In the half light of the cabin I had not at first perceived how ill he looked.

"But you, Mistrust Lester," he was saying. "How does it occur that you also are going to France? I did not know you contemplated it."

"No," I answered calmly, for I had seen that the question was inevitable, and I even welcomed it, since it gave me opportunity to get my guns going. "No; the last time I saw you I didn't contemplate it, but a good deal has happened since then. Would you care to hear?"

"Oh, how I relished tantalizing him!"

"I should like very exceedingly to hear," he assured me and shifted his position a little so that his face was in the shadow. "The beams of light through the shutter makes my eyes to hurt," he added.

So he mistrusted himself; so he was not finding the part an easy one either! The thought gave me new courage.

"You may remember," I began, "that I told you once that if I ever went to work on the Holladay case I'd try first to find the murderer. I succeeded in doing it the very first day."

"Ah," he breathed. "And after the police had failed! That was, indeed, remarkable. How did you accomplish it?"

"By the merest chance; by great good fortune. I was making a search of the French quarter, house by house, when on Houston street, I came to a restaurant, the Cafe Jourdain. A bottle of superior set Jourdain's tongue to wagging. I pretended I wanted a room. He dropped a word, the merest hint, and in the end I got the whole story. It seems there was not only one woman—there were two."

"Yes?"

"Yes, and a man whose name was Betuny, or Bethune, or something like that. But I didn't pay much attention to him. He doesn't figure in the case. He didn't even go away with the woman. The very day I set out on my search he was picked up on the street somewhere suffering with apoplexy and taken to a hospital, so nearly dead that it was a question whether he would recover. So he's out of it. The Jourdain told me that the women had sailed for France."

"You will pardon me," said my hearer, "but in what way did you make sure that they were the women you desired?"

"By the younger one's resemblance to Miss Holladay," I answered, lying with a glibness which surprised myself. "The Jourdain maintained that a photograph of Miss Holladay was really one of their lodgers."

"Ah, yes," he said. "That was exceedingly clever. I should never have thought of that. That is worthy of M. Lecocq. And so you follow them to France; but surely you have some more definite address than that?"

"No," I said. "It seems rather a wild goose chase, doesn't it? But you could advise me, Mr. Martigny. Where would it be best for me to search for them?"

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!—difficult affair, Mistrust 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, Mistrust Lester," he observed, with just a touch of irony, "that I fail to comprehend your anxiety concerning her."

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

she answered calmly. "It will be easier in France than in New York."

My hands were trembling at the thought of it. If we should really be too late!

"But I don't believe they'll go to such extremes, Mr. Lester," continued my companion. "I believe you're going to find her and solve the mystery. My theory doesn't solve it, you know; it only makes it deeper. The mystery, after all, is: Who are these people? Why did they kill Mr. Holladay? Why have they abducted his daughter? What is their plot?"

"Yes," I assented. And again I had a moment of confused perplexity.

"But after you find her," she asked, "what will you do with her?"

"Do with her? Why, take her home, of course."

"But she'll very probably be broken down, perhaps even on the verge of hysteria. You must bring her to us at Paris, Mr. Lester."

I saw the wisdom of her words.

"That's very kind of you," I said. "I am sure Mr. Royce will agree. But we have first to find her."

I was glad for my own sake too. The parting of tomorrow would not, then, be a final one.

She left me presently, and for an hour or more I sat there and looked, in every aspect, at the theory she had suggested. Certainly there was nothing to disprove it, and yet, as she had said, it merely served to deepen the mystery. Who were these people, I asked myself again, who dared to play so bold and desperate a game? The illegitimate daughter might, of course, impersonate Miss Holladay, but who was the elder woman—her mother? Then the liaison must have taken place in France—her descent was not to be mistaken—but in France Mr. Holladay had been always with his wife. Besides, the younger woman spoke English perfectly. True, she had said only a few words—the hoarseness might have been affected to conceal a difference in voice—but how explain the elder woman's resemblance to Hiram Holladay's daughter? Could they both be illegitimate? But that was nonsense, for Mrs. Holladay had taken her into her life, had loved her—

And Martigny? Who was he? What was his connection with these women? That the crime had been carefully planned I could not doubt, and it had been carried out with surprising skill.

Doubtless it was Martigny who had arranged the plot, who had managed its development. And with what motive? He had not feared to be present at the inquest or even to approach me and discuss the case with me. I tried to recall the details of our talk. Impatient that I had paid so little heed to it, he had asked, I remembered, what would happen to Frances Holladay if she were found guilty. He had been anxious, then, to save her life—had yes—I saw it now—he had written the note which did save her; he had run the risk of discovery to get her free!

But why?

If I only had a clew—one thread to follow! One ray of light would be enough. Then I could see my way out of this hopeless tangle. I should know how to strike. But to stumble blindly onward in the dark—that might do more harm than good.

Yes, and there was another thing for me to guard against. What was to prevent him the moment he stepped ashore wiring to his confederates, warning them, telling them to flee? Or he might wait, watching us, until he saw that they were really in danger. In either event they must easily escape. Miss Kemball had been right when she pointed out that our only hope was in catching them unprepared.

The impulse was too strong to be resisted. In a moment I was on my feet. But, no! To surprise him would be to make him suspect. I called a steward.

"Take this card up to M. Martigny," I said, "in 375, and ask if he is well enough to see me."

As he hurried away a sudden doubt seized me. Horrified at my hardness I opened my mouth to call him back. But I did not call. Instead I sank back into my chair and stared out across the water.

"M. Martigny," said the steward's voice at my elbow, "answers that he will be most pleased to see M. Lester at once."

CHAPTER XVI.

MARTIGNY was lying back in his berth smoking a cigarette, and as I entered he motioned me to a seat on the locker.

"It was most kind of you to come," he said, with his old smile.

"It was only by accident I learned you were on board," I explained as I sat down. "You're getting better?"

"I believe so; though this physician is—what you call—an armistist. Most of them are, indeed. The more desperate the illness the more renowned the cure! Is it not so? He has even forbidden me cigarettes, but I prefer to die than to do without them. Will you not have one?"

"Thank you," I said, selected one and lit it. "Your cigarettes are not to be resisted. But if you are so ill—why

attempt the voyage?"

"A sudden call of business," he explained. "Unexpected, but what you call imperative."

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