

The Holladay Case

A Mystery Of Two Continents

By BURTON E. STEVENSON
Copyright, 1905, by Henry Holt and Company

CHAPTER VI.

I WAS quite dazed for the moment. "A crowd of them in my room!" I repeated. "A crowd of whom, Mrs. Fitch?"

"A crowd of reporters! They've been worrying my life out. They seemed to think I had hid somewhere. I hope you're not in trouble, Mr. Lester?"

"Not the least in the world, my dear madam," I laughed. And I breathed a long sigh of relief, for I had feared I knew not what disaster. "I'll soon finish with the reporters." And I went on up the stair.

Long before I reached my rooms I heard the clatter of voices and caught the odor of various qualities of tobacco. They were loitering about over the furniture, telling stories, I suppose, and they greeted me with a cheer when I entered. They were such jovial fellows that it was quite impossible to feel angry with them. And, besides, I knew that they were gentlemen; that they labored early and late at meager salaries for the pure love of the work; that they were quick to scent fraud or trickery or unworthiness and inexorable in exposing it; that they loved to do good anonymously, remaining a few behind the scenes, so I returned their greeting smilingly and sat me down in a chair which one of them obligingly vacated for me.

"Well?" I began, looking about at them.

"My dear Mr. Lester," said the one who had given me the chair, "permit me to introduce myself as Rankin of the Planet. These gentlemen—and he included them in a wide gesture—"are my colleagues of the press. We've been anxiously awaiting you here in order that we may propound to you certain questions."

"All right; fire away," I said.

"First, we'd like to have your theory of the crime. Your work this afternoon convinced us that you know how to put two and two together, which is more than can be said for the ordinary mortal. The public will want to know your theory—the great public."

"Oh, but I haven't any theory," I protested. "Besides, I don't think the great public is especially interested in me. You see, gentlemen, I'm quite out of the case. When we cleared Miss Holladay our case then with it ended."

"But is Miss Holladay cleared?" he persisted. "Is it not quite conceivable that in those two hours she was absent

enough. Where did he take you?"

"To the Studio—Sixth avenue."

"Of course!" he cried, slapping his leg. "We might have known. Boys, we'd better go back to Podunk."

"Well, at least, Mr. Lester," spoke up another, "you oughtn't to give Godfrey a scoop."

"But I didn't give him a scoop. I didn't even know who he was."

"Didn't you tell him what was in the note?"

"Not a word of it. I told him only one thing."

"And what was that?"

"That the person who wrote the note didn't know that Rogers was color blind. You are welcome to that statement too. You see, I'm treating you all alike."

They stood about me staring down at me, silent with astonishment.

"But," I added, "I think Godfrey suspects what was in the note."

"Why?"

"Well, his theory fits it pretty closely."

"His theory! What is his theory, Mr. Lester?"

"Oh, come," I laughed. "That's telling. It's a good theory too."

They looked at each other, and, I fancied, gasped their teeth.

"He seems a pretty clever fellow," I added, just to pile up the agony. "I fancy you'll say so, too, when you see his theory in tomorrow's paper."

"Clever!" cried Rankin. "Why, he's a very fiend of cleverness when it comes to a case of this kind. We're not in the same class with him. He's a fancy fellow—just the Record kind. You're sure you didn't tell him anything else, Mr. Lester?" he added anxiously. "Godfrey's capable of getting a story out of a fence post."

"No, I'm quite sure I didn't tell him anything else. I only listened to his theory with great interest."

"And assented to it?"

"I said I thought it plausible."

An electric shock seemed to run around the room.

"That's it!" cried Rankin. "That's what he wanted. Now, it isn't his theory any more. It's yours. Oh, I can see his headlines! Won't you tell us what it was?"

"Now, frankly, Mr. Rankin," I asked, "if you were in my place would you tell?"

He hesitated for a moment and then held out his hand.

"No," he said as I took it. "I shouldn't. Shake hands, sir; you're all right. Come on, boys; we might as well be going."

They filed out after him, and I heard them go singing up the street. Then I sank back into my chair and thought again of Godfrey's theory. It seemed to fit the case precisely, point by point—even—and I started at the thought—to Miss Holladay's reticence as to her whereabouts the afternoon before. The whole mystery lay plain before me. In some way she had discovered the existence of her half sister, had secured her address; she had gone to visit her and had found her away from home—it was probable, even, that the half sister had written her, asking her to come—though, in that case, why had she not remained at home to receive her? At any rate, Miss Holladay had awaited her return, had noticed her agitation; had, perhaps, even seen certain marks of blood upon her. The news of her father's death had pointed all too clearly to what that agitation and those blood spots meant. She had remained silent that she might not betray her father's name, and also, perhaps, that she might protect the other woman. I felt that I held in my hand the key to the whole problem.

Point by point—but what a snarl it was! That there would be a vigorous search for the other woman I could not doubt, but she had a long start and should easily escape. Yet perhaps she had not started. She must have remained in town, else how could that note have been sent to us? She had remained, then—but why? That she should feel any affection for Frances Holladay seemed absurd, and yet how else explain the note?

I felt that I was getting tangled up in the snarl again. There seemed no limit to its intricacies; so, in very despair, I put the matter from me as completely as I could and went to bed.



They greeted me with a cheer when I entered.

from her carriage she may have changed her gown, gone to her father's office, and then changed back again? In that case, would she not naturally have chosen a green gown, since she never wore green?"

"Oh, nonsense!" I cried. "That's puerile. Either she would disguise herself effectually or not at all. I suppose if you were going to commit a capital crime you would merely put on a high hat because you never wear one! I'll tell you this much: I'm morally certain that Miss Holladay is quite innocent; so, I believe, is the district attorney."

"But how about the note, Mr. Lester? What did it contain?"

"Oh, I can't tell you that, you know. It's none of my business."

"But you ought to treat us all alike," he protested.

"I do treat you all alike."

"But didn't Godfrey get it out of you?"

"Godfrey?" I repeated. "Get it out of me?"

He stared at me in astonishment.

"Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Lester," he questioned, "that you haven't been spending the evening with Jim Godfrey of the Record?"

"Then, in a flash, I understood, and as I looked at the rueful faces of the men gathered about me I laughed until the tears came.

"So it was you," I gasped, "who chased us up Broadway?"

He nodded.

"Yes, but our horses weren't good

endeavor to find the guilty woman.

Now that the police knew in which quarter to spread their net, I had little doubt that she would soon be found, since she had tempted Providence by remaining in town.

Mr. Graham and Mr. Royce were looking through the Record article when I reached the office, and I explained to them how the alleged interview had been secured. They laughed together in appreciation of Godfrey's audacious enterprise.

"It seems a pretty strong theory," said our senior. "I'm inclined to believe it myself."

I pointed out how it explained Miss Holladay's reticence—her refusal to assist us in proving an alibi. Mr. Royce nodded.

"Precisely. As Godfrey said, the theory touches every point of the case. According to the old police axiom, that proves it's the right one."

CHAPTER VII.

THE body of Hiram Holladay was placed beside that of his wife in his granite mausoleum at Woodlawn on the Sunday following his death. Two days later his will, which had been drawn up by Mr. Graham and deposited in the office safe, was read and duly admitted to probate. As was expected, he had left all his property, without condition or reserve, to his daughter Frances. There were a few bequests to old servants, Rogers receiving a handsome legacy; about half a million was given to various charities in which he had been interested during his life, and the remainder was placed at the absolute disposal of his daughter.

We found that his fortune had been overestimated, as is usually the case with men whose wealth depends upon the fluctuations of the Street, but there still remained something over four millions for the girl—a pretty dowry. She told us at once that she wished to leave her affairs in our hands and in financial matters would be guided entirely by our advice. Most of this business was conducted by our junior, and, while, of course, he told me nothing, it was evident that Miss Holladay's kindly feelings toward him had suffered no diminution. The whole office was more or less conversant with the affair and wished him success and happiness.

So a week or ten days passed. The utmost endeavor of newspapers and police had shed no new light on the tragedy, and for the great public it had passed into the background of the forgotten, but for me, at least, it remained of undiminished interest, and more than once I carefully reviewed its features to convince myself anew that our theory was the right one. Only one point occurred to me which would tend to prove it untrue—if there was an illegitimate daughter, the blow she had dealt her father would be the heavier; so she had acted in her own despite—Still, Godfrey's theory of sudden passion might explain this away. And then again Miss Holladay could probably be counted upon, her first grief past, to provide suitably for her sister. Granting this, the theory seemed to me quite impregnable.

One other thing puzzled me—how had this woman eluded the police? I knew that the French quarter had been ransacked for traces of her, wholly without success, and yet I felt that the search must have been misconducted, else some trace of her would surely have been discovered. Miss Holladay, of course, rigidly refused herself to all inquirers, and here again I found myself on the horns of a dilemma. Doubtless she was very far from wishing the discovery of the guilty woman, and yet I felt that she must be discovered, if only for Miss Holladay's sake, in order to clear away the last vestige of the cloud that shadowed her.

Then came new developments with a startling rapidity. It was toward quitting time one afternoon that a clerk brought word into the inner office that there was a woman without who wished to see Mr. Royce at once. She had given no name, but our junior, who happened to be at leisure for the moment, directed that she be shown in. I recognized her in an instant, and so did he—it was Miss Holladay's maid. I saw, too, that her eyes were red with weeping, and as she sat down beside our junior's desk she began to cry afresh.

"Why, what's the matter?" he demanded. "Nothing wrong with your mistress?"

"She ain't my mistress any more," sobbed the girl. "She discharged me this afternoon."

"Discharged you?" echoed our junior. "Why, I thought she thought so much of you?"

"And so did I, sir, but she discharged me just the same."

"But what for?" persisted the other. "That's just what I don't know, sir. I begged and prayed her to tell me, but she wouldn't even see me. So I came down here. I thought maybe you could help me."

"Well, let me hear about it just as it happened," said Mr. Royce soothingly. "Perhaps I can help you."

"Oh, if you could, sir," she cried. "You know, I thought the world and all of Miss Frances. I've been with her nearly eight years, and for her to go and treat me like this—why, it just breaks my heart, sir! I dressed her this afternoon about 2 o'clock, and she was as nice to me as ever—gave me a little brooch, sir; that she was tired of. Then she went out for a drive, and about an hour ago came back. I went right up to her room to undress her, and when I knocked, sir, a strange woman came to the door and said that Miss Frances had engaged her for her maid and wouldn't need me any more, and here was a month's wages. And while I stood there, sir,

too dazed to move, she shut the door in my face. After I'd got over it a bit, I begged that I might see Miss Frances, if only to say goodby, but she wouldn't see me. She sent word that she wasn't feeling well and wouldn't be disturbed."

Her sobs mastered her again and she stopped. I could see the look of amazement on our junior's face, and did not wonder at it. What sudden dislike could her mistress have conceived against this inoffensive and devoted creature?

"You say this other maid was a stranger?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; she'd never been in the house before, so far as I know. Miss Frances brought her back with her in the carriage."

"And what sort of looking woman is she?"

The girl hesitated.

"She looked like a foreigner, sir," she said at last. "A Frenchwoman, maybe, by the way she rolls her r's."

I pricked up my ears. The same thought occurred at that instant to both Mr. Royce and myself.

"Does she resemble Miss Holladay?" he asked quickly.

"Miss Holladay? Oh, no, sir. She's much older—her hair's quite gray."

Well, certainly, Miss Holladay had the right to choose any maid she pleased and to discharge any or all of her servants; and yet it seemed strangely unlike her to show such seeming injustice to any one.

"You say she sent down word that she was ill?" said Mr. Royce at last. "Was she ill when you dressed her?"

"Why, sir," she answered slowly, "I wouldn't exactly say she was ill, but she seemed troubled about something. I think she'd been crying. She's been crying a good deal, off and on, since her father died, poor thing," she added.

That would explain it, certainly, and yet grief for her father might not be the only cause of Frances Holladay's tears.

"But she didn't seem vexed with you?"

"Oh, no, sir; she gave me a brooch, as I told you."

"I fear I can't promise you anything," said Mr. Royce slowly, after a moment's thought. "Of course it's none of my business, for Miss Holladay must arrange her household to suit herself; yet, if you don't get back with your old mistress, I may perhaps be able to find you a position somewhere else. Suppose you come back in three or four days, and I'll see what I can do."

"All right, sir, and thank you," she said, and left the office.

I had some work of my own to keep me busy that night, so devoted no thought to Frances Holladay and her affairs, but they were recalled to me with renewed force next morning.

"Did you get Miss Holladay's signature to that conveyance?" Mr. Graham asked me as he came in.

"No, sir," answered Mr. Royce, with just a trace of embarrassment. "I called at the house last night, but she sent down word that she was too ill to see me or to transact any business."

"Nothing serious, I hope?" asked the other quickly.

"No, sir. I think not. Just a trace of nervousness, probably."

But when he called again at the house that evening he received a similar message, supplemented with the news imparted by the butler, a servant of many years' standing in the family, that Miss Holladay had suddenly decided to leave the city and open her country place on Long Island. It was only the end of March, and so a full two months and more ahead of the season. But she was feeling very ill, was not able to leave her room, indeed, and believed the fresh air and quiet of the country would do more than anything else to restore her shattered nerves. So the whole household, with the exception of her maid, a cook, house girl and underbutler, were to leave the city next day in order to get the country house ready at once.

"I don't wonder she needs a little toning up," remarked our chief sympathetically. "She has gone through a nerve trying ordeal, especially for a girl reared as she has been. Two or three months of quiet will do her good. When does she expect to leave?"

"In about a week, I think. The time hasn't been definitely set. It will depend upon how the arrangements go forward. It won't be necessary, will it, to bother her with any details of business? That conveyance, for instance—"

"Can wait till she gets back. No, we won't bother her at all."

But it seemed that she had either improved or changed her mind, for two days later a note, which her maid had written for her, came to Mr. Graham asking him to call upon her in the course of the next twenty-four hours, as she wished to talk over some matters of business with him. It struck me as singular that she should ask for Mr. Graham, but our senior called a cab and started off at once without comment. An hour later the door opened and he entered the office with a most peculiar expression of countenance.

"Well, that beats me!" he exclaimed as he dropped into his chair.

Our junior wheeled around toward him without speaking, but his anxiety was plain enough.

"To think that a girl as level headed as Frances Holladay has always been should suddenly develop such whimsicalities. Yet, I couldn't but admire her grasp of things. Here have I been thinking she didn't know anything about her business and didn't care, but she seems to have kept her eyes open."

"Well?" asked Mr. Royce as the other paused.

"Well, she started out by reminding me that her property had been left to her absolutely, to do as she pleased with, a point which I, of course, con-

ceded. She then went on to say that she knew of a number of bequests her father had intended to make before his death, and which he would have made if he had not been cut off so suddenly; that the bequests were of such a nature that he did not wish his name to appear in them, and that she was going to undertake to carry them out anonymously."

"Well?" asked our junior again.

"Well," said Mr. Graham slowly, "she asked me to dispose of once of such of her securities as I thought best in order that I might place in her hands by tomorrow night \$100,000 in cash—a cool hundred thousand!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"A HUNDRED thousand dollars!" ejaculated Mr. Royce, and sat staring at his chief.

"A hundred thousand dollars! That's a good deal for a girl to give away in a lump, but she can afford it. Of course we've nothing to do but carry out her instructions. I think both of us can guess what she intends doing with the money."

The other nodded. I believed that I could guess too. The money, of course, was intended for the other woman. She was not to suffer for her crime after all. Miss Holladay seemed to me in no little danger of becoming an accessory after the fact.

"She seems really ill," continued our senior. "She looks thinner and quite careworn. I commended her resolution to seek rest and quiet and change of scene."

"When does she go, sir?" asked Mr. Royce in a subdued voice.

"The day after tomorrow, I think. She did not say definitely. In fact, she could talk very little. She's managed to catch cold—the grip, I suppose—and was very hoarse. It would have been cruelty to make her talk, and I didn't try."

He wheeled around to his desk and then suddenly back again.

"By the way," he said, "I saw the new maid. I can't say I wholly approve of her."

He paused a minute, weighing his words.

"She seems careful and devoted," he went on at last, "but I don't like her eyes. They're too intense. I caught her two or three times watching me strangely. I can't imagine where Miss Holladay picked her up, or why she should have picked her up at all. She's French, of course. She speaks with a decided accent. About the money, I suppose we'd better sell a block of U. P. bonds. They're the least productive of her securities."

"Yes, I suppose so," agreed Mr. Royce, and the chief called up a broker and gave the necessary orders. Then he turned to other work, and the day passed without any further reference to Miss Holladay or her affairs.

Afternoon, a small packet neatly sealed and docketed—100 thousand dollar bills Mr. Graham turned it over in his hand thoughtfully.

"You'll take it to the house, of course, John," he said to his partner. "Lester'd better go with you."

So Mr. Royce placed the package in his pocket, a cab was summoned, and we were off. The trip was made without incident, and at the end of half an hour we drew up before the Holladay mansion.

It was one of the old style brown stone fronts which lined both sides of the avenue twenty years ago. It was no longer in the ultra fashionable quarter, which had moved up toward Central park, and shops of various kinds were beginning to encroach upon the neighborhood, but it had been Hiram Holladay's home for forty years, and he had never been willing to part with it. At this moment all the blinds were down and the house had a deserted look. We mounted the steps to the door, which was opened at once to our ring by a woman whom I knew instinctively to be the new maid, though she looked much less like a maid than like an elderly working woman of the middle class.

"We've brought the money Miss Holladay asked Mr. Graham for yesterday," said Mr. Royce. "I'm John Royce, his partner. And without answering the woman motioned us in. "Of course we must have a receipt for it," he added. "I have it ready here, and she need only attach her signature."

"Miss Holladay is too ill to see you, sir," said the maid, with careful enunciation. "I will myself the paper take to her and get her signature."

Mr. Royce hesitated a moment in perplexity. As for me, I was ransacking my memory. Where had I heard that voice before? Somewhere, I was certain—a voice low, vibrant, repressed, full of color. Then, with a start, I remembered. It was Miss Holladay's voice as she had risen to welcome our junior that morning at the coroner's court. I shook myself together, for that was nonsense.

"I fear that won't do," said Mr. Royce at last. "The sum is a considerable one and must be given to Miss Holladay by me personally in the presence of this witness."

It was the maid's turn to hesitate. I saw her lips tighten ominously.

"Very well, sir," she said. "But I warn you she is most nervous, and it has been forbidden her to talk."

"She will not be called upon to talk," retorted Mr. Royce curtly, and without answering the woman turned and led the way up the stair and to her mistress's room.

Miss Holladay was lying back in a great chair with a bandage about her head, and even in the half light I could see how changed she was. She seemed much thinner and older and coughed occasionally in a way that frightened me. Not grief alone, I told myself, it could have caused this breakdown; it was the secret weighing upon her. My



"I have brought the money you ask for," companion noted the change, too, of course—a greater change perhaps than my eyes could perceive—and I saw how moved and shocked he was.

"My dear Miss Holladay," he began, but she stopped him abruptly with a little imperative motion of the hand. "Pray do not," she whispered hoarsely. "Pray do not."

He stopped and pulled himself together. When he spoke again it was in quite a different tone.

"I have brought the money you asked for," and he handed her the package. "Thank you," she murmured. "Will you verify the amount?"

"Oh, no; that is not necessary."

"I have a receipt here," and he produced it and his fountain pen. "Please sign it."

She took the pen with trembling fingers, laid the receipt upon her chair arm without reading and signed her name with a somewhat painful slowness. Then she leaned back with a sigh of relief and buried her face in her hands. Mr. Royce placed the receipt in his pocketbook and stopped, hesitating. But the maid had opened the door and was awaiting us. Her mistress made no sign; there was no excuse to linger. We turned and followed the maid.

"Miss Holladay seems very ill," said Mr. Royce in a voice somewhat tremulous as she paused before us in the lower hall.

"Yes, sir; ver' ill."

Again the voice! I took advantage of the chance to look at her intently. Her hair was turning gray, certainly; her face was seamed with lines which only care and poverty could have living likeness to Hiram Holladay's daughter. I looked again—it was faint, uncertain—perhaps my nerves were overwrought and were deceiving me. For how could such a likeness possibly exist?

"She has a physician, of course?" asked my companion.

"Oh, yes, sir."

"He has advised rest and quiet?"

"Yes, sir."

"When do you leave for the country?"

"Tomorrow or the next day after that, I think, sir."

He turned to the door and then paused, hesitating. He opened his lips to say something more—his anxiety was clamoring for utterance—then he changed his mind and stepped outside as she held the door open.

"Good day," he said, with stern repression. "I wish her a pleasant journey."

The door closed after us, and we went down the steps.

"Jenkinson's the family doctor," he said. "Let's drive around there and find out how ill Miss Holladay really is. I'm worried about her, Lester."

"That's a good idea," I agreed and gave the driver the address. Jenkinson was in his office and received us at once.

"Dr. Jenkinson," began our junior without preamble, "I am John Royce, of Graham & Royce. You know, I suppose, that we are the legal advisers of Miss Frances Holladay."

"Yes," answered Jenkinson. "Glad to meet you, Mr. Royce."

"In consequence we're naturally interested in her welfare and all that concerns her, and I called to ask you for some definite details of her condition."

"Her condition? I don't quite understand."

"We should like to know, doctor, just how ill she is."

"Ill!" repeated Jenkinson, in evident surprise. "But is she ill?"

"She's your patient, isn't she? I thought you were the family doctor?"

"So I am," assented the other, "but I haven't seen Miss Holladay for ten days or two weeks. At that time she seemed quite well—a little nervous, perhaps, and worried, but certainly not requiring medical attention. She has always been unusually robust."

Mr. Royce stopped, perplexed. As for me, my head was in a whirl again.

"I'll tell you the story," he said at last. "I should like the benefit of your advice." And he recounted rapidly the facts of Miss Holladay's illness, in so far as he knew them, ending with an account of our recent visit and the statement of the maid that her mistress was under a doctor's care. Jenkinson heard him to the end without interrupting, but he was plainly puzzled and annoyed.

"And you say she looked very ill?" he asked.

"Oh, very ill, sir; alarmingly ill, to