

The Holladay Case

A Mystery
Of Two
Continents

By
BURTON E. STEVENSON

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(CONTINUED.)

"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 unusual noise to be audible. Mr. Holladay's office has heavy walls 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

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 cutting 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?"

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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, but added nothing to the story. He had gone to the chute to mail some letters. The woman must have entered the office while he was away. He saw her come out again, but, of course, did not see her face. He had been employed recently and did not know Miss Holladay.

Then the physicians who had attended the dead man were called and testified that the knife blade had penetrated the left carotid artery and that he had bled to death—was dead, indeed, before they reached him. It would take perhaps ten minutes to produce such an effusion of blood as Rogers had noticed, certainly more than five minutes, so that the blow must have been struck before the woman left the inner office.

The policeman who had responded to the alarm testified that he had examined the windows and that they were both bolted on the inside, precluding the possibility of any one swinging down from above or clambering up from below. Nothing in the office had been disturbed. There was other evidence of an immaterial nature, and then Miss Holladay's maid was called.

"Was your mistress away from home yesterday afternoon?" asked the coroner.

"Yes, sir. She had the carriage ordered for 3 o'clock. She was driven away shortly after that."

"And what time did she return?"

"About 6, sir. Just in time to dress for dinner."

"Did you notice anything unusual in her demeanor when she returned?"

The maid hesitated, fearing doubtless that she might say too much.

"Miss Holladay had complained of a headache in the morning," she said, after a moment. "She was looking bad when she went out, and the drive made her worse instead of better. She seemed very nervous and ill. I advised her to lie down and not dress for dinner, but she would not listen. She always dined with her father and did not wish to disappoint him. She was in a great hurry, fearing that he'd get back before she was ready."

"There's no doubt in your mind that she was really expecting him?"

"Oh, no, sir! She even went to the door to look for him when he did not come. She seemed very uneasy about him."

That was one point in our favor certainly.

"And when the news of her father's death reached her how did she bear it?"

"She didn't bear it at all, sir," answered the maid, catching her breath to choke back a sob. "She fainted dead away. Afterward she seemed to be in a kind of daze till the doctor came."

"That is all. Have you any questions to ask the witness, Mr. Royce?"

"Only one," said my chief, leaning forward. "I knew what it was and held my breath, wondering whether it were wise to ask it. 'Do you remember the gown your mistress wore yesterday afternoon?'" he questioned.

"Oh, yes, sir!" And the witness brightened. "It was a dark red broadcloth, made very plain, with only a little narrow black braid for trimming."

CHAPTER III.

FROM the breathless silence that followed her answer she saw that she had somehow dealt her mistress a heavy blow, and the sobs burst out beyond control, choking her. I could see how my chief's face turned livid. He had driven another rivet in the chain—just the one it needed to hold it firmly together. My head was whirling. Could it be possible,

after all, that this gentle, cultured girl was really such a fiend at heart that she could strike down—I put the thought from me. It was monstrous, unbelievable!

The coroner and the district attorney were whispering together, and I saw the former glance from the blood-stained handkerchief on the desk before him to the sobbing woman on the stand. It needed only that—her identification of that square of cambric—to complete the evidence. He hesitated a moment, said another word or two to Singleton, then straightened up again in his chair. Perhaps he thought the chain was strong enough; perhaps he saw only that the witness was in no condition to go on.

"Anything further, Mr. Royce?" he asked.

"Not at present, sir," answered our junior hoarsely. I think he was just beginning fully to realize how desperate our case was.

"We will dismiss the witness, then, temporarily," said the coroner. "We shall probably recall her later on."

The maid was led back to the witness room on the verge of hysteria, and Goldberg looked over the papers on his desk.

"We have one more witness," he said at last, "Miss Holladay's coachman, and perhaps a little testimony in rebuttal. If you wish to adjourn for lunch, Mr. Royce, I'm quite ready to do so."

"Thank you, sir," said my chief, welcoming an opportunity to pull himself together and prepare a plan of defense. "I do wish it."

"Very well, then. We'll adjourn till 2 o'clock," and he pushed back his chair.

"May I have one word with you, sir?" asked Mr. Royce.

"Certainly."

"I should like to see Miss Holladay a few moments in private. We wish, of course, to arrange our rebuttal."

The coroner looked at him for a moment with eyes in which just a tinge of curiosity flickered.

"I'll be very glad to allow you to see her in private," he answered readily. "I regret greatly that we couldn't find you last night, so that you could have opportunity to prepare for this hearing. I feel that in a way we haven't been quite fair to you, though I don't see how delay could have altered matters, and in a case of this kind prompt action is important. I had no intention of placing Miss Holladay on the witness stand, so I thought it best to proceed at once with the inquest. You must admit, sir, that as the case stands there's only one course open to me."

"I fear so," assented the other sadly. "It's a most incomprehensible case. The chain of evidence seems absolutely complete, and yet I'm convinced—as every sane man must be—that there is in it some fatal flaw, which, once discovered, will send the whole structure tottering. It must be my business to find that flaw."

"Strange things happen in this world, Mr. Royce," observed Singleton, with a philosophy born of experience.

"The impossible never happens, sir!" retorted our junior. "I hope to show you that this belongs in that category."

"Well, I hope you will," said the district attorney. "I'd be glad to find that some one else is guilty."

"I'll do my best." And Mr. Royce turned to me. "Lester, you'd better go and get some lunch. You look quite done up."

"Shall I bring you something?" I asked. "Or, better still, have a meal ready for you in half an hour? Rotin's is just around the corner."

He would have refused, I think, had not the coroner interfered.

"You'd better go, Mr. Royce," he said. "You're looking done up yourself. Perhaps you can persuade Miss Holladay to eat something. I'm sure she needs it."

"Very well, then. Have two meals ready in half an hour, Lester," he said, "and a lunch we can bring back with us. I'll go to Miss Holladay now and then go direct to Rotin's."

He hurried away after the coroner, and I walked slowly over to Rotin's to give the necessary orders. I chose a table in a snug corner, picked up a paper and tried to read. Its one great item of news was the Holladay case, and I grew hot with anger as I saw how unquestioningly, how complacently it accepted the theory of the daughter's guilt. Still, I asked myself, was it to blame? Was any one to blame for thinking her guilty after hearing the evidence? How could one escape it?

Why, even I—

Preposterous! I tried to reason calmly; to find an opening in the net, yet how complete it was! The only point we had gained so far was that the mysterious visitor had asked for Mr. Holladay, not for her father, and what an infinitesimal point it was! Supposing there had been a quarrel, an estrangement, would not she naturally have used those very words? After all, did not the black eyes, the full lips, the deep colored cheeks bespeak a strong and virile temperament, depth of emotion, capacity for swift and violent anger? But what cause could there be for a quarrel so bitter, so fierce, that it should lead to such a tragedy? What cause? And then suddenly a wave of light broke in upon me. There could be only one. Yes, but there could be one! Capacity for emotion meant capacity for passion. If

she had a lover, if she had clung to him despite her father! I knew his reputation for severity, for cold and relentless condemnation. Here was an explanation, certainly!

And then I shook myself together angrily. Here was I reasoning along the theory of her guilt, trying to find a motive for it! I remembered her as I had seen her often, driving with her father; I recalled the many stories I had heard of their devotion; I reflected how her whole life, so far as I knew it, pointed to a nature singularly calm and self-controlled, charitable and loving. As to the lover theory, did not the light in her eyes which had greeted our junior disprove that at once and forever? Certainly, there was some fatal flaw in the evidence, and it was for us to find it.

(To be Continued.)

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"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."