

The Holladay Case

A Mystery
Of Two
Continents

By
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(CONTINUED.)

"I must remember Mr. Graham's warning," she said. "You haven't invented this astonishing story just to entertain me, Mr. Lester?"

"On my word, no," I responded a little bitterly. "I only wish I had!"

"There!" she said contritely. "I should not have doubted. Forgive me, Mr. Lester. Only it seemed so fantastic, so improbable!"

"It is fantastic," I assented, "but, unfortunately, it is true. We must keep an eye on M. Martigny, or Bethune."

"Which is his real name?"

"Those are the only ones I know, but I doubt if either is the true one."

Royce and Mrs. Kemball joined us a moment later, and we sat watching the low, distant Long Island shore until the gong summoned us to lunch. A word to the steward had secured us one of the small tables in an alcove at the side. Our first meal at sea was a merry one, Mr. Royce seeming in such spirits that I was more than ever determined not to disturb him with the knowledge of Martigny's presence.

As the moments passed my fears seemed more and more uncalled for. It was quite possible, I told myself, that I had been making a bogey of my own imaginings. The Frenchman did not appear in the saloon, and afterward an inquiry of the ship's doctor developed the fact that he was seriously ill and quite unable to leave his stateroom.

I may as well confess at once that I was seasick. It came next morning, ten minutes after I had left my berth, not a violent sickness, but a faintness and giddiness that made me long for my berth again, but Mr. Royce would not hear of it. He got me out on deck and into my chair, with the fresh breeze blowing full in my face. There was a long line of chairs drawn up there, and from the faces of most of their occupants I judged they were far more miserable than I.

After awhile the doctor came down the line and looked at each of us, stopping for a moment's chat.

"Won't you sit down a minute, doctor?" I asked when he came to me, and motioned to Mr. Royce's chair.

"Why, you're not sick!" he protested, laughing.

"It wasn't about myself I wanted to talk," I said. "How's your other patient, the one who came aboard last?"

His face sobered in an instant.

"Martigny is his name," he said, "and he's in very bad shape. He must have been desperately anxious to get back to France. Why, he might have dropped over dead there on the gang plank."

"It's a disease of the heart?"

"Yes, far advanced. He can't get well, of course, but he may live on indefinitely, if he's careful."

"He's still confined to his bed?"

"Oh, yes. He won't leave it during the voyage if he takes my advice. He's got to give his heart just as little work as possible or it'll throw up the job altogether."

I turned the talk to other things, and in a few moments he went on along his rounds. But I was not long alone, for I saw Miss Kemball coming toward me.

"So mad me has laid his hand on you, too, Mr. Lester?" she cried.

"Only a finger," I said. "But a finger is enough. Won't you take pity on a poor landsman and talk to him?"

"But that's reversing our positions!" she protested, sitting down, nevertheless, to my great satisfaction. "It was you who were to be the entertainer! Is our Mephisto abroad yet?" she asked in a lower tone.

"Mephisto is still wrestling with his heart, which, it seems, is scarcely able to furnish the blood necessary to keep him going. The doctor tells me that he'll probably spend the voyage abed."

"So there'll be nothing for us to do after all! Do you know, I was longing to become a female Lescot!"

"Perhaps you may still have the chance," I said gloomily. "I doubt very much whether Mephisto will consent to remain inactive."

She clapped her hands and nodded a laughing recognition to one of the passing promenaders.

"You're going to Paris, aren't you, Miss Kemball?" I asked.

"To Paris—yes. You too?"

"We go first to Etretat," I said and stopped as she leaned, laughing, back in her chair. "Why, what's wrong with that?" I demanded, in some astonishment.

"Wrong? Oh, nothing. Etretat's a most delightful place—only it recalled to me an amusing memory of how my mother was one day scandalized there by some actresses who were bathing.

But it's hardly the season for Etretat. The actresses have not yet arrived. You'll find it dull."

"We will not stay there long," I said. "But tell me about it."

"Etretat," said my companion, "is a bohemian resort. It has a beach of gravel where people bathe all day long. When one's tired of bathing there are the cliffs and the downs, and in the evening there's the casino. You know French, Mr. Lester?"

"Oh, I know the phrase made immortal by Mark Twain."

"Avez-vous du vin?"—yes."

"And I think I also have a hazy recollection of the French equivalents for bread and butter and cheese and meat. We shan't starve. Besides, I think Mr. Royce can help. He's been to France."

"Of course—and here he comes to claim his chair."

"I won't permit him to claim it if you'll use it a little longer," I protested.

"Oh, but I must be going." And she arose, laughing. "Have I been a satisfactory entertainer?"

"More than satisfactory; I'll accept no other."

"But you won't need any at all after this morning—I don't really believe you're ill now!"

She nodded to Royce and moved away without waiting for my answer.

Saturday, Sunday and Monday passed, with only such incidents to enliven them as are common to all voyages, but I saw that quiet and sea air were doing their work well with my companion and that he was steadily regaining his normal health, so I felt more and more at liberty to devote myself to Miss Kemball, in such moments as she would permit me, and I found her fascination increasing in a ratio quite geometrical. Martigny was still abed, and, so the ship's doctor told me, was improving very slowly.

It was Tuesday evening that Mrs. Kemball and her daughter joined us on the promenade, and we found a seat in the shadow of the wheelhouse and sat for a long time talking of many things, watching the moonlight across the water. At last we arose to return, and Royce and Mrs. Kemball started on ahead.

"Two more days and we'll be at Havre," I said. "I'll be very sorry."

"Sorry? I'd never have suspected you of such a fondness for the ocean."

"Oh, it's not the ocean!" I protested, and—what with the moonlight and the soft night and the opportunity—the time and the place and the loved one, all together—would have uttered I know not what folly had she not sprung suddenly forward with a sharp cry of alarm.

"Mr. Royce!" she cried. "Mother!"

They stopped and turned toward her just as a heavy spar crashed to the deck before them.

CHAPTER XV.

I UNDERSTOOD in a flash what had happened and sprang up the stair to the upper deck, determined to have it out with our enemy once for all. I searched it over thoroughly, looking in and under the boats and behind funnels and ventilators, but could discover no sign of any one.

When I got back to the promenade a little crowd had gathered, attracted by the noise of the falling spar, which a dozen members of the crew were busy hoisting back into place.

"I do not see how those lashings could have worked loose," said the officer in charge.

I took a look at the lashings. They had not been cut, as I expected to find them, but had been untied. Martigny had doubtless worked at them while we sat there talking.

"Well, luckily, there's no damage done," observed Mr. Royce, with affected lightness, "though it was a close shave. If Miss Kemball hadn't called to us the spar would have struck us."

Mrs. Kemball closed her eyes with a giddy little gesture at the vision the words called up, and the officer frowned in chagrin and perplexity. Just then the captain came up, and the two stepped aside for a consultation in voices so low that only an excited word of French was now and then audible.

I turned to Miss Kemball, who was leaning against the rail with white face and eyes large with terror.

"But it was not an accident, Mr. Lester," she whispered. "I saw a man leaning over the spar."

I nodded. "I don't doubt it in the least. But don't tell your mother. It will only alarm her needlessly. We'll talk it over in the morning."

She said good night and led her mother away toward their stateroom. I went at once in search of the ship's

doctor and met him at the foot of the saloon staircase.

"How is Martigny, doctor?" I asked. "Worse, I fear," he answered hurriedly. "He has just sent for me."

"Which room has he?"

"He's in 375, an outside room on the upper deck."

I went forward to the smoking room and looked over the colored plan of the ship posted there. A moment's inspection of it showed me how easily Martigny had eluded pursuit. He had only to walk twenty feet, open a door and get into bed again.

When I sat down next morning beside Miss Kemball she closed her book and turned to me with a very determined air.

"Of course, Mr. Lester," she began, "if you think any harm can come from telling me, I don't want you to say a word, but I really think I'm entitled to an explanation."

"So do I," I agreed. "You've proved yourself a better guard than I. I'd forgotten all about Martigny. I was thinking—well, of something very different. I had no thought of danger."

"Nor had I," she said quickly. "But I chanced to look up and see that dark figure bending over them, and I cried out, really, before I had time to think."

"It was just that which saved them."

"Yes; but, oh, I could think afterward! I'd only to close my eyes last night to see him there yet, peering down at us, waiting his opportunity."

And then, of course, I puzzled more or less over the whole thing."

"You shan't puzzle any more," I said. Then I laid the case before her, step by step. She listened with clasped hands and intent face, not speaking till I had finished. Then she leaned back in her chair with a long sigh.

"Why, it's horrible!" she breathed. "But you haven't given me your explanation yet, Mr. Lester."

"I haven't any explanation," I said helplessly. "I've built up half a dozen theories, but they've all been knocked to pieces, one after the other. I don't know what to think, unless Miss Holladay is a victim of hypnotism or dementia of some kind."

"Sometimes she's nice and at other times she's horrid. It recalls 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,' doesn't it?"

"Yes, it does. Only, as I say, such an explanation seems absurd."

"There's one theory which might explain it—part of it. Perhaps it wasn't Miss Holladay at all who returned from Washington square with the new maid. Perhaps it was the other woman, and the barred windows were really to keep Miss Holladay a prisoner."

"But she wasn't there!" I protested. "We saw her when we gave her the money."

"Yes, in a darkened room, with a bandage about her forehead, so hoarse she could scarcely speak."

I stopped a moment to consider.

"Remember, that would explain something which admits of no other reasonable explanation," went on my companion—"the barred windows and the behavior of the prisoner."

"It would explain that, certainly," I admitted, though at first thought the theory did not appeal to me. "You believe, then, that Miss Holladay was forcibly abducted?"

"Undoubtedly. If her mind was going to give way at all it would have done so at once and not two weeks after the tragedy."

"But if she had brooded over it," I objected.

"She wasn't brooding—at least she had ceased to brood. You have Mr. Royce's word and the butler's word that she was getting better, brighter—quite like her old self again. Why should she relapse?"

"I don't know," I said helplessly. "That affair last night has upset me so that I can't think clearly. I feel that I was careless—that I wasn't doing my duty."

"I shouldn't worry about it; though, of course," she added a little severely, "you've realized by this time that you alone are to blame for Martigny's presence on the boat."

"But I had to go to the Jourdain's," I protested, "and I couldn't help their going to him. To have asked them not to go would have made them suspect me at once."

"Oh, yes; but at least you needn't have sent them. They might not have gone at all—certainly they wouldn't have gone so promptly—if you hadn't sent them."

"Sent them?" I repeated, and stared at her in amazement, doubting if I had heard aright.

"Yes, sent them," she said again emphatically. "Why do you suppose they went to the hospital so early the next morning?"

"I suppose they had become suspicious of me."

"Nonsense! What possible reason could they have for becoming suspicious of you? On the contrary, they went after the key to those padlocks on the window shutters. Of course Martigny had it."

For a moment I was too nonplussed to speak. I could only stare at her.

"Well, I was a fool, wasn't I?" I demanded finally. "To think that I shouldn't have foreseen that! I was so worked up over my discovery that night that I couldn't think of anything else. Of course, when they asked for the key, the whole story came out."

"I shouldn't blame myself too severely."



Health

Calumet makes
light, digestible
wholesome food.

Economy

Only one heap-
ing teaspoonful
is needed for one
quart of flour.

ly," laughed Miss Kemball as she looked at my rueful countenance. "I myself think it's rather fortunate that he's on the boat."

"Fortunate! You don't mean that?"

"Precisely that. Suppose the Jourdain's hadn't gone to him. He'd have left the hospital anyway in two or three days. He isn't the man to lie inactive when he knew you were searching for the fugitives. He'd have returned then to his apartment next to yours; your landlady would have told him that you had sailed for Europe, and he had only to examine this boat's passenger list to discover your name."

"But, at any rate," I pointed out, "he would still have been in America. He couldn't have caught us."

"He couldn't have caught you, but a cablegram would have passed you in midocean warning his confederates. If they have time to conceal their prisoner, you'll never find her. Your only hope is in catching them unprepared. And there's another reason—since he's on the boat, you've another opportunity. Why not go and have a talk with him—that battle of wits you were looking forward to?"

"I'd thought of that," I said, "but I'm afraid I couldn't play the part."

"The part?"

"Of seeming not to suspect him. It's too great a risk."

"The advantage would be on your side," she pointed out. "You could tell him so many things which he already knows and which he has no reason to suspect you know he knows. It sounds terribly involved, doesn't it? But you understand?"

"Oh, yes; I understand."

"And then it would be the natural thing for you to look him up as soon as you learned he was ill. To avoid him will be to confess that you suspect him."

"But his name isn't on the passenger list. If I hadn't happened to see him as he came on board I'd probably not have known it at all."

"Perhaps he saw you at the same time."

"Then the fat's in the fire," I said. "If he knows I know he's on board. Then he also knows that I suspect him. If he doesn't know, why, there's no reason for him to think that I'll find it out, unless he appears in the cabin, which doesn't seem probable."

"Perhaps you're right," she admitted. "There's no use taking any unnecessary risks. The thing appealed to me. I think I should enjoy a half hour's talk with him, matching my wits against his."

"But yours are brighter than mine," I pointed out. "You've proved it pretty effectually in the last few minutes."

"No, I haven't. I've simply shown you that you overlooked one little thing. And I think you're right about the danger of going to Martigny. Our first duty is to Miss Holladay. We must rescue her before he can warn his confederates to place her out of our reach."

The unstudied way in which she said "our" filled me with an unreasonable happiness.

"But why should they bother with a prisoner at all? They didn't shrink from striking down her father."

"And they may not shrink from striking her down at a favorable moment," 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, im-

agine that her mother, but who was the elder woman—her mother? Then the liaison must have taken place in France—her accent 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 boldness! 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. He 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."

(To be Continued)

Local Grain Market.

(Furnished by J. P. Delaney)

Wheat	.....	66c
Old shelled corn	.....	30c
New shelled Corn	.....	29c
Ear Corn, new	.....	23c
Oats	.....	47c
Rye	.....	28c
Barley	.....	28c