

The Holladay Case

A Mystery
Of Two
Continents

By
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(CONTINUED.)

"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, goodby."
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 indeed seen through my artifice? In attempting to blind him had I merely uncovered my own plan, or—and my cheeks burned at the thought—was he so well entrenched that he had no fear of me? Were his plans so well laid that it mattered not to him whether I went or what I did?

I passed a moment of heartrending uncertainty. I saw quite clearly what a little, little chance of success we had. But I shook the feeling off, sought the lower deck and inquired again for Martigny. At last the ship's doctor told me that he had seen the sick man safely to 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 Etretat. In half an hour a train would leave for Beuzeville, where we must transfer to another line to Les Ifs. 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 Ifs 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.

An hour's run brought us to Beuzeville, where we were dumped out, together with our luggage, in a little frame station. An official informed us that we must wait there three hours for the train for Les Ifs. Beyond that he could not say.

"How far is Les Ifs from here?" inquired my companion.

"About twelve kilometers, monsieur."
"And from there to Etretat?"
"Is twenty kilometers more."
"Thirty-two kilometers altogether," said Mr. Royce. "That's about twenty miles. Why can't we drive, Lester?"

Certainly it seemed better than waiting on the uncertain railway, and we set at once about the work of finding a vehicle. I could be of little use, since English was an unknown tongue at Beuzeville, and even Mr. Royce's French was sorely taxed, but we succeeded at last in securing a horse and light trap, together with a driver who claimed to know the road.

The road was smooth and level, and in an hour and a half from Beuzeville we reached Les Ifs, and here we stopped for a light supper. We had cause to congratulate ourselves that we had secured a vehicle at Beuzeville, for we

learned that no train would start for Etretat until morning. The damage wrought by the storm of two days before had not yet been repaired.

Luckily for us, the moon soon arose, so that we got forward without much difficulty, though slowly, and an hour before midnight we pulled up triumphantly before the Hotel Blanquet, the principal inn of Etretat.

CHAPTER XVII.

WE were up at an hour which astonished the little fat keeper of the inn and inquired the location of the office of the registrar of births. It was two steps away in the Rue Alphonse Karr, but would not be open for three hours at least. Would messieurs have their coffee now? No, messieurs would not have their coffee until they returned. Where would they find the residence of the registrar of births—his residence? That was another matter. His residence was some little distance away, near the casino, at the right. We should ask for Maitre Pingret. Any one could tell us. When should messieurs be expected to return? It was impossible to say.

We set off along the street, leaving the innkeeper staring after us.

"Maitre Pingret?" we inquired of the first passerby, and he pointed us to a little house half hidden in vines.

A knock brought the notary himself to the door, a little dried up man, with keen face and eyes incredibly bright. My companion explained our errand in laborious French, supplemented by much gesticulation—it is wonderful how the hands can help one to talk—and after a time the little Frenchman caught his meaning and bustled away to get his hat and coat, scenting a fat fee. Our first step was to be an easy one, thanks to the severity and thoroughness of French administration, but I admit that I saw not what we should do further, once we had verified the date of Miss Holladay's birth.

The notary unlocked the door, showed us into his office and set our chairs for us; then he got down his register of births for 1876. It was not a large book, for the births at Etretat are not overwhelming in number.

"The name, I think you said, was Holladay?" he asked.

"Hiram W. Holladay," nodded Mr. Royce.

"And the date June 10?"

"Yes; June 10."

The little man ran his finger rapidly down the page, then went back again and read the entries one by one more slowly, with a pucker of perplexity about his lips. He turned the leaf, began farther back and read through the list again, while we sat watching him. At last he shut the book.

"Messieurs," he said quietly, "no such birth is recorded here. I have examined the record for the months of May, June and July."

"But it must be there!" protested Mr. Royce.

"Nevertheless it is not here."

"Could the child have been born here and no record made of it?"

"Impossible, monsieur."

"For a large fee, perhaps," suggested my companion.

"In Paris that may sometimes be possible. But in a small place like this I should have heard of it."

"You have been here for that length of time, then?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur," smiled the little man. "For a much longer time than that."

Mr. Royce leaned forward toward him. He was getting back all his old power as a cross examiner.

"M. Pingret," he began impressively, "I am quite certain that Hiram W. Holladay and his wife were here during the months of May, June and July, 1876, and that while they were here a daughter was born to them. Think again. Have you no recollection of them or of the event?"

The little notary sat for some moments with knitted brows. At last he shook his head.

"That would be the height of the season, you see, monsieur," he said apologetically. "There are a great many people here at that time, and I cannot know all of them. Nevertheless it seemed to me for a moment that there was about the name a certain familiarity—as of an old tune, you know, forgotten for years. Yet it must have been my fancy merely, for I have no recollection of the event you mention."

There was one other chance, and I gave Mr. Royce the clew.

"M. Pingret," he asked, "are you acquainted with a man of the name of Pierre Bethune?"

And again the notary shook his head.

"Or Jasper Martigny?"

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"I never before heard either name."

We sat silent a moment, in despair. Was our trip to Etretat to be of no avail? Where was my premonition now? If we had lost the trail thus early in the chase, what hope was there that we should ever run down the quarry? And how explain the fact that no record had been made of Frances Holladay's birth? Why should her parents have wished to conceal it?

An hour had passed, the shops were opening and a bustle of life reached us through the open door.

"The first train for three days is about to arrive," said the little notary.

Again we fell silent. Mr. Royce got out his purse and paid the fee. We had come to an impasse—a closed way. We could go no farther. I could see that the notary was a-hungered for his roll and coffee. With a sigh, I arose to go. The notary stepped to the door and looked up the street.

"Ah," he said, "the train has arrived, but it seems there were not many passengers. Here is one, though, who has finished a long journey."

He nodded to some one who approached slowly, it seemed. He was before the door. He passed on. It was Martigny!

"That is the man!" I cried to Mr. Royce. "That is Martigny! Ask who he really is."

He understood on the instant and caught the notary's arm.

"M. Pingret, who is that man?"

The notary glanced at him, surprised by his vehemence.

"That," he said, "is Victor Fajolle. He is just come from America."

"And he lives here?"

"Oh, surely—on the cliffs just above the town, the first house. You cannot miss it, buried in a grove of trees. He married the daughter of Mme. Alix some years ago. He was from Paris."

"And his wife is living?"

"Oh, surely she is living. She herself

returned from America but three weeks ago, together with her mother and sister. The sister, they say, is—well— And he finished with a significant gesture toward his head.

I saw my companion's face turn white. I steadied myself with an effort.

"And they are at home now?"

"I believe so," said the notary, eying him with more and more astonishment. "They have been keeping close at home since their return. They will permit no one to see the invalid."

"Come, we must go," I cried. "He must not get there before us!"

But a sudden light gleamed in the notary's eyes.

"Wait, messieurs!" he cried. "A moment, but a moment. Ah, I remember it now. It was the link which was wanting and you have supplied it—Holladay, a millionaire of America, his wife, Mme. Alix. She did not live in the villa then, messieurs. Oh, no. She was very poor, a nurse; anything to make a little money. Her husband, who was a fisherman, was drowned and left her to take care of the children as best she could."

He had got down another book and was running his fingers rapidly down the page, his finger all a-tremble with excitement. Suddenly he stopped with a little cry of triumph.

"Here it is, messieurs! See!"

Under the date of June 10, 1876, was an entry of which this is the English:

Holladay, Hiram W., and Elizabeth, his wife, of the city of New York, United States of America; from Celeste Alix, widow of Auguste Alix, her daughter Celeste, aged five months. All claim surrendered in consideration of the payment of 25,000 francs.

Mr. Royce caught up the book and glanced at the back. It was the "Record of Adoptions."

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN A moment we were hurrying along

the street in the direction the notary had pointed out to us. Martigny was already out of sight, and we had need of haste. My head was in a whirl. So Frances Holladay was not really the daughter of the dead millionaire! The thought compelled a complete readjustment of my point of view.

We had reached the beach again, and we turned along it in the direction of the cliffs. Far ahead I saw a man hurrying in the same direction, I could guess at what agony and danger to himself. The path began to ascend, and we panted up it to the grassy down which seemed to stretch for miles and miles to the northward.

Right before us was a little wood, in the midst of which I caught a glimpse of a farmhouse.

We ran toward it, through a gate and up the path to the door. It was closed, but we heard from within a man's excited voice, a resonant voice which I knew well. I tried the door. It yielded, and we stepped into the hall. The voice came from the room at the right. It was no time for hesitation. We sprang to the door and entered.

Martigny was standing in the middle of the floor, fairly foaming at the mouth, shrieking out commands and imprecations at two women who cowered in the farther corner. The elder one I knew at a glance; the younger—my heart leaped as I looked at her—was it Miss Holladay? No, yet strangely like.

(To be Continued)

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