

THE RIDDLE OF THE SPINNING WHEEL

Being An Exploit in the Career of Hamilton Cleek, Detective.
By MARY E. AND THOMAS W. HANSEW

(Continued from yesterday)

"No two questions about it, to my way of thinking," said he quietly, as they traversed the darkness together. "That Captain Macdonald did the thing—because of those footprints of his outside the window—and as he couldn't or wouldn't give the reason of why he was in the grounds here last night at that identical time. And the person he was shielding was obviously Lady Paula. She, too, has been involved in this, though whether in the actual murder or not, I'm not prepared to say. And Ross Duggan, too, I imagine the whole thing is a put-up job; don't you, Cleek?"

"I can't rightly say," returned Cleek in an uncertain tone. "Sometimes it points one way and sometimes another. And I'm inclined to agree with you where Lady Paula is concerned. She knows a good deal more than she says, and is wily—deuced wily, as all drug-takers are. And the motive would be there all right, judging from what Macdonald told me was the share which Sir Andrew had apportioned out for his widow and her boy. She'll double that easily enough. But to kill for such a thing seems incredible—though I've known of worse crimes for less reason than that. But Ross Duggan's is the greatest motive of all, taking into consideration just when the thing happened—before his name was cleared, you must remember. Mr. Narkom, and as he's a dabster at electricity and the only person with an air-pistol in the house—well, circumstantial evidence looks pretty black against him, doesn't it?"

"It certainly does," Mr. Narkom's voice was a trifle apologetic. "Well, I hardly know what to think, Cleek. And you're such a begger for stringing evidence together, and never forgetting it! And there's such a dicker of a lot of evidence in this case that a chap gets horribly involved, and his memory is likely to play him tricks. And then that Italian chap whom Dollops has seen such a lot today—where does he come in?"

"Right into the midst of the whole business," returned Cleek emphatically. "And don't you make any mistake about that, my friend. Dicky-Dago, to use Dollops's name, is one of the prime movers in this little inheritance game, and in another one also. A dollar to a dust he knows the whole thing, and 'Dewey Coat's' with him."

"Who the dickens is Dewey Coat?"

"The gentleman whom Dollops so



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red neck-cloth. Likely lookin' blighter, ain't he?"

"H'm. Not very. Not a sound, boy. There's a couple of 'em coming this way. Got it in barrels, have they? Gadi! I'd like to have a look at one of those homely articles. I'll swear there's a false bottom to it, if I know anything of this kind of trickery."

"—there's Dewey Coat!"

"Dewey Coat," thus named, passed a stone's throw in front of them, his arm linked with another man's, his head down-bent. But Cleek had seen the moonlight upon his face, and knew his man at last. Ross Duggan had worn that coat this morning, or one so like it that even he, hawk-eyed detective that he was, could have told no difference between them. The moonlight struck upon the white boom of his evening-dress shirt, making it shine like a strip of ivory, and at something which his companion said to him, he caught it close together, and turned the collar of the jacket up about his throat.

First the handkerchief so plainly marked "R. D." and now this! But that such a man should be mixed up in a thing of this sort, an illicit thing which was against all laws and regulations of the land that had borne him,

followed you here tonight, because I—I wanted to talk with you—I had to talk with you, to tell you something! I simply had to. But I've been a fool to break parole, as you have done, with that man with the hawk eyes in the castle even at this minute. But so much hangs upon it—Ross, so much! Look up and speak to me, and, whoever your companion is, tell him to go away until we have had a word together. Look up, look up—do!"

CHAPTER XXIV
Hares And Hounds

To say that Cleek was startled was to under-estimate the matter altogether. Here was a pretty kettle of fish indeed! It took exactly three seconds for him to act, and to act in such an extraordinary fashion as to call forth a gasp from Dollops, whose head was still half ducked, with one arm up-thrown to hide it from the woman's eyes, and to register in his loyal heart the fact that this master whom he served was a miracle-worker indeed.

For Cleek's hand had flashed up in the darkness and taken the moustache from his lip, and as the woman still continued to plead with him in her soft voice Dollops, peering through the curtain, he loved write suddenly as though he had been made of rubber, saw him twitch up his hand and muffle his face, and he faced the lady in her thin dark wrap through the glimmer of some light satiny material showed like a line of fire.

"My dear girl," said Ross Duggan's voice a trifle testily, "what a fool you are to come out here at this time. If you'll excuse my saying so! Sit down, for heaven's sake, if you must be here, and don't let those men down there see you. I'm—I'm making some observations on my own, but at any rate I wouldn't answer for the consequences. You've fallen into a hornet's nest, Catherine, and only a woman with some desperate plan of action would do that. Don't you know what's being carried on down there?"

She shook her dark head, and dropped instantly into a little heap of satiny, dark-coloured velvet beside him in the darkness.

"No," she whispered softly. "I wonder what you're doing, and what your companion might be. Send him away, Ross. I must speak with you alone."

"All right." The infection of voice was so identical with that of the new maid of the manor as to make Dollops fairly jump at the sound of it. He would hardly have been able to believe the evidence of his own ears if he had not seen this thing done before in those old Apache days, in the inn of the Western Arm, when the notorious Marto and her crew had run them to earth and this was the only way out.

Get along here, Parsons. There's nothing more to be seen now. You can meet me some time next week—in the city hall, or at the end of a long rope! And we'll have another can-bush together, you'll better make yourself scarce now. There'll be a dicker of a kybosh if they find we've broken parole, and I don't want you hauled into the beastly thing. So long. And listen—listen: be careful—do!"

Dollops nodded his head forthwith, and by dint of wriggling and scrambling made his exit from this astonishing pit, at the feet of the bare moonlight at last, broke cover and started off at a good run, wondering what the dickens they had stumbled into now.

Meanwhile the erstwhile Ross and his lady friend sat on behind the fur-cush in their somewhat ridiculous predicament, and talked in whispers.

"What is it you want to say to me?" said "Ross," a hint of sharpness in his low-pitched voice. "That you should run this risk—that is madness, Catherine—madness!"

"Nothing is madness that I could do for your sake," she responded passionately, putting a hand over his as it rested upon the brown earth, and bending toward him. "Don't you know, Ross, haven't you guessed my secret yet? Surely you must have seen it! I have tried to tell you with my eyes, time and time again, and when you looked at Cynthia, I felt my heart bound with gladness that you did not care for her. And that has made me brave. Oh, my dear—my dear! Listen to me, and do what I ask of you. If you did kill your father, Ross, that man down there at the castle will make you swing for it. Those penetrating eyes of his can see beyond the veil of deception right down into your heart. If you have done this dreadful thing, tell me, and I have made all arrangements that you can escape at once. I've a car waiting in the lane. I phoned for it at the garage by the station only a bare two hours ago, and I had difficulty, too, as you can imagine, with the whole house full of policemen and our every action watched. But I was desperate—desperate! I couldn't see you arrested for that! And so, while there is yet time, Oh, don't you see! It's your liberty I'm offering you! And we could start away together and make our lives afresh in new country. Ross, Ross, don't you hear, don't you



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