POOR DOCUMENT

MC 2035

THE RIDDLE OF THE SPINNING WHEEL

Being An Exploit in the Career of Hamilton Cleek, Detective

By MARY E. AND THOMAS W. HANSHEW

(Continued from yesterday)

"Rubber shoes, my dear fellow! Where were your eyes? snapped Cleek with a hasty exclamation. "Off somewhere where she doesn't want to be seen. I'll swear. And as this courtyard leads out into the backwoods of the place, to that forest ridge which girts it about, and thence on to the Great Free Road as it's called, she's meeting someone whom she doesn't want any one to see — and doesn't want to be discovered in the act, either. . . . Hello! here's Dollops at last! Just the very chap I was wanting. Here lad, there's work for you. Run along and track down that lady in black who is disappearing so rapidly up there by the right-hand side of the hedge — and keeping pretty close to it, too, for shelter from the watching eye in the household. Gad! lucky thing we came out this way, Mr. Narkom, and caught her napping. She never thought of that, I suppose. Seems a woman of one ideal all through, doesn't she? The beautiful, sleepy-eyed cat-creature! I've met her kind before. All purr and softness when she's a friend — and a perfect she-devil when an enemy. Now, then, Dollops, your legs are nimble, so slip up after her, but don't on any account let her know you're doing it. And I'll follow in a moment or two. But don't let her get away without discovering where she's going to. Mr. Narkom, you wait here, will you, and keep watch in case she returns, or any one else in the know follows after, while I nip up to the lady's boudoir, and enquire where she has gone to. I'll dare swear she's 'lying down with a headache and has given orders not to be disturbed.' "

And his imaginings proved to be correct, for that was exactly the case. For Miss McCall, encountered in the outer passage from her lady's room, with coat and hat on, and pulling on a pair of neatly darned cotton gloves, met him, blushed like the timid little thing she was, and answered him in all faith that what she spoke was true.

"Lady Paula? I believe she's lying down, Mr. Deland. She told me on no account to disturb her, and to let everyone else know that she wished a couple of hours' quiet," she said in her soft, gentle voice, lifting her timid eyes to his face. "It's been a shock, I suppose" — her face and voice hardened — "but she'll get over it — as she gets over everything else that happens to worry her. She said she'd be down for tea however; and Master Cyril has gone off with Mr. Duggan and his fiancee for a walk round the laboratory. It's — it's all very sad, Mr. Deland, isn't it?"

"Very," rejoined Cleek. "Very sad, indeed. For a house divided against itself, Miss McCall — you know the rest of the biblical quotation. And I'm afraid that is exactly what will happen in this case. . . . Oh, well, lying down, is she? Then I won't disturb her. Going out?"

"Yes. Just along to Mr. Tavish's cottage, at the bottom of the drive," she responded a trifle drearily. "Mr. Tavish and I, you know, are — engaged. I have tea with him sometimes, and try to do some of his mending. It's hard for a man to live alone, as he does."

"Indeed it is. Engaged? Then may I offer you my congratulations, Miss McCall? I won't detain you any longer, as I know you must be anxious to get along. A little freedom in the fresh air will do you good. We shall meet again later, I've no doubt. Good-bye."

She nodded to him brightly and disappeared down the hall, and Cleek could hear her soft feet beating upon the carpet as she passed down the stairs.

Once out of sight of her, he darted into the room which he knew was Lady Paula's, and closed the door softly behind him, turning the key in the lock. It was just the sort of boudoir he would have imagined her choosing — a place all soft pillows and low divans, and hung in silks of Eastern colourings, so that it resembled nothing so much as the home of a sultan's favourite, from the low Turkish stool standing by the couch-side, with the little filigree box of cigarettes upon it, accompanied by a match-case en suite, to a tiny jewelled inlaid holder bearing a half-smoked cigarette in it Cleek picked it up, smelt it, smelt it again, and then pursed his lips up into a low whistle of astonishment.

"My lady indulges in a delicate drug now and again, does she?" he o'd himself, examining the thing with some distaste. "And for that reason one may find excuse for the hysteria of this morning. That lends fresh colour to the case, certainly. For a drug-fiend in plain parlance is little more than a fool, and a half-balanced fool at that. . . . I'll take a peep at those drawers in that secretaire, my lady, and see if you have anything to reveal to me. For an ambitious drug-fiend would stop at nothing to gain her own ends, and if those same ends should happen to be such a heritage as this for her son and herself. . . . Hello! what's this? Tablets, eh? But the bottle unmarked."

He drew one out of the little phial and laid it in the palm of his hand, and with the other thumb as piston, ground it down to fine powder and then sniffed it, recollecting that story which Maud Duggan had told him of her suspicions with regard to the poisoning of her father. But after he had touched the tip of his tongue to it, he smiled a little.

"H'm. Nothing but aspirin. I thought as much, certainly, when she told me the story. So that explodes that little theory once and for all — if there was anything in it from the beginning. . . . Nicely appointed chamber, I must say." He walked leisurely about it, lifting a pillow there, and dropping it back into its place, and straightening the set of a chair, pushed out of its usual position by a very obvious hurry of the room's occupant.

And he was just in the act of doing this trivial thing when he came upon a little screw of paper lying in a twisted ball beneath a chair which stood close up to the Turkish stool, and evidently dropped by accident (which undoubtedly was the fact). Cleek stooped to pick it up, smoothed it out in his fingers, and then of a sudden sucked in his breath, and every muscle in that well-organized frame of his went taut as iron. For the paper — innocent as it looked — contained news which was enough to startle the most unsuspicious police-constable in existence. For, written across its surface, having neither name nor address nor date, and in a calligraphy which was undoubtedly foreign, were the words:

Meet me at three o'clock by the G. F. Road. Everything successfully carried out. Muffled clapper. Must see you. Utmost importance.

A. M.

"Hello! Hello!" rapped out Cleek in the sharp staccato of excitement. "Then she did have something to do with it, after all, did she? Gad! a dollar to a ducat that there's someone else in this affair whom we've never even hit upon yet! What a bit of luck Dollops turned up at that moment — when she was just on the way! Let's see — what's the time? Three o'clock. Gad! I'll nip along myself, and come in at the finish, and hear what I can hear from the good lady's lips herself, and see who the dickens it is who's meeting her. There's more in this than meets the eye, Cleek my boy, and don't you forget it!"

Following the direction shown him by Mr. Narkom (who was still standing like a monument of Patience in the little shrubbery where they had first caught sight of her wandering ladyship), Cleek pelted off in the direction of the woods, every faculty alert, and in the hastily donned rubber-soled shoes proving himself a silent if a fleet-footed pursuer.

But he was doomed to disappointment upon his quest. For halfway toward the Great Free Road, as that portion of the country was called, through a belt of thick trees which entirely hid the landscape from view, he met Dollops, looking disconsolately upon the ground, hands in pockets and face dejected, and cannoned into him as they came abreast of each other.

Dollops's face went crimson at sight of Cleek, and then paled off suddenly. His voice was tragic in the extreme.

"Missed 'er Guv'nor!" he declared laconically. "Missed 'er for the first time in all my existence upon this 'ere plannit! Give me the slip, strite she did, but how, is a question as 'as fair diddled me. I follored 'er up to 'ere as good as you please, and then of a suddint 'eard voices to the left of me, did a bunk after 'em, as I knowed you'd wish me to sir, and — that there she-devil 'ad disappeared as smooth as you please! A fair ghost she were Guv'nor, strite — an' if she ain't the Peasant Girl wot 'aunts these parts, then I'm a Dutchman!"

But Cleek had not the heart to smile at the boy's excited preamble. He was too disappointed at losing his quarry so easily when this new thing had been thrust right into his hands in this fashion, and the chance of elucidating the mystery so incredibly easy — judging by the crumpled note in his breast-pocket. Another such opportunity would never occur again — one could not hope for things to happen in duplicate.

"Dollops! Dollops!" he exclaimed with a shake of the head. "Where is your training in Apache quarters gone to, I'd like to know? Letting a mere woman elude you, as though she had been Margot, Queen of the Apaches, herself. And doing the ventriloquial trick so successfully upon you, too! And at the very crux of the case, just when I'd found the clue of all others which was likely to establish the truth of the whole appalling affair! I'm disappointed. But it can't be helped, so put away your crestfallen countenance, and come back to the house with me. We'll have to wait until evening now, and see what comes to pass tonight. Did the lady actually see you by any chance?"

"Don't know, sir." Dollops's voice was dejected. "Suppose she must 'er done, by the way she slipped the leash on me, so ter speak. Why, sir?"

"Because, my young jackanapes, if that is the case, the scarcer you make yourself the better," returned Cleek rapidly. "For it's no use your allying yourself to me in her ladyship's presence, for the fat would be in the fire with a vengeance. And now, about that other affair . . . You did what I told you? And what did your bit of private 'detecting' bring forth, may I ask?"

For a second Dollops's glum face lit up, and his eyes shone. Here at least he had found something with which actually to help. There was a hint of triumph in his tones.

"Got 'em 'id in the shrubs, sir," he returned enthusiastically. "Done up in brahn paper, they are, and ready for examination on sight. 'Untin' boots, Mr. Cleek, sir — gent's 'untin'-boots, and that thick wiv mud as ter look like blessed gardings, too. Fit fer growin' a crop of taties in, I swear, sir. An' fahnd 'em 'idden in a bush er laurels as large as life."

"Whew! Is that all, then? Nothing underground?"

"No, sir. Not a blinkin' thing."

"Um. Pity. You must show me the hunting-boots, Dollops; they may prove a clue — though just how they would be connected with this particular case remains to be seen. Very muddy, eh? Any name inside?"

Dollops nodded.

He looked hastily from side to side to see that no one was listening. Then he bent toward Cleek with a mysterious manner and spoke in a bated voice.

"Yessir. Belongs to a gen'leman as is sweet on the young leddy we come along wiv yesterday from Lunnon," he replied weightily. "Or so they tell me up at the Taree Fishers. Name of Macdonald — Captain Angus Macdonald. Writ inside 'em as large as life and twice as nat'ril. Eh? — wot's the matter, sir?"

For Cleek had whirled about suddenly and struck his hands together, and was laughing, laughing like a man gone suddenly daft. He stopped abruptly and put one hand upon Dollops's shoulder.

"Matter?" he said rapidly. "Way, simply this: Get a line on this young Captain's handwriting, Dollops, and report to me this afternoon. And if it tallies with this note, as I somehow fancy it does — well, we'll see the fur fly so quickly that you won't be able to say Jack Robinson. Happen to notice the size of the boots, by any chance?"

"Yessir. Tens."

"Good lad. And the footprints outside of the window in that little courtyard are tens, too! The net's closing in upon you, my gallant friend, and you won't get a chance to do much more spluttering and exclaiming before I've found out what your little move in this Interitance Game is, and — nipped it in the bud! . . . Gad! Captain Angus Macdonald! And — tens! . . . Now, who the dickens would have thought it?"

(To be continued)

YUKON SPRING RUSH.

Automobiles, Horse and Dog Teams Commandeered.

Dawson City, Y. T., March 24.—The spring rush it on the Yukon. The overland trail from White Horse to Dawson and Mayo is lined with horse and dog teams and hikers bound northward. The White Pass shipyards are operating at full blast repairing the upper Yukon river fleet.

A ten-ton caterpillar tractor, with three trailers, hauling five tons of freight each, will start over the trail from White Horse for Mayo tomorrow, a distance of 300 miles, the first journey of its kind ever undertaken over Yukon snows.

So many individual silver claims are producing in Keno Hill, in addition to two big companies, that every horse, dog team, automobile, sleigh and caterpillar in the district has been crowded into service, rushing ore to Mayo Landing before the snow disappears. It is expected that 8,000 tons will be transported by April 1.

Routine business occupied the time at a session of the council of the New Brunswick Association of Professional Engineers last evening with B. M. Hill, of Fredericton, in the chair. In addition to the president, the following members were resent: Professor E. O. Turner, Fredericton; K. S. Pickard, Sarkville; H. F. Bennet, G. G. Murdoch and J. A. W. Waring, St. John.

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These new strawberries will revolutionize strawberry growing here. Plants set out in srinpg with first blossom cut off will start to bear about the 1st of August and continue bearing until heavy frost in late October. 500 plants set in May produced in August, September and October nearly 400 quarts, which sold at 20c to 40c per quart, netting at rate of $2,000 to the acre.

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OSAGE INDIANS TO GET MORE MILLIONS FROM OIL

New Auction of Lands May Net $5,000,000 to Richest People Per Capita in World.

Washington, March 24—The Osage Indians—the richest people per capita in the world—are to be cut another oil melon on April 5 that is expected to net millions of dollars to the members of this tribe. At a public auction at Pawhuska, Okla., under the direction of Secretary of the Interior Work, oil and mineral rights upon approximately 34,000 acres of lands belonging to the Osages are to be sold. Members of the tribe, totaling 2,100, will not only receive a cash bonus, but will be paid royalties upon every barrel of oil taken from the ground at the rate of from one-fifth to one-sixth.

Last year the Department of the Interior, through the sale of these oil leases, gave each of the 2,100 Osage Indians $10,000 and some of the families derived as high as $80,000. The sale is expected to bring a bonus of something like $4,000,000 or $5,000,000 as a similar sale conducted in 1922 brought $7,000,000.

An investigation into the burning of the Manor House on January 29 was held yesterday afternoon in the office of H. H. McLellan, provincial fire marshall. G. H. V. Belyea, K. C., represented the adjustors and the insurance companies, and J. Starr Tait appeared for John Jackson, owner of the destroyed property. Among others present were Daniel Mullin, K. C., Dr. F. J. G. Knowlton, K. C., Commissioner R. S. Ritchie of the Fire Prevention Board, F. C. Mortimer of the Palatine Insurance Co., Ltd., F. S. Whittaker, adjustor, and R. A. McLean. Several witnesses were examined. The finding has not yet been announced.

The Canadian Press made an investigation of the report from Fredericton on Thursday intimating that there had been some sort of a disaster in California, and found that there was no foundation for such an assumption. The despatch had said that people in from friends in Santa Barbara, California, saying, "We are all right." It was assumed that there might have been an earthquake, but the Canadian Press finds there was no reason for any uneasiness in this respect.

The world's largest airship hangar at Lakehurst, New Jersey, could hold two buildings the size of the United States Treasury.

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