

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)
 Mr. Narkom acceded to all these requests with a quick nod, took up his post by the gateway leading out upon the road, and let his startled eyes travel backward now and again at Cleek's nimble, crawling figure climbing steadily up the sides of the huge gates, like a lizard upon a wall. Up, up, up he went, scaling the height and clinging here and there to the twists of iron and bronze that made an easy foothold—until, just as the summit was reached, and he was standing abreast of the enormous figure and looking up into its great face, with the bell dangling from the bar of iron upon which he stood, he heard the sound of "God Save the King" floating up to him in Mr. Narkom's whistle, darted quickly through the giant's legs, and drew him-

self up against the back of him and hoped for luck. The sound of two men's voices—and one of them the Superintendent's—reached him where he stood upon the narrow ledge. He recognized the other as that of the bailiff, James Tavish, whom he had encountered upon the high-road only yesterday. Mr. Narkom galled with him for so long, passing the time of day and making tactless inquiries about the murder, in his blunderbuss fashion ("Dear old bungler!" Cleek apostrophized him inwardly), that he began to wonder when the man would ever go. Then at length the voices ceased, and he saw Tavish's fine, well-set-up figure swing off in front of him up the driveway, and then himself slid back to the outer side of the statue, lest the bailiff look back, and waited until Mr. Narkom whistled "Coast all clear" again.

This done, Cleek swung himself down carefully, clinging on with knees and feet in a most impossible and seemingly dangerous position which brought a hasty warning from Mr. Narkom, and found the clapper of the bell at last. It wasn't such a big bell—not much bigger than a man's head, but wrought of solid bronze, which made it almost impossible for him to swing it up on its chain to the platform upon which he hung poised above it. But somehow he managed to do the thing, and Mr. Narkom, watching with his heart in his mouth, saw his hand dive down inside of the bell and fumble there a moment. Then he heard Cleek's quick whistle of surprise as he swung the bell silently back again, and came down once more—empty-handed!

"Well, what did you discover?" hastily exclaimed the Superintendent as Cleek came to earth at last and stood dusting himself. "Or wasn't there anything at all? Was the bell muffled before last night's tragedy, Cleek—or is it simply a bird's nest that's lodged

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there and stopped the thing? I'm on tenterhooks to know."

"And know you shall, old friend," said Cleek, straightening himself from his self-imposed task and giving his cravat a twitch with nimble fingers to its correct position once more. "It wasn't a bird's nest—not by a long chalk! More like a hornet nest, I should say, between you and me; but that's apart from the question. And it wasn't muffled before the tragedy, either, Mr. Narkom. It was muffled after! Pretty strange, isn't it? . . . Yes, I thought you'd think so. Well, anyhow, I'm coming tonight to remove the 'muffling' object when the rest of the people are in bed, and I want you to help me by keeping on the watch-out. We're due for a full moon tonight, and that'll help matters. . . . So Rhea's in the mystery, too, is he? Umm. A difficult subject to tackle as well, on account of his silence. But he's told me something this day that has unravelled one portion of the riddle, at all events. And when I've unravelled the remainder, you shall hear what it is."

"Now for Dollops, and the Three Fishers, I'm anxious to hear that 'Crown and Anchor' story from his own lips. And I've other work for him. So come along."

CHAPTER XV

Another Fly In The Web
 It was a full hour by the clock when Captain Macdonald, in the hands of his burly captor, and looking as furious as it is possible for a man to look in such circumstances, entered the library at Aygon Castle, where already Mr. Narkom, Cleek, and all the other members

of that ill-assorted and tragic party were already assembled, and, looking neither to right nor left of him, pushed past Maud Duggan's detaining fingers and went straight up to his man on sight.

"Look here!" he said angrily, as, hat in hand he stood before Cleek, his countenance showing a little of what he felt inside his hot young heart. "What the deuce—what the dickens do you mean by sending a beastly policeman for me? That's what I want to know! I was on my way up here—the awful thing that has just happened I only heard this morning through my groom, who met one of the Castle grooms in the village, and he told him—and I was comin' up to see if I could be any help, when up comes my lord constable, seizes me by the sleeve, tips his cap, and says, 'You've got to come along with me'—just as if I'd picked a blessed pocket or something! I'm dashed well furious, I can tell you! And I want

an apology at once. . . . Thought there was somethin' decidedly fishy in your appearance here in the Castle grounds last night, and now I know what you were about for."

"But unfortunately, I don't know what you were about for, Captain," retorted Cleek with a one-sided smile. "And that's exactly what I sent for you to find out. After you have explained yourself so fully and so—so emphatically—in the presence of these ladies, I will now claim a little of your time and attention for myself."

"You were perfectly right. I happened to be coming here, upon this very unpleasant and tragic errand, at the summons of Miss Maud Duggan—"

"Maud sent for you?"

"She did. We had a prearranged signal—she'll probably tell you all about it"—he smiled at her sad young face, a hint of tenderness in his own.

"You see, we happen to be friends through friends, if you can follow what I mean. Miss Duggan's school-mate and chum chances to be the lady who has done me the honour to promise to become my wife, and of course it was naturally a firm link between us."

"Maud's school-friend?" The Captain's voice was incredulous. "And you? A—police-man! Darned funny!"

"As you say—very funny," returned Cleek, with an ironical bow. "But I must beg of you, my good Captain, to curb your language a little before the ladies. It's not done, you know, in the best society—even a mere policeman's language beyond the point I'm aiming at, let's get down to brass tacks at once. What I want to know is—what were you doing here last night, when the crime had only just been committed? And why did I encounter you running from the direction of the house as fast as your feet could carry you?"

"A sudden gasp of amazement from Maud Duggan, hastily suppressed, brought Cleek's eyes round to her instantly. Meanwhile, the Captain, going red and white by turns, started to speak, hesitated, and then commenced again, looking the picture of abject discomfort and unhappiness."

"At last: 'Well, if you want so much to know—find out for yourself,' he broke out in a sulky tone. 'For I'm not going to tell you—that's flat! I've had nothing whatsoever to do with the beastly affair, and you know it. And if you don't know it, it won't take you long to find out. But what I was doing here last night is my private affair, and nothing to do with anybody.'"

"Oh!" said Cleek in two different tones, arching an eyebrow in Mr. Narkom's direction. "Still more emphatic, I must say! And absolutely refuses, too! The Law takes no refusals, Captain Macdonald, and if you don't know that fact, you'd better learn it now. And if you and Mr. Ross Duggan happen to be friends—"

"We are friends—the best of 'em, eh, old chap?" from Ross himself.

"Very well, then. All I can say is that you are harming Mr. Duggan's case with your ridiculous silence, and if you're not pretty careful, might end in driving him into the prisoner's dock."

It was a "tall order"—and it almost carried, but not quite. For Macdonald gave out a smothered exclamation of amazement, swung around and looked at Ross, and then, meeting Maud Duggan's agonized eyes, tightened his mouth and faced Cleek again with the set expression upon his face.

"Ross Duggan's no murderer—and you know it, dash you!" he gave out in a harsh, curt voice. "And it's no business of yours what I was doing here last night. I'm a friend of the family

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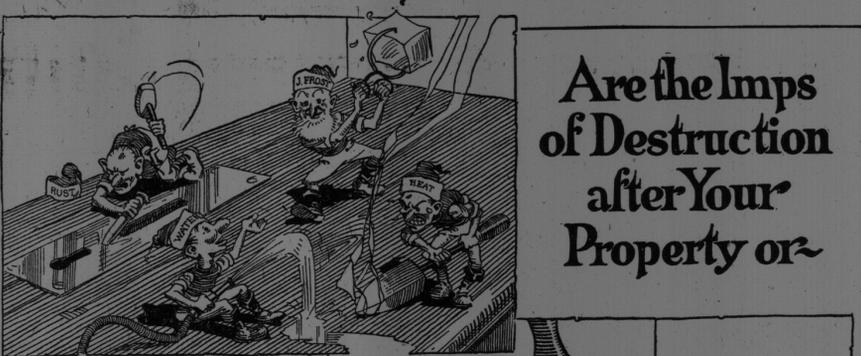
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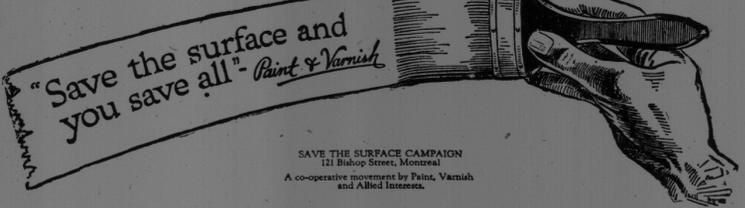


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