

THE EVENING TIMES AND STAR, ST. JOHN, N. B., THURSDAY, MARCH 8, 1923

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)

"Isn't it? Isn't it? I can see you have the love of Home and Race in you, too, Mr. Deland, just as I have it in me," she responded, with a little happy sigh. "And if only I had not this other trouble which hangs over me like the sword of Damocles itself, life would be a very happy thing, indeed. For when one loves and is loved—"

Her voice trailed off into silence, and she stood a moment looking out of the window, eyes alight, face aglow.

"Oh!" thought Cleek, with upturned brows. "So Love finds its way even to these Highland fastnesses. First James Tavish and Lady Paula's companion (if what Mr. Fairmish said was true), and now Miss Duggan herself."

"Who is the happy man?" he said smilingly, as she sighed and turned toward him.

"How did you know there was one?"

"How does any one know that any one loves any one else—when oneself

lozes?" he returned enigmatically. "Remember I, too, belong to the happy band. He lives close here, Miss Duggan?"

"Yes. Only a couple of miles away. But, alas! my father will hear nothing of him, and has even forbidden him the house."

"And may I ask why?"

"Certainly. Because he is poor. Father's god is Mammon, Mr. Deland. He knows and acknowledges no other. Angus Macdonald has received very little at the hands of that god."

"But a good deal at the hands of the only God that matters, I take it," put in Cleek softly, with a smile at her.

"Well, they say that Love laughs at locksmiths, and always finds a way. Time will give you your chance, Miss Duggan, and you'll have to be brave enough to take it. . . . There's someone coming, I think."

There was someone coming, for even as Cleek spoke the door swung open

and a tall, gaunt, white-haired old man, with a back like a ramrod and a face of granite, and with eyes that shone like pin-points of steel in the smooth pallor of it, came into the room, followed by a dark-eyed, dark-haired, well-complexioned woman with the long nose of the Italian and the brand of the true coquette stamped all over her.

Cleek recognized them at once. Here were the chief actors in the little comedy of what was at present a girl's imaginings, and which he sincerely hoped would never become anything else. What a hard face the man had! What a trap-like mouth! What a merciless, seeking eye! And the woman with him—all soft curves and roundness, with those luminous eyes of southern Italy looking out at him from the frame of her pale, ivory-tinted face, with already a hint of coquetry in her velvet depths for any well-dressed, well-portioned specimen of mankind. Beside the something rugged and clear-cut in Maud Duggan's personality—the something Scotch and enduring which is the birthright of those born beyond the boundary-line of England—this woman's pale suavity fell into a kittenish foolishness, became instantly trivial and beyond recognition.

At sound of their approach Maud Duggan turned hurriedly and waved a hand toward Cleek.

"Father!" said she in her low, level-toned voice, "this is Mr. Deland of whom I told you last night. Mr. Deland is engaged to Alisa Lorne, my old school friend at the convent in Paris—and he has come down for the fishing, and did me the honour to call upon me the very first thing. I have asked him to play and lunch with us."

Sir Andrew bowed stiffly and then extended a blue-veined and tremulous hand. Cleek took it and bent over it like a courtier.

"Very pleased indeed to see you, Mr. Deland," said Sir Andrew, in a deep, full-throated voice that spoke more of the man he had been than of the man he was now. "You are welcome to our hospitality now and at any other time."

"I am deeply grateful, sir, and thank you for your kind words. I have been hoping to make fuller acquaintance of you and your family—your wife? How do you do, Lady Paula?" I am enamoured of your charming surroundings and your glorious home. May I be permitted to congratulate you upon both?"

A fleet look flashed from her eyes, a swift warmth of friendship for this stranger who made her so much one of them who had never yet been made one by the family themselves.

"It is beautiful, isn't it?" Smooth as velvet her voice, warm, subtle, alluring as the country that gave her birth. "I love it—how I love it! Even though I am not of the Scotch blood, yet have I that birthright of my nation—home-love. Maud, dear, take me to the room where you have been living. I have still some matters to arrange with your father, so you must do the honours in my stead. And when Sir Andrew and I have finished with our little personal matters—she smiled suddenly, showing a flash of snowy teeth between the warm red lips which Time had not yet cooled to the more even tenor of England's blood—"then we will join you upon the terrace. And be sure and show Mr. Deland the electric-lighting plant, dear. He will be interested."

Maud Duggan flashed her a look of absolute hatred at this, for she saw the darkening shade upon her father's face, and noted the sudden clenching of the hand upon his stick.

"Cursed modernism and all its extravagant ways!" said the old gentleman in a bitter voice. "Spendings that which he should have saved, sir, upon a ridiculous experiment which has ruined

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the Three Fishers told you the story yet? He is usually to be relied upon to impart every bit of village gossip within the first five minutes of one's acquaintance."

Cleek threw back his head and laughed. They had entered a long, low-celled room, panelled in Spanish leather, with casement windows which gave upon a little walled-in enclosure surrounded by flowering shrubs and white-starred syringa-bushes that sent their pungent odour upon the air in one long waft of perfume.

"He's told me a good deal, it is true, but—What a delightful room! A library, I take it? And what a curious old instrument that is! I haven't seen a spinning wheel like that since I was in Wales and one stood in the corner of the room where I slept at the village inn. A sort of heirloom, I suppose?"

She nodded, and Cleek crossed over to the thing to examine it, touching it with his fingers.

(To be Continued)

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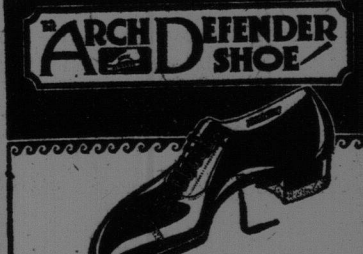
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ed the atmosphere of the place entirely. Wayward foot!"

"But it has improved your reading facilities, anyhow, Father," put in Miss Duggan in a quiet, resolute voice. Paula is not nearly so busy nowadays, when you can read your own newspaper—"

"As though I ever wanted to do anything but wait upon him—dear man!" struck Lady Paula reproachfully, and with an arch glance at Cleek, which did not go unreturned. "Your father is not so old a man as to be in his dotage. And if there is twenty years between us, Maud, it is hardly kind of you to bring the matter up like this. Perfect love should have no age nor yet youth. It should be as ageless as Eternity, as boundless as the sea, as high as Heaven itself. . . . Are you ready, Andrew dear?"

She bent toward the flattered and fluttered old man with that something in her gesture which has been the gift of every woman of her type all down the long ages since Scylla tempted Ulysses and Charybdis sent his head whirling with her lure.

Maud Duggan led Cleek from the room at that, and once out of earshot of this ill-assorted pair, whirled round upon him, a spot of anger showing in each cheek.

"You see, Mr. Deland, you see?" she rapped out excitedly, "how she misleads everything we say, and turns it all to her own ends? Oh, how I hate her—hate her! and have done so ever since she first set foot in this dear old home of ours. And Father—did you notice how worn and ill he looks? How his hand shakes so that he cannot steady it? Three months ago his hand was like a rock; his colour was as healthy as yours or mine. And yet your Mr. Narkom would say that a woman's intuition leads to nothing but her own foolish imaginings!"

"Hush, my dear young lady—have a care!" threw in Cleek quickly, at the sound of footsteps hurrying toward them, his line tightening in a way that suggested that he, too, thought there might be "something in it." "We don't want the whole place to suspect my mission. That is our secret, if you please. Now, show me the Castle, if you will—and whatever of interest which you think has bearing upon the case. Where is Lady Paula's son? Does he live here, or is he away at school just now?"

Miss Duggan shook her head.

"No—Cyril is a delicate boy, and the doctor has advised Father to let him stay home for a year and just run



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