

## 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 Saturday)  
CHAPTER XVII  
A Pair-Of Boots

Who, indeed? That King's Evidence was beginning to prove itself against still another member of this unhappy household—or, to be more literal, a would-be member—was clearly to be seen. What if the Captain's story of shielding someone else were a mere "blind," as he had thought once before? What if he was in league with Lady Paula herself, and using a pretended affection for Maud Duggan as a wedge to get into the graces of the household? Who knew? Stranger things had happened. But if he was sound enough to steal the heart of a good woman, such as Miss Duggan, undoubtedly was a good, honest, straight woman, then he was a black-guard indeed!

Cleek had come across just such things in his varied experience in Yard matters, and found his faith in human nature apt to be shaken by the least wind that blew upon it. And for the will to disappear—after Sir Andrew had declared that he would disinherit Ross and substitute the name of his sister instead—and not that name which Lady Paula had hoped he would substitute, the name of Cyril Duggan, as all her imaginings had led her to believe—what if, on the strength of this fact, the murder had been committed

to get the old man out of the way, and then to snatch the will itself, and—see what the Law would do for the widow and the progeny? Who knew anything of Lady Paula but that she was the daughter of a famous criminal who had paid the last penalty for his crime? And a graceless but fascinating woman at that. The whole thing might be a gigantic plot to wrest from the estates that that will of Sir Andrew was likely to leave to her and her immediate family.

Captain Macdonald and the good lady might share things between them, and then make off together when things had righted themselves and start again in another country. It seemed incredible after what Maud Duggan had said of him, and yet... Love blinds a woman's eyes even more than it blinds a man's, and the good Captain was a handsome devil, to say the least of him.

The web of his imaginings spun itself on and on during that brief walk back to the house alone, with the parcel containing those tell-tale hunting-boots under his arm, Dollops having been left on the outskirts of the wood to "keep his eyes open and see what he could see." It was remarkable how one thing led to another, tightening the chain all the time. Here was possible motive, surely, and what if that note had been written by the worthy Captain? H'm. That certainly was possible. And the initials were the

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same. Gad! it gave one to think, as the Law gave a widow a third share of everything—and in the case of no will her son had an equal share with the other children of the first family. And Maud Duggan had told him that Sir Andrew had left enough to live upon for herself and Cyril. . . . But all these estates in Scotland, that were not part of the entail, well, a third would certainly bring them more than that.

He didn't trust Lady Paula. He'd met her kind too often before to take her upon face value. But the Duggan's themselves came of far different stock. H'm. That might be it. And the air-pistol stunt simply used to throw the blame upon Ross. Gad! it grew more credible as one went on thinking about it. But there were loop-holes to be filled up before one could be even sure. The condition of Captain Macdonald's affairs would assist considerably. Maud Duggan had

said he was poor. Another link. He might even be in debt. Possibly was. Well, that must be looked into, too.

But if the thing had actually gone so far as murder, why had there been two of 'em—when one would have done? And Lady Paula had stood upon her liege-lord's right hand, and not upon his left. And it was through the heart that that little pistol had pierced. And Catherine Dowd stood there. And it was she who had tossed him the pistol in the first place! It was the devil's own doing, any way you looked at it. And not only Catherine Dowd, but Miss Debenham and Johanna McCall as well.

He reached the house at last, and stepping in through the French window that led to the great drawing-room by the back way, rang a bell there and waited for the maid who answered to come and speak to him.

"I want Miss Duggan, please."

The maid withdrew with a discreet, "Yesir," and it was not many seconds later when Maud Duggan herself appeared, looking pale and distraught and exceedingly unhappy.

"You wanted me, Mr. Deland?"

"I did. Just for a moment," replied Cleek gently, noting her dark-ringed eyes, and in the present state of his mental peregrinations feeling more than a little sorry for her. "I've something to show you. And I want you to tell me exactly to whom they belong and how you think they got where my boy discovered them."

Then he pulled the wrappings from his bulky parcel and set the hunting-boots in front of her upon a little marquise table.

She gave a sudden start, went pale as death, and shut her hands against her heart as though to stop its unruly beating. Her pale lips trembled.

"Angus!" she exclaimed in a wrung voice. "Where—did you find them?"

Cleek turned his head away, not to see her evident distress. It hurt him miserably to hurt her. It was like whipping a faithful dog that trusted you.

"I thought so. The name, you see, is in the boots. I found them hidden in the shrubbery, just near the gates, and brought them along to me at once. Do you know anything about how they got there, Miss Duggan?"

She shook her head vigorously.

"No. Not a single idea of it, Mr. Deland. That I swear," she returned with emphasis. "Those boots are undoubtedly Captain Macdonald's, of that I am sure. And so, as you say, there is the name inside. But they have not been used by him for a long, long time. It was nearly six months ago, I think, that he left them here, after a meet in our grounds, and before Father had found out anything about our—our caring for each other. He stayed the night, Mr. Deland, and Ross lent him some sleeping things, and then one of the men-servants carried his hunting togs over to his place the next day."

"And these boots?"

"He called for them, but I ask him not to take them away. You see, I—liked to have them here, for silly, sentimental reasons, no doubt. But I told him I loved to see them with the other men's boots—Ross's and Father's and Cyril's and Mr. Tavish's—in our harness-room, where the groom, Jarvis, always takes care of them and keeps them oiled, when not in use, to prevent them cracking. And so Angus laughed at me, and said they might stay, as he'd another pair at home—and teased me terribly over my babyishness. It may sound silly to you, Mr. Deland, but it meant a lot to me to see those boots there—belonging where I belonged. It was like a peep into the future. . . . And when the trouble with Father came, I wanted them there more than ever, to keep my heart up. To my knowledge they have never been moved."

"And yet my man Dollops found them under the shrubbery and in this condition this morning—after last night's terrible affair, Miss Duggan," put in Cleek quietly, keen eyes upon her face.

"It certainly looks black for Angus, Mr. Deland," she replied in a frightened voice. "But I'll swear he never used them. I'll swear it in court, if need be."

"How do you know?"

She stopped a moment and sucked in

her breath, and then a sudden look of determination came over her face.

"Because," she said steadily, "he was coming to meet me in the grounds last night, as he had come often enough before. We could never see each other in daylight, as Father had forbidden him the house, and so we stole our meetings at night, under the old oak tree at the bottom of the first lawn. You can't see it from the house, as that hedge of yew hides it entirely."

"And you saw him last night? You'll swear upon that?"

"I—I—that is—yes, I saw him last night," she replied, with flaming cheeks and upthrust chin. "First Ross, and now Angus! You're cruel, Mr. Deland, cruel as detectives can so often be! I thought you were going to help me—truly—and, instead, you cast suspicions upon the two people I love most dearly in the world! How can I possibly put you upon other clues? Anything to lead you away from such a false and utterly unwarranted suspicion?"

Cleek laid a hand upon her arm, and bending his head, looked down at her, a great sadness upon his face.

"Justice is so often cruel, Miss Duggan," he said quietly, "and to men in my profession we have so often to be cruel to be kind. I wouldn't hurt you for the world, believe me. But I must do my duty to the Law that employs me at all costs. I am not indicting your fiancé—truly—and there may be still another way out. Men have borrowed each other's boots before now. And if you can tell me the size of the feet of the men in this household, it will be a considerable help."

She lifted her eyes and looked at him, filled with a sudden hope.

"I can tell you Ross's this minute," she said quickly. "He takes eight. He has a small foot, like poor old Father had. And Cyril's, of course, is just a boy's foot—seven, I think."

"Any one else?"

"The butler, Jarvis. Our groom, Battchett, and the old gardener, McGubbin—and Mr. Tavish; but he's a huge man, and would take eleven, I should imagine—if not bigger. Anyhow, I'll make inquiries, and be back with you in ten minutes, if that will do."

"Make it twenty minutes, here—for I've other things to attend to," returned Cleek with a smile. "And don't worry more than you can help. Things will right themselves in time, you know; and there are lots of blind alleys in the pursuit of Justice which we often imagine to be the royal road to Rome. In twenty minutes, then. By the way, who attends to your laundry, may I ask? The sorting and counting of it I mean."

"You amazing man! What on earth do you want to know that for? Why, the laundry-maid, supervised by Miss McCall. One of her endless stream of duties."

"Thanks. . . . One more question. What do you know of Miss Catherine Dowd?"

She shook her head.

(To be continued)

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