

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)

"Only that she is Cynthia's cousin," she returned uncertainly, "and that she has been staying down here on and off all through the spring. She—she's rather fond of Ross, I believe, Mr. Deland—though for mercy's sake don't whisper it about! We call her 'La Gioconda,' you know. She's so odd and inscrutable."

"Exactly. I nicknamed her that myself. And I'll tell you another secret, too. She brought me this morning the letter which so obviously stabbed at your father. She says she found it sticking in the curtains. Have you ever discovered that the young lady gave a quick, uneasy laugh, and shrugged her shoulders."

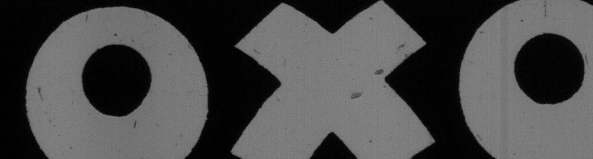
"Ross always says he wouldn't trust her on sight," she paraphrased, with a nervous gesture. "We've tripped her up—on purpose—lots of times, you know, as she does to one another. But to men, it seems a mean trick. I expect, Mr. Deland. Only, she elaborates so frightfully, you know. About her family and their money, and all the rest of it. And that's such frightfully bad form. If people really belong, they don't have to advertise the fact, do they? And Catherine advertises it rather too much. But I don't know anything actually against her."

"Thanks. And what of this Johanna McCall? Where did she originally come from? Do you know?" Her face softened visibly. You could see that Miss McCall held a warm place in her heart.

"Yes. I can tell you at once. Her foster-father used to be a bailiff of my father's in the good old days when money wasn't so hard to get, and even lead seemed to yield a richer harvest. The old man died at his work, and as he was a widower, with this little adopted daughter living with him, he begged Father to see that she came to no harm. And Father promised. And when she grew old enough, he gave her work in the house. Sort of secretary—Mother's help, you know. But when he remarried, Paula changed all that, and took her for her own sort of companion-lady's-maid. I believe she would have left us before now, after the treatment she has had, if it hadn't been for Father being her guardian, so to speak. But none of us can ever forgive Paula for the way she has treated her. It's disgraceful."

"And yet your father never complained?"

"My father never saw. But the girl has been made a pack-horse from the minute Paula set her foot in this house. She seemed to have marked her down for her own, and Johanna has



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ought to have been a lady-detective, using those methods," he replied lightly. "But it's odd—deuced odd! I'll take a look at their feet whenever I get the chance. Don't bother any more, Miss Duggan. I'll get to the bottom of this thing somehow or other, before the next few days, and don't make any mistake about that. That's all you can do for me. So go along, and lie down and have a proper rest. I'm going to interview Mr. Narkom again. What time is tea, by the way?"

"Half-past four. If you'd like it sent to your rooms with Mr. Narkom—"

"No, thanks; we'd prefer to take it with you." (And use our eyes for ourselves," he supplemented slyly.) Then, without more ado, bowed and left her, and went off in pursuit of a Superintendent, who had been spending a quiet hour investigating the scene of last night's tragedy, and trying to solve the riddle of it.

Halfway there Cleek encountered young Cyril, wandering disconsolately about, hands in pockets and head down, and at sight of Cleek he fairly ran up to him, his brows black as thunder, his young mouth set into an ugly line.

"Look here," he demanded in his shrill young voice, planting himself in Cleek's way and looking up into his face, "they've been telling me you suspect my stepbrother Ross of murdering my father last night, and I've been waiting to catch you and to tell you it's a damned lie!"

"Easy, easy, my young enthusiast," returned Cleek, with a throb of admiration for this fearless young man's nerve. "They'll never make a detective of you if your methods of attack don't improve hastily. Let's hear what you're worrying over. Now, then, all over again. I'm going along this way to see the Superintendent, and you can come with me if you like."

Cyril's face went a dull brick-red at Cleek's bantering tone, and his lips twitched. He swung into step beside Cleek as they traversed the long hall toward the library.

"They've been telling me," he reiterated, "that you think my stepbrother Ross killed Father last night, and—"

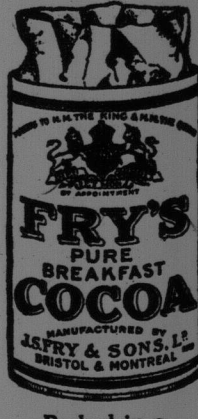
"Who's they, may I ask?"

"Oh—Mother—Miss Dowd, Cynthia—the whole batch of 'em. Said you'd threatened to arrest Ross last night—put him in prison. But it isn't true, sir, is it?"

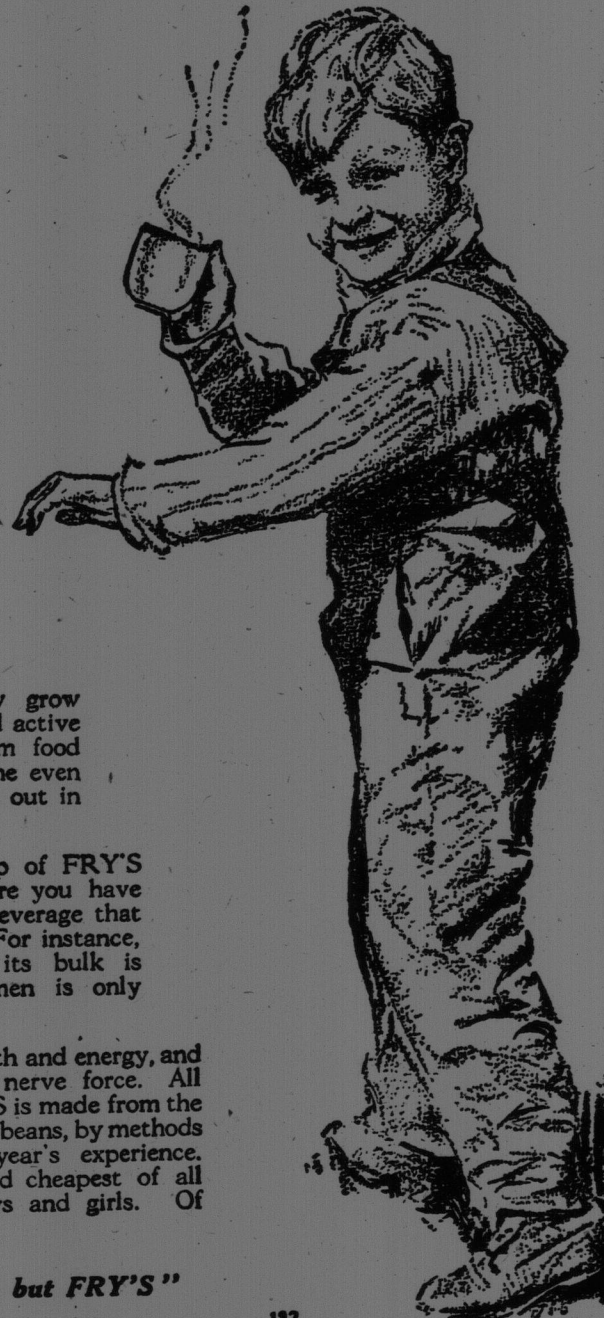
Cleek looked down at the eager young face, and sighed.

"Partly," he returned, "and partly not. I've made no accusation, Cyril, but—things point very blackly to your brother, and it will take pretty strong evidence to say he is innocent at this juncture of the case, at any rate. There are—others—whom I doubt, but at the present moment doubts are all that can be expected of me. Certainties will follow later. . . . Now, look here, you can help considerably. Tell me, who's been tinker with the electric switches in the library lately?"

(To be continued)



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land, and I can easily pay it back, so that it's nobody else's business, is it? But I wouldn't have Paula know it for worlds! She'd make my life a misery."

"As she'd make any one's—who stood in her way," thought Cleek, as the girl left the room, shutting the door quietly behind her. "So the worthy Captain is a debtor, is he? H'm! A very uncomfortable state of affairs, imagine. And that poor girl had only thrown fuel upon the smouldering fire, and helped to bank it up. For a man who is dogged by debts would stoop to a good deal, and if he is already in correspondence with her step-mother, by way of this little clandestine note, why shouldn't he do other things? There's a good haul, at any rate, bigger than that for which many a worse crime has been committed. And, besides, he must have hated the old man for forbidding him the house. So he might have worked off a bit of that, too. And yet—gad, it's a puzzle! I'll nip after Mr. Narkom and have a little talk with him! And no!—I'll see the laundry-maid first. Perhaps by now she will have remembered something with regard to that missing handkerchief."

Acting upon that impulse, he rang the bell once more, summoned the maid to him, and had a little talk with her there in the shaded drawing-room, and elicited a few facts which surprised him not a little in the puzzling mesh of conflicting clues which seemed to surround him upon all sides.

CHAPTER XVIII

Enter Cyril

Within the space of a half-hour Miss Duggan was back again in the big drawing-room, and Cleek, having had a short confidential talk with Mr. Narkom, and gleaned a few of that good gentleman's ideas, entered the room by the French windows that led on to the terrace just as she came in by the hall door.

"Hello!" he said with a smile. "Brought your bookmaker's department with you, eh? Now we'll really be able to establish somebody's innocence on that! Come, let's have a look at it."

She brought the paper to him, a sort of blank wonderment written in her eyes as they scanned his face.

"It's the strangest thing," she said with a shake of the head, "the very strangest! But every single man in this establishment has the same-size foot, Mr. Deland. There's nothing but tens' among them. It seems a queer coincidence, surely!"

Cleek pursed his lips up to a whistle of amazement.

"Gad! it certainly does. Every man—jack of 'em, then? Jarvis, and Batchett, and your bailiff Tavish, and McGubbins? Every one of them?"

"What a memory you have!" she countered amazedly. "Yes, every one of them. Except Mr. Tavish. And his is eleven, he tells me."

"Didn't give away any reason for asking, I hope, Miss Duggan?" put in Cleek at this juncture, with an arching of the brows and a keen look into her upturned face.

"Indeed I didn't. In fact, I threw them off the scent most successfully by taking a pair of Ross's boots along with me and pretending I didn't know whose they were. Batchett soon put me right. 'Them's Mr. Ross's—Sair Ross, if ye please, m'm,' he said, using Ross's new title (poor old boy! He won't like it a bit, either. He thinks titles are anathema!). But Mr. Tavish, of course, didn't know whose they were, nor did the old gardener, McGubbins, nor Jarvis, either. Only they said they weren't theirs. And then, of course, told me the sizes they took. So, you see, Mr. Deland, you can't blame Angus for that, can you?"

He smiled at her and shook his head. "You've missed your vocation," You



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