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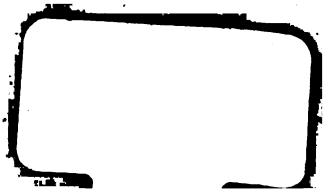

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THE RIDDLE OF THE SPINNING WHEEL

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THE RIDDLE OF THE SPINNING WHEEL

By MARY E. and THOMAS W. HANSHEW

AUTHORS OF

"Cleek, the Man of Forty Faces," "Cleek's Government Cases," "The Riddle of the Frozen Flame," "The Riddle of the Night," "The Riddle of the Purple Emperor," "The Riddle of the Mysterious Light," etc.

A. L. BURT COMPANY

Publishers New York

Published by arrangement with Doubleday, Page & Company

Printed in U. S. A.

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES
AT
THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS, GARDEN CITY, N. Y.

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THE RIDDLE OF THE SPINNING WHEEL

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The Riddle of the Spinning Wheel

CHAPTER I

THE GIRL FROM SCOTLAND

MR. MAVERICK NARKOM, Superintendent of Scotland Yard, looked up from the letter he was perusing, a wrinkle in his brow and one hand spread out over the sheet to keep it open, as the sound of a soft knock broke through the stillness, and with an exasperation born of the knotty problem upon which he was at work, called out an irritable "Come in."

Inspector Petrie's head appeared in the aperture, stiff hand at the salute.

"I know you wasn't to be disturbed, sir," he began apologetically, "but there's a leddy come to see you. Seemed distressed, and said it was urgent, and begged me for the love of 'even to let her in."

"And, being a religious man, you succumbed, of course," rapped out Mr. Narkom in a tone of exasperation. "Oh, well, where's her card? What with one thing and another, this morning's work

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has practically gone to blazes. Not a minute's peace, by James! What's the lady's name, Petrie?"

Inspector Petrie came forward, a strip of pasteboard in his hand upon which was engraved a name and something written in a woman's hand underneath.

"*Miss Maud Duggan.* H'm. Scotch, I take it. And what's this! *School friend of Miss Ailsa Lorne.* — Ailsa Lorne, eh? Haven't heard from her in a month of Sundays. Said her business was important — eh, Petrie?"

"Very important, sir."

"Oh, well, then, show her up. This cipher business requires entire quiet, and so long as I can't seem to enforce that, I might as well attend to the matter in hand."

"Very good, sir." Bowing, Petrie withdrew. Meanwhile Mr. Narkom slipped his arms into his coat — it was June, and the heat-wave had London in its grip, and allied with an equally warm problem he had thought himself fully justified in shedding it — and sat at his desk, drumming his fingers upon the top of it to the tune of "God Save the King."

A moment later "Miss Maud Duggan" was standing before him — a slim, pale-faced woman with dark-ringed eyes and a twitching, nervous mouth. She came toward him, hands clasped over heaving breast, entire body aflame with the intensity of her quest. Mr. Narkom, waving her to a seat with

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none too much cordiality, mentally labelled her "highly strung," and seated himself with an effort to interest himself in what she had to say.

"Miss Duggan, I believe?" he began, with a creditable attempt at cordiality. "Friend of Miss Lorne's?"

"That's right," she said in a hesitating voice, with just a trace of Scotch accent that told of the part of the British Isles which gave her birth. "I *am* a friend of Ailsa's — an old school friend — although we haven't seen each other for a matter of five years. But I wrote to her — when the trouble began — and she told me to come to you. Here is her letter, if you care to see it."

"I prefer to listen to your version of the story first, my dear young lady," returned Mr. Narkom, with a reassuring smile. She was palpably nervous. "You are in trouble, of course? No one ever visits these offices for any other reason. Now just set yourself at ease and tell me all about it. Is it a family matter, or what?"

"Yes, it is a family matter. And a very serious one at that, Mr. Narkom," returned Miss Duggan in her rapid voice. "And I am so worried I don't know which way to turn — and so, in desperation, I came down — all the way from Scotland — to consult you. You will help me, I know. It is about my father. His life is in danger, in very grave danger, and I am afraid that even now, while I am

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away, something may happen to him, and that woman practise her cunning successfully at last."

"In danger?" Mr. Narkom sat forward in his chair, his professional instincts awake at the word. "Who is the woman of whom you speak, Miss Duggan, and why should she have designs on your father's life? Begin at the beginning and tell me where you live, and all about it. There's plenty of time, you know. Things don't happen so rapidly as a lot of you young people imagine. You are Scotch, are you not?"

"I am. And my father is Sir Andrew Duggan, of whom you have no doubt heard. He — he has large possessions in Scotland. A big landowner, you know ——"

"And a hard one," said Mr. Narkom mentally, recalling certain paragraphs about the gentleman which appeared from time to time in the Scotch papers.

"Our home is at Aygon — Aygon Castle, in Argyllshire. And there are two of us by our father's first marriage — my brother Ross and me. Ross, as you know, is heir to the estates, of course, as eldest son of the line (that part of them which is entailed); but some seventeen years ago my father married again, an Italian woman whom he met upon one of his periodical journeys abroad."

"And this is the woman in question?"

"It is!" Her voice ran up a tiny scale of excite-

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ment. She shut her hands together and breathed hard, and leaning forward in her seat, let her big dark eyes dwell a moment upon his face. "That woman is a would-be murderer, a fiend incarnate, prompted to heaven knows what awful action by her ambitions for her son Cyril!"

"Your father's child?"

"My father's child. Cyril is sixteen this birthday — a nice lad, but with all the Latin traits of his mother's race — those traits which mix so badly with our Scotch character, Mr. Narkom. Paula has planned this thing from the beginning — slowly, secretly, steadily. She has planned to wrest the estates from Ross, to turn his own father against him, so that at the last he will remake his will and leave all that he possesses to Cyril — and rob Ross of his rightful inheritance!"

"My dear lady, have you any foundation for believing this?" put in Mr. Narkom at this juncture, as she paused. "An ambitious woman is not necessarily a potential murderess, you know."

"But this one is. One can see it in her eyes when she looks at Ross, and one can read it in every gesture — every thought that passes across her face. She is a dangerous woman, Mr. Narkom, who will stop at nothing. Her own father, I believe, had a career that was shrouded in mystery, so far as we can trace, but there was theft in it, and crime, too — that much I have ascertained. His daughter is the

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fitting descendant of the family. I repeat, there is nothing she will stop at — nothing! — and now that Ross has taken up with this electricity installation — he has been mad on engineering ever since he was big enough to toddle, but Father would not permit him to go in for it — Lady Paula has used it to her own desperate plans, and has practically succeeded in turning Father against Ross, so that the two hardly speak when they meet, and avoid each other as much as possible in the daily round of life."

"And what, my dear young lady, makes you think that — er — Lady Paula would wish to murder your father?"

"My eyes — and my ears, too. Both of which are sharper than one might imagine. When Paula mixes my father's food — he is an old man and full of whims and cranks, Mr. Narkom, and he has been much attached to his second wife and trusts her absolutely — and at night he takes bread-and-milk for supper, nothing else. And no one but Paula must make it. She has a little sitting-room of her own just off my father's study, where there is a little gas-stove and all the necessary paraphernalia for mixing an invalid's food, and last week I made a point of going in to watch her — found an excuse to get some notepaper and stepped into the room quietly. She was stirring the milk in the saucepan, and in her hand was a little phial of some whitish

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powder which she was just about to empty into it when the sound of my step startled her. Instantly she swung round, went as pale as death, and clapped her hand to her heart. 'How you startled me!' she exclaimed. 'You should not enter the room so softly, Maud. It is dangerous.' 'Not more dangerous than what you are at present doing,' I wanted to answer, but I dared not. I had no proof, and to accuse her without it might only make Father turn entirely from Ross and me in his quick-tempered, irascible fashion. But she slipped the phial into her pocket and finished making the bread-and-milk while I fumbled in the stand where the house paper is kept, all the time watching her from the tail of my eye. And I could see how her hands trembled, Mr. Narkom, so that she slopped the milk over into the saucer from the cup. It's poisoning she is practising upon him — I know it, intuitively!" She clenched her hand, and sent an agonized look into the Superintendent's face. "And all because she is determined to get the estates for Cyril, and then kill poor Father, and take *everything*, and turn us all out of our rightful home!"

Mr. Narkom took out his handkerchief and wiped the beads of perspiration from his brow. The day was warm, and this excitable and evidently very much upset young woman only made matters warmer.

"Come, come," he said in his paternal way. "Isn't that going a little too far — to accuse a

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woman of poisoning upon such slight evidence? How is your father's health?"

"Failing every day. Every day he grows weaker, but he will see no doctor — does not believe in them and will never let one enter his house if it can be avoided. But he is weakening steadily. And it is not because of his seventy-six years, either, for a haler and heartier man never lived — until Paula started this wicked thing upon him, and began making him bread-and-milk for supper. She says he eats too heavily; that it is not good for him. And Father takes every word as law."

"A somewhat unwise course with any woman — begging your pardon," put in Mr. Narkom with a smile. "And now tell me what arrangements your father has made for the future of his second wife and her son. Or don't you know?"

"As it happens, I do. Father is a great stickler for inheritance — or was until Paula got hold of him — and upon his marriage with her, when my brother and I were only children (I am twenty-seven and Ross is twenty-nine), he made this point quite clear to her, I understood, assuring her upon the birth of Cyril of a sufficient income for her own and Cyril's needs when death should claim him for its own.

"Paula, however, has always wanted Aygon Castle; always envied us as its rightful owners; always said what *she* would do with it if it belonged

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to her. And now that Ross has taken up with this electrical hobby (an extravagant one, as you no doubt know), he has installed a complete lighting plant in the Castle instead of the musty old lamps which we used to use, and has thereby frightened all the old tenants of the place nearly out of their wits. For they have never seen such a thing before!"

"And yet we live in modern times, and in the year of grace Nineteen-Twenty-Two," said Mr. Narkom quietly.

"But you must remember that our village is miles away from anywhere," she returned quickly. "It is a sort of rock-bound fortress which is almost as impenetrable as the fortresses of old. Miles of heather-covered hills and crags surround us, and the nearest town — Cragnorth — is a three hours' journey away. Many of the villagers have never even seen a train, so that this modern installation of electricity into the old castle is like some witchcraft that terrifies them. Paula has made a tremendous fuss, too, saying that the place is ruined, that it is vandalism, and has so inflamed Father that quarrels take place all the time between him and Ross, and he has threatened to disinherit him if he continues in such mad practices."

Mr. Narkom nodded vigorously several times.

"Aha! now we have come to the root of the affair altogether," he said with some satisfaction. "That

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was the point I was waiting for. Your father has actually volunteered that statement, Miss Duggan?"

"He has. And in my presence."

"And how does your brother Ross take it?"

"Ross has the family temper, Mr. Narkom. Ross said hot words which he should never have uttered, and then dashed off to his fiancée's house, three miles distant — a sweet girl, whom we all love — and did not come back until the next afternoon."

"I see, I see. A very unpleasant affair altogether. And you, naturally loving your brother, Miss Duggan, have pieced things together, and have now come to me to see what I can do for you? I must have a few minutes to think this over." A finger touched the bell at his side. Almost immediately a head appeared and Mr. Narkom gave his orders. "Tell Mr. Deland to come here, Petrie. I want to speak to him."

"Very good, sir."

"And now, to look the thing straight in the face. You can bring me no actual proof of guilt upon your stepmother's part but your own love for your brother and your woman's intuition, added to what you have seen. One can bank upon a woman's intuition very often — but not in a case of this sort. That you will readily understand. However, something is obviously wrong and wants looking into. So I've sent for one of my best men, Miss Duggan, and if he thinks enough of the case to take it up,

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I will entrust the matter entirely to him. He happens to have looked in this morning, luckily, and — here he is!"

Even as he spoke, the door opened, and Mr. Deland came in. He was a tallish, well-set-up man, with eyes neither green nor gray, but with that something in the bearing of him which mutely stands sponsor for the thing called Birth. And he was dressed in the trappings of the average young-man-about-town. Anything more unlike a police officer or a private detective would be difficult to imagine.

Mr. Narkom crossed over to him and, drawing him aside, with a muttered apology to the anxious-faced girl who watched him, spoke a few words in a low tone into his ear. Mr. Deland's expression changed from feigned interest to the real thing. The two men spoke again for a few moments in the same low-toned voices, and then Mr. Narkom addressed her.

"Miss Duggan," he said, rather pompously, she thought — "Mr. Deland has promised his interest in the case. I have given him but the barest outlines. It is for you to fill in the story in the manner that you have filled it in for me. Sit down, Mr. Deland. Now, Miss Duggan, please begin all over again."

She looked into this strange man's eyes with her own anguished ones, and bit her lip a moment to keep back the tears that had been impending since

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the beginning of her story. Her lips trembled. But the eyes were kind — and understanding. Something in the face spoke to her as lips can never do. She leaned forward in her seat, shutting her hands together one upon another in her distress.

"Mr. Deland," she said brokenly, "help me, please — *please!* I am in despair; every moment that passes! I am terribly afraid for Father's life, even as I have told Mr. Narkom here. But there are some things which a woman cannot tell. Those things which she feels in her heart — and has no concrete facts with which to explain them. Father will die if you do not come to my rescue immediately. He will die, and by no natural means. I tell you, my father is being poisoned slowly, and because of his very taciturnity none of us can save him! Even now, as I sit here, something tells me that things are not right with him, or with Ross, my brother! All my life long I have had these premonitions. There must be gipsy blood in me, I think. But there it is. Oh, help me to save him, to save my brother Ross's inheritance. And my blessing will go with you to the end of your days!"

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CHAPTER II

CLEEK TO THE RESCUE

SHE stopped speaking suddenly and choked back a sob, covering her face with her gloved hands, and for a moment Deland sat looking at her, eyes narrowed, and the curious little one-sided smile so characteristic of the man travelling up his face. Here was very evident distress indeed. And real, too, if he knew anything of women. And yet — where was the evidence, the intention to murder, as she had suggested? There was absolutely nothing to go upon but a woman's intuition — and that, strangely enough, very rarely went wrong. He'd bank a good deal upon a woman's intuition every time, and feel he'd get good credit.

"Listen, Miss Duggan," he said, leaning forward in his seat and surveying her with keen, critical eyes. "You are very grieved, I know, but, as Mr. Narkom has just told me, you have nothing to go upon but — *actually* — your own intuition. My friend here does not always bank on that. I do. A woman's intuition is often a great deal safer than a whole chain of circumstantial evidence. That is

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where Mr. Narkom and I differ — eh, old friend? . . . At any rate, as there is another case besides yours up in Argyllshire awaiting my investigation, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll come up to Scotland to-morrow — to-night, in fact, by the midnight train — and look into both cases at once. And if I can find anything requiring my assistance I'll gladly give it. How will that do?"

Mr. Narkom stifled an exclamation of surprise. Here was an interest which he had never dreamed of awakening. Cleek (for such was the admirable gentleman in his admirably cut clothes) rarely, if ever, showed such immediate interest unless there was more in the thing than met the eye in the first place. And although this Miss Duggan was obviously in earnest, he himself would be inclined to put the thing down to a woman's natural jealousy for her rightful possessions, and a natural love for the man who was beloved to her by all the ties of flesh and blood and for whom she would fight, if necessary, to the bitter end. He had seen this sort of thing before — and paid very little attention to it. The poison story was weak — undeniably weak — though no doubt Miss Duggan firmly believed in it. A thousand things might have been contained in the phial other than the poison to which her jealous mind had instantly leapt. Powdered aspirin, perhaps, or whatnot. And for Cleek to take such an immediate interest — *Cleek!*

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He sucked in his breath noiselessly.

"Gad!" thought he, "there *is* more in this than meets the eye; of that I'm sure, or he'd never take such an interest in it. Of course, there's those illicit stills in the same county, but . . . well, anyhow, I was right in sending for him, by James! It was worth taking a chance over."

Then he turned his eyes to where Miss Duggan had leaned forward suddenly, her wet eyes alight with gratitude and face instantly transfigured.

"Oh, will you? — will you? How good of you, how very, very good!" she ejaculated with a little half-sigh of utter relief. "That is all I ask, Mr. Deland. Someone will come and *see* — see for themselves how things stand at Aygon Castle. I tell you my intuition is very rarely wrong, and if harm does not come to my poor father before this week is out, then I have made the first mistake in all my life. But I'm not mistaken. Of that I am positively, absolutely *sure!*"

"Well, let's hope you are, my dear young lady," said Mr. Narkom, in his practical fashion, getting to his feet at a sign from Cleek, to show that the interview was over at last. "You are lucky to have the help of Mr. Deland, I must say. Personally I never thought for an instant that your case would interest him, but as it *has*, you'll no doubt meet on the midnight express — eh, Deland? — and travel up together? And now, as I have a lot of business

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on hand, I'll wish you a very good morning and good luck."

"Thank you." She got to her feet and put her gloved hand into his. "You have been very, very kind. And I hope, too, that you are right concerning my intuition. But I am afraid not. Thank you so much for — everything. And you, too, Mr. Deland. Shall I expect you to-night, then, by the midnight express, or would you prefer to travel alone?"

Cleek bowed.

"Certainly not. I shall be glad of your company, if you will permit me to travel with you, Miss Duggan," he responded gallantly — feeling, however, that he would have preferred to travel alone, if politeness permitted him to say so. "There will be a good deal of reading that I shall have to do, but if you'll pardon that . . . To-night, then, by the midnight express. I shall look for you outside the Third booking-office, at 11:40. And I shall already have secured two corner seats. Back to the engine, or not?"

"Back, please," she made answer, giving his hand a grateful squeeze on parting. "How kind you are! I feel hopeful already! Somehow, you inspire me with confidence, Mr. Deland. In your hands I know things will not go amiss. If we can only get there in time ——"

She shrugged her shoulders, and let the rest of

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the sentence go by default, and then, bowing slightly to each in turn, took her departure, a graceful, elegant figure, bearing in every line and look the mark of the noble ancestors of one of Scotland's noblest families.

As the door closed behind her, Cleek wheeled round, and striding over to Mr. Narkom set a hand upon each of his podgy shoulders, and stood a moment looking down into his face. Then he gave a short, sharp laugh, and let his hands drop.

"A dollar to a ducat but there's more in that than meets the eye," he said, with a lift of the shoulders and a twitch of the lip. "There's a woman who has sincerity written upon her soul, but hasn't a jot or tittle of actual evidence to offer us. Your method would be to send her home again, until she brought you the poison bottle or the cork of it, or the bread-and-milk into which the stuff had been poured — eh, old chap? . . . And mine — what?" He spread out his hands, and shrugged his shoulders, and swung upon his heel with a laugh for the rueful expression upon Mr. Narkom's face.

"Oh, I say, old fellow ——" began the Superintendent excitedly; but Cleek's uplifted hand silenced him.

"Familiarity breeds — the best of comradeship! —my friend. And a little dig in the ribs now and then should never be read amiss. I owe all I have to you, Mr. Narkom. You know the deeps of my

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gratitude. And if I am not permitted sometimes to tease . . . Oh, you silly old booby! You'll never be a policeman to the end of your days. There are too many sensitive nerves running round underneath that plump and portly exterior of yours. And your heart's too soft! But don't let us stray from our business in this ridiculous fashion, for time slips by and the hour isn't half long enough for what must be done in it. Tell me briefly what she told *you*, and in as near her own words as you can remember, and then I'll be off and away to make arrangements for to-night's journey. If there's nothing in this thing, I'll send you a wire: 'Empty.'

"You'll understand. If there *is*, then the word 'Full' will answer quite satisfactorily, without giving away our plans to any interested persons. As for the whisky-still business, what more perfect harbour for it than those craggy, heather-covered hills of Scotland? I'll have news for you, my friend, never fear; and immediately I hit upon anything, Dollops shall send it travelling over the wire in our own special code to you."

"What a man you are, Cleek! What a fund of restlessness, untiring interest and intelligence!" said Mr. Narkom, as he laid a fond hand upon Cleek's sleeve and looked up into his smiling face. "Gad! The Yard would go to pieces without you nowadays. You saved us from collapse in the old days of that Maurevanian business, when the whole

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country seemed to have run amuck — and blamed the police for it! And you're saving us every time now. What we'd do without your brains and your pluck and your wonderful birthright, which disguises you so successfully that even I, your best friend, don't know you, when you choose — well, I can't say. But my blessing with you, Cleek, and the best of luck! You'll find what you're looking for, I haven't a doubt."

"Yes, I'll find what I'm looking for, Mr. Narkom; I'm certain of that," said Cleek quietly, the queer little one-sided smile travelling up his cheek once more. "I don't wish to sound egotistical, but there are few things can beat your humble when his mind's made up. Else how would I have travelled back from the underworld into such a position of trust and uniqueness as this? Only that a woman's eyes lit the way for me, and a man's great heart opened the door — and the crook determined to become the gentleman, and pitched into it forthwith all he was worth. Cussed — that's me!"

"And *clean!* And with those two attributes Hercules was enabled to clean out the Augean Stables and prove himself ready for anything that came," supplemented Mr. Narkom, with a noisy sigh. "Cussed and clean! That's your motto. I'll back it every time. . . . Now, then, to business. We've thrown enough bouquets at each other to last for a lifetime! There's a dickens of a cipher

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case which is tying me into knots at present, so I need all my faculties to untie myself again! Here are the facts, Cleek. Nothing much, but you will make more than I can of them; so here goes."

And so it came about that when Cleek left the offices in Scotland Yard that afternoon, and strolled leisurely down toward his diggings in Clarges Street, he was in possession of the full story, just as Maud Duggan had told it to Mr. Narkom, and had gleaned therewith one or two incidental conclusions upon his own account.

The journey to Scotland was likely to prove a fruitful one. And he was to see the gaunt crags of that most majestic and rugged country under more interesting conditions than he had at first bargained for.

But *how* interesting and how tragically enthralling, even Cleek himself was not able to foresee.

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CHAPTER III

THE CASTLE O' DREAMS

TO SAY that Cragnorth — that little unknown village of the Highlands which lies like an eagle's aerie upon the crest of the hills, scattering its few dwelling-places like seed over the hillside and down into the valley below — stood half-an-hour's distance from the station was to underestimate the fact. For it took Cleek and Dollops and Miss Duggan two mortal hours of driving in the station hack before they came in sight of it.

And it was just as they reached a bend in the hill-road and came out upon a deep ravine, moss-covered and still wreathed with the mists of the morning, that Cleek saw Aygon Castle for the first time, and felt the whole true meaning of what it meant to these lairds of the Highlands to live here, generation after generation, giving to their children the right of ownership in the ancestral homes; it was just then that Miss Duggan turned in her seat and pointed with one arm out-thrown toward it.

"That's the Castle. Isn't it too magnificently beautiful for words, Mr. Deland?" she said, with a

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suggestion of a catch in her voice at sight of it. "With those mists wreathing it about, and all its dear, gaunt, worn turrets piercing the top of the world like that! Now you can imagine how I feel toward the — the woman who would wrest all this from Ross, take what is his rightful inheritance from him and give it to a boy who is only half a Scotsman, and with the blood of another country running in his veins! Now you can understand why I came all the way to London to see Mr. Narkom. Look on it, Mr. Deland, and drink in its beauty. The sight of it is like heaven itself to me."

Cleek did look on it to his heart's fill, and drank so deep of its majestic beauty as to be well-nigh intoxicated with it. The artist's soul of the man was afire with the chill grandeur of the place. From turreted towers rising through the gray mists, like the towers and the turrets of the Holy City itself, Aygon Castle was like some enchanter's palace, like some figment of the mind's weaving in those hours of day-dreams which lie between the dark and the day.

To the left of it a huge watch-tower reared its monstrous head to the blue-flecked Highland sky, set atop of which stood the figure of a man, gigantic and wrought in bronze, with the plaid of the Duggans sweeping across his shoulder and eddying out into a marvellous real billow behind him, one huge forearm raised in the hand of which was a battle-

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axe, standing out black and menacing against the early morning sky.

Cleek swept a hand out to it, while Dollops, silent up to the present, gave forth the feeling of his Cockney soul in one long-drawn "S'welp me!" of utter enthusiasm.

"Who is the gentleman of the axe, Miss Duggan?" said Cleek, turning toward her, his face alight with interest. "What a magnificent thing it is! And how he stands out against this Highland sky of yours — menacing, victorious, utterly sublime! Some ancestor, no doubt?"

"*The* ancestor. The greatest of all that great line of Duggans, or *Mac*duggans, as it was then," she responded in a hushed, exultant voice. "Chief of the greatest and most powerful clan of all Scotland, in those days when Scotland was a country apart, and the Scottish chiefs were little kings in their own dominion, ruling in absolute monarchy over their subjects. Rhea du Macduggan. That was his name, Mr. Deland. A great and powerful and just man. And when this Castle was built over the spot where his camp had been in those bygone glorious days, the Macduggan who had it built caused that statue to be erected, and had it wrought in finest bronze, to endure throughout the centuries. You can see for yourself how well Rhea has withstood the bludgeoning of time. And, too, you may understand a little, at sight of him, what

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this place means to my brother and me, and how loath we are even to entertain the thought of letting it get out of the family."

"And is the estate not entailed?"

"Unfortunately not this portion of it. That part which follows the entail comprises a couple of the adjacent villages and a lot of farmsteads out there across the valley. But the Castle — no. In olden days each son of the family fought for it against the surviving holder of it, fought a personal battle of strength to prove himself worthy of it, and then, upon victory — or proved worthiness — the will was made. The line has never been broken, Mr. Deland. And to-day my brother and I are as willing to fight for it as were our ancestors of old."

"And I don't blame you, either," said Cleek with alacrity, sighing a little, as though some thought of all this magnificence awakened an echo in his heart that would not immediately be stilled. "I know a little of that feeling, too. When a man loves his ancestral home, and his country, he will fight for it and die for it rather than that an alien hand shall take possession of either. That is the gift of Race, the inherent something that Family breeds in us. The clanship which belongs to an old and unbroken line. I know — I know. . . . Heigho! But it is an inheritance indeed. I am more in sympathy with you than ever before, Miss Duggan, for I, too, would fight for this against the hand of an enemy, and

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die fighting rather than that it should slip out of my reach. . . . And you mean to tell me that your brother Ross has installed electric lighting *here?*"

She smiled a little, and nodded her head as one might smile at thought of some child's deliciously childish and foolish action. One could see that she worshipped her brother.

"Yes, Mr. Deland. A complete installation, which is both the envy and the desire of every other land-owner for miles around."

"And why the envy, may I ask?"

"Because the fortunes of many are lower than ours. The Duggans were always the wealthiest clan in this part of the country. The other clans were poor. They are still poor. And we, too, are poorer than we were. The land takes nearly all our income to wrest something from its wildness besides the heather and the stretches of gorse-covered moor. We herd the flocks on those parts, Mr. Deland, but cultivation of the rest is very difficult. It is too wild, too barren. And the other big houses are indeed envious of our wonderful lighting arrangements. It has been the root of much friendly quarrelling among us. But the villagers are *terrified!*"

"I can well understand that — in this uncivilized quarter," put in Cleek with a smile. "Many, I have no doubt, still use the old rushlight of former days. . . . Ah, here is the village. My man and I had better put up at the local hotel, Miss Duggan, as

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a couple of fishermen — I'll be bound your salmon is wonderful in these parts, and I for one love the sport — and then we can effect an introduction by the aid of our mutual friend, Miss Lorne, and perhaps to-morrow I might be permitted to call upon you. How does that satisfy your mind?"

She put out a hand to him with an impetuosity that was foreign to her.

"It satisfies me splendidly. You are more than kind to take such an interest. Put up at the Three Fishers, by all means, Mr. Deland. The landlord is a kindly soul, and will give you every attention, I know. And then, if you will be good enough, call to-morrow morning — unless I have to send for you before then. And if so, how shall I do that?"

The hack drew up in front of the Inn of the Three Fishers and Cleek and Dollops dismounted, the latter entering the inn with their baggage, while Cleek stood at the side of the carriage, leaning over the edge of it to speak to its sole occupant. Beyond him, directly opposite to them, the village street broke off into a slope that led down into the valley, rock-bound and lichened over with heather-bells and the outstretched arms of prickly gorse-bushes. While on an adjacent hill directly in front and rising out of the valley itself up a steep mountainside stood Aygon Castle, its many windows commanding a distant view of the village, and practically upon a level with it, so that some of those

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same windows faced upon those of the inn, with the street and then the valley and the hillside on which it stood between.

Cleek waved a hand toward it now.

"Which is your own window?" he asked softly.

She pointed. "Fourth from the left. That tall, narrowish slit-like one. It has mullioned panes — see? There are only three others like that on this side. The fourth from the left is mine. Why?"

"Because," said Cleek meaningly, "if you want me, put a light in that window — a red light, for preference, as at this distance it would be easier to see. And light and re-light it three times. I shall be on the watch. And if not I, my man Dollops. Until to-morrow morning, when I shall call. Remember — three times, if you want me, and I shall come immediately — in my professional guise or not, as you like. And keep up your heart, Miss Duggan. Things may not be as black as you think. Fourth from the left, isn't it?"

"Fourth from the left. How kind you are! I shall never be able to thank you for all your interest. And I have a little disused bicycle lamp in my cupboard. It has a red slide. I will flash that — if I need you. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Cleek, smiling, and standing bareheaded in the early morning sunshine.

The carriage drove on up the hill, turning at the corner and winding down again into the valley, and

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from the outer wall of the street upon the opposite side one could watch its progress as one watched the movements of a fly upon an adjacent bank. Cleek crossed the road and stopped there, head bent, arms folded upon the low stone top of the wall. Round along the tortuous hill road it went creeping along, at an incredibly slow pace it seemed from his position above it, on and on and on into the valley, and then up, up, up, the opposite hillside, through bushes and shrubs that screened it now and again from view, and betwixt immense boulders, until eventually it came abreast of the huge wrought-iron gates of the place and passed between them out of sight.

And as it disappeared Cleek turned upon his heel with a deep-drawn sigh.

"Gad! what an inheritance!" he mentally commented as he crossed the road and entered the portals of the inn itself. "Enough to fight for, indeed! Mr. Narkom, old friend, this is one of those subtle things which your middle-class upbringing could never understand. One of those things which belong to the few and the chosen. Heigho! And Esau bartered his birthright for a mess of pottage. She'd fight for it — and so would I! A nice girl — hysterical, high-strung, but full of the pride of race. The fourth window from the left, she said. I'll put Dollops on the job, while I snoop around a bit for myself, and see how the land lies. Mine host

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might possibly put me wise to a good deal, as our American cousins say."

So he strolled into the bar-parlour, and ordered a tankard of ale, and over it made the acquaintance of that particular specimen of rugged Scotch manhood who was for the time being to be his host.

"Fine views in these parts," said he, conversationally, and in the man-of-the-world-tourist-idiot voice which he affected upon occasions. "My man and myself want to put up here for the fishin', doncherknow. You can fix us in all right, I suppose?"

"Cairtainly, sair. Therre's plainty of rume in th' Three Fishairs," responded Mr. Fairnish, with a smile of welcome, and in that inimitable accent which is Scotland's own, and which rings like rugged music upon the ear of the stranger to those parts. "We've a nice bedroom facin' th' Castle. It'll be a grrand vi-ew in the mornin' wi' yer tea. And yer man — we'll find him a shake-down nearrby, if ye so wish ut."

Cleek liked on sight this genial host with his mellow accent.

"Well, I'd prefer for him to be within reachin' distance of me, doncherknow," he said, with an inane grin into the red-whiskered countenance, blue-eyed and lined with exposure to wind and weather, that glowed above him.

"Cairtainly. If ye weesh it; Mrs. Fairnish will show ye yer rume, and anything ye may want ——"

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Cleek raised a detaining hand.

"Please don't be in any hurry," he said pleasantly. "I've all day here before me. Come down to do a bit of fishin', doncherknow. Fine sport in these parts, they tell me. And that's Aygon Castle, is it? I know the young lady, Miss Duggan, slightly. Grand place it looks, to be sure."

Mr. Fairnish raised his eyes ceilingwards. His hands followed them.

"It's a heavenly spot indeed," he said piously, as one might speak of some religious place of worship. "One of the grrandest in our whole country, sair. You'll be visitin' there, no doubt?"

"Oh, possibly. A friendly call, doncherknow. What's the old chap like who owns it?"

Mr. Fairnish cast a hurried look on either side of him. The canny Scot showed uppermost in his visage. But the coast was clear. Only a boy of ten or twelve played at the other end of the bar with a roughly made engine of wood, dragging it to and fro over the tiled floor.

"Sair Andrew's a harrd mon — a dour, harrd mon is Sair Andrew," he said in a low, harsh voice, and with a wrinkling of face muscles which spoke volumes. "I wudner cross his path unless I could help it. Harrd, sair, harrd as nails. And wi' a grrasp on him for every penny!"

"Oho!" said Cleek in two different tones. "Mean, is he?"

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"Mean wi' ye call it? Mean? There's no worrd ter expraiss what Sair Andrew is at all. Not in the language, sair. But he's got a fine bailiff ter manage th' land, and 'tis wi' him the people deal. Not wi' Sair Andrew. Mistair Tavish, now — he's a fine chap, wi' a greeat hearrt an' a helpin' hand for aiverybody. Mistair Tavish, now, he's a gentleman, sair. Not a block er grranite, like th' old landlorrd!"

Cleek smiled. So even in these rocky fastnesses of the silent Highlands a man liked his bit of gossip, and loosened his tongue to pass the time of day with every stranger.

"Very interesting, Mr. ——"

"Fairnish, Robairt Fairnish."

"Mr. Fairnish. And what about the rest of the family? Mean also?"

'Aw no, sair. Not Mistair Ross, at any rate, nor Miss Duggan, either," supplemented Mr. Fairnish, lighting his pipe with one horny hand and leaning out over the bar the better to address Cleek. "Another ale, sair? — cairtainly. Mr. Ross, now. A fine fellow, in spite of his strrange ways and his wonderful apparatus. He's lit th' whole Castle with electricity, sair; and Sair Andrew has no got ovair the effect o' it yet. He does nought but grrumble and growl at Mistair Ross for th' expainse and th' noosence of it, until, so I haird, th' Castle be no pleasant spot to live in. And his wife, Lady Paula Duggan ——"

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Mr. Fairnish raised his hands and eyes in a very expressive gesture.

"You don't like the lady of the Castle, then, Mr. Fairnish?" interposed Cleek, tossing off his ale and setting the empty tankard down upon the bar in front of him.

"Like her, do ye say, sair? Like her! Show me th' pairson in th' whole deestrict that does, and I'll tell him he's a liarr — if ye'll pardon my language. There's nought in the countryside that does like her — a black-haired, weecked foreigner like hersai'f — though ye'll no repeat my worrds, I pray, or 'twould go harrd with Robairt Fairnish when next rrent-day comes round. But never a bairnie that has ought to say that's plaisant o' her — th' black-eyed witch-wummun! An' that's a fact. She speaks a heathen tongue, sair, an' I never trusts a foreigner. They're suspeeshus characters, the best o' them."

Cleek threw back his head and laughed — laughed heartily.

"Well," said he, with a shake of the head, "perhaps you're right. Though I won't say that my experience has always been just that. However, the lady does not seem to find favour in your eyes. Mr. Ross Duggan I haven't met."

"A fine upstanding gentleman, sair, wi' ne'er a mean bone in his body."

"And Miss Duggan?"

"A gentle, kind creature wi' a hearrt o' gold.

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She'd do nought to harrm anny one, sair, and I've proof o' that — bless her! Nor Miss McCall, either."

"Miss McCall?"

"Lady Paula's companion and handy maid, sair. A leddy, if I knaws one. Engaged to Mistair Tavish, I unnerstand — though 'tis not yet given out to the gran' folk. But the' ha-ve th' saft look in their e'e for one anaither. And 'tis juist that it means. A puir freeted creatur' wi' an e'e fer the ghost o' the Castle. She'll have a fine mon in Mistair Tavish, I assure ye. And now 'tis time ye saw yer rume, sair, or I'm no a guid host ye'll ken."

So saying, Mr. Fairnish moved away from the bar reluctantly, as one stung by duty into doing something for which he had no relish, for bar and Fairnish were as synonymous as the Dawn and the Day — and almost as inseparable.

Cleek watched him with upflung eyebrow and keen eye. Then he followed, and set a hand upon the garrulous fellow's sleeve.

"Mr. Fairnish," he said quietly, "you've interested me immensely. My own fellow-folk, you know — what is it that Pope says? — 'The proper study of mankind is man.' Well, it's like that with me. Perhaps I'm over-curious — there are a lot of us like that in this world. But you mentioned a ghostly visitant of the Castle just now. You were speaking in jest, of course?"

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An imperceptible something passed like a shadow over Mr. Fairnish's rugged face. He gave a shiver.

"In jest ye tak eet?" he said a trifle huskily. "Weel, 'tis in airnest that I spoke. For nevair a step near the grounds will ought o' th' countryside go at night. 'Tis a lang story, and I've no time to be tellin' it thee noo, sair, but here's a leetle. 'Tis a peasant-gairl that a Sair Andrew of the sixteenth century, I ken, abducted from her propair parents (they lived in the Lowlands, so I've heard tell), and brought to th' castle and locked up — for his ain pleasure! 'Tis a sorry tale, for the puir maid deed o' a broken hearrt an' a broken speerit, too, I tak' it, nigh on to twelve months latair, wi' a leetle one juist come ter gladden her sore hearrt."

"Indeed? And what became of the child, then?"

"No one knaws. 'Twas said 'twas stealed at night by the granfer and speerited awa'. And 'twas said th' de'il himsaif cam' an' claimed eet. No one knaws that parrt o' th' story, but there's a mony who says they du. Only the peasant-gairl hersaif haunts the Castle tu this day, sair, and stalks th' whole place over from top tu bottom, an' inside and out, a-lukin' fer her sheel."

"Poor girl!" There was genuine sympathy in Cleek's low-toned voice, and at sound of it Mr. Fairnish spun round and looked at him, his own face brightening.

"Then ye believe in eet?" he said. "Fer yer

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voice tells me so. And so du I — an' aiverybody in these parrts. And wi' a mon so harrd as Sair Andrew as laird, ye ken what a puir time the gel must have had long ago — wi' another of 'em th' same. You're a sympathetic gentleman at hearrt, sair, I knew it on sight uf ye, so ye'll be takin' a worrd of advice from me, and no be out in the grounds at nicht, when there's no mune. 'Tis said she twists the neck of every man she sees at nicht-time in the grounds after dark, as a revenge for what she suffered at the hands of one. Ugh! but it's a sorry tale and no prettier fer the telling, I ken. . . . If ye come this way, sair, I'll introduce ye to my ain leddy, and she'll tak' unco' care o' ye."

"Thanks."

Cleek swung into step behind him and mounted the wide shallow oak stairs of the place to the tune of Mr. Fairnish's deep-pitched voice calling for "Mary! Mary!" In the fullness of time "Mary" appeared, and resolved herself into a buxom, high-bosomed, rosy-cheeked Highland lass, whom Mr. Fairnish had taken to wife (the second for him) last January. She appeared almost as garrulous as her husband, and while she showed Cleek his room — a long, low-ceiled bedroom overlooking the Castle and with windows across one end of it — she regaled him with tid-bits of gossip of neighbouring parts, and incidentally added to his already plentifully filled

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store of knowledge of the "Castle-folk" the fact that Miss Duggan herself was secretly engaged to a Captain Macdonald — one of the poorest landowners of those parts — who, because of his poverty, was forbidden the house by Sir Andrew, and promptly sent about his business.

"A harrd mon," she said, as her husband had done, standing in the frame of the open doorway with arms akimbo, and looking the true Scots lassie she undoubtedly was. "And sich a nice gentleman, tu — that Captain Macdonald. Reel gentry, Mr. Deland, sair. I've often thocht what a peety it was tu see 'em pulled apart like thaat. Ye'll be wanting some hot water, sair, I ken."

"Thanks. I'd like some, certainly. And my man ——"

"He's made himself at home already," she responded, beaming at him. "And he's in my keetchen th' noo, eatin' an airly lunch. He towld me ye'd come fer the fishin', sair. We've a-mony come fer that to these parrts. That'll be all, I tak' it?"

"That'll be all."

At which the good woman withdrew her tongue and herself, and left Cleek a trifle dazed by the positive fount of garrulity at which he had been drinking this past half-hour, and a good deal interested in the Castle-folk to boot.

He walked to the window and stood looking out of it at the magnificence of Aygon Castle that rose

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like some dream-palace before his admiring eyes. And as he looked he counted the windows across that part of the building which faced upon the village.

The fourth from the left. Well, she'd possibly never need to signal, and yet — one never knew. And there was a ghost, too, and a horny-fisted and hard-hearted landlord, just as the penny novelettes would have had it. Quite interesting; quite. But the arrival of hot water set every other thought but that of cleanliness out of his head, and he gave himself up to his ablutions like a schoolboy on holiday.

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CHAPTER IV

THE MORNING CALL

NO RED light showed itself at Miss Duggan's window that night — though Cleek sat up until the soft fingers of the dawn were wreathing the sky with lavender veils and the face of the morning peeped through, like some goddess stepped down from Olympus to smile upon her lesser fellows. And it was then, and then only, that he sought his bed and the comfort of cool sheets at last.

Dollops, knowing his plan, did not disturb him. And so it came about that the clock upon the mantel had chimed out ten before he opened an eye and looked about him, sleep still dimming his vision and making the unfamiliar room doubly strange.

"What the — how the — Gad! if it isn't ten o'clock, and I've been sleeping like a noodle ever since dawn," he said, springing out of bed and donning dressing-gown and slippers to have a first glimpse out of the window at that "fairy sight" which Mr. Fairnish had promised him with his cup of tea. "Well, she *is* a beauty and no mistake! Good morning to you, fair Palace of the Mists.

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What secrets are locked away in your breast this morning, I wonder? Well, the night has passed tranquilly enough to be sure, and that poor girl's terrors are stilled for the present twelve hours, at any rate. I'll call there after breakfast and scrape acquaintance with the lot of 'em, and judge if Mr. Robert Fairnish is as good an observer as he is a talker."

And directly after breakfast that was exactly what he did do. Dollops, armed with fishing-tackle and rods, received his marching orders in full sight and sound of the inn's proprietor, knowing full well that within five minutes of that time all that he had said and done would be ablaze over the village, if he knew aught of that garrulous tongue of his.

"Be off with you, Dollops, and have a look at the river," said Cleek from the shelter of the open doorway, as Dollops wended his way slowly down the path to the wicket-gate which led out on to the road. "And see what fish lie in those waters. And if you don't come home with a twenty-pounder, you're no angler, my lad!"

Dollops nodded and winked.

"Right you are, sir. As Mr. Asquith says, better 'wait and see.' And if I don't bring 'ome a twenty-pounder, I'll bring 'ome a twenty-yarder, at any rate. Fer I'm a fair dabster for eels every time."

"Sounds more like boa constrictors and the

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jungle than Highland rivers and modest eels," retorted Cleek, laughing heartily. "And I'm paying a call at the Castle and making my respects to Miss Duggan. So if I'm not back for lunch, Dollops, don't fancy dreadful things and imagine I've been consumed by the ghost-lady who haunts those lovely turrets and towers, but come home and wait for me."

Dollops stopped in his tracks and sucked in his breath hard, and the freckled brown of his Cockney countenance took on a queer drabbish shade. He came back again along the path and stopped in front of his master, mouth hanging open, eyes wide.

"Ghosts, sir! Did I 'ear you use the word *ghosts?*" he ejaculated with a perceptible shiver. "Br-r-rh! I doesn't mind dealin' wiv any kind of *'uman* — but wiv them in'uman species I'm a reg'lar goner! You ain't arskin' me ter meet the lidy, are yer, sir?"

"Not yet, my boy," returned Cleek, with a laugh and a shake of the head. "So you needn't worry yourself about that. And if I do ask, you may be sure I'll be asking nothing that I would not — and will not — partake of myself. Get along with you, and don't bother your head. When I want you to call, I'll come, too. You can count upon that."

"Well, so long as I don't 'ave to call alone I doesn't mind so much," retorted Dollops. Then, swinging round in his tracks, he went off down the pathway, whistling that very hackneyed but popular

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tune, "Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Ole Kit-Bag and Smile, Smile, Smile!" While Cleek, watching him for a moment, felt a sudden warmth of feeling toward the rough-mannered but warm-hearted youth who had followed him — willy-nilly — ever since they two had met upon that memorable far-off day when Cleek had made himself responsible for the boy's safety.

A leisurely cigarette smoked in company with the worthy host, and then Cleek took up his soft "squash" hat, seized hold of his blackthorn stick, and with a nod and a smile to Mr. Fairnish, swung out into the roadway, monocle screwed into left eye, well-cut tweeds setting off the splendid figure of him, and looking for all the world like the leisured, perfectly turned-out exquisite who journeys so far out of his beaten track only in pursuit of a sport which vastly amuses him, and to whom Bond Street and the very outer edge of the Western Highlands are all one and the same thing, so long as he can get a day's amusement out of them.

The walk to the Castle was not as long as he expected. It was, in fact, but a brief fifteen minutes over a rough, hilly road which in parts was little more than a track, and which swung up and down so unevenly over the moor that walking was at times difficult. Half-way there, as Cleek turned the corner of a little ravine and came out upon a full view of the valley, with the Inn of the Three Fishers to

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the left of him and the Castle to the right, he heard the *thud-thud* of a horse's hoofs, and in a moment more, drawing up against the bank to allow whoever was coming to pass, he saw a rider approach from the right and go through a gate which led apparently to the Castle grounds. As the rider passed, Cleek stepped out into the path with a sudden impulse and raised his hat.

"I say," said he in his London drawl, as the rider dismounted and, removing his hat, stood before him — a fine figure of a man in Scotch tweeds, measuring a good six-feet-two of staunch muscle and bone, with the shoulders of a giant and a big-featured, kindly face, and the blue eyes and high hooked nose of the typical Scotsman; the all-observing eye of Cleek noticed that one of the stranger's fingers was bandaged, as if it had recently been cut. Cleek instinctively liked him. "Can you tell me," he said — "awfully sorry to stop you and all that — but can you possibly tell me if this is Aygon Castle? Looks like it from the pictures, b' Jove, but photography's frightfully deceptive — what? Friend of mine — a Miss Duggan — Miss Maud Duggan, I think the name is — lives there, doesn't she? I happened to come up here yesterday for the fishin' — awfully fond of it and that sort of thing — and promised to call whenever I was out this way. I'm right, am I not?"

"Perfectly right." Cleek liked the deep, ringing

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voice which answered him, as he liked the shrewd blue eyes that travelled so rapidly over his tweeds. Liked, too, the hard, grim mouth which broke into such a charming smile, transfiguring the whole face as though a light had been set behind it. "And Miss Duggan does live here. You're keen on fishing, I take it. Well, so am I. It's a man's sport, and there's few Scotsmen who don't like it. My name's Tavish — James Tavish — and I'm agent for Sir Andrew Duggan's estates. We'll possibly meet each other up the river some time, for I spend most of my spare time there."

"Thanks. I'd like it immensely. Fishin's a lonesome game alone. And though I've brought my man with me, and he's a dab hand with the tackle, one gets a bit bored sometimes. I'll probably see you up at the Castle, Mr. Tavish, and we'll improve our acquaintance. Many thanks for your courtesy."

So saying, Cleek passed on up the rough road, while his new friend remounted the little chestnut mare he rode so magnificently, and went galloping off up the incline, making a fine picture against the rugged scenery of which he seemed such an inseparable part.

Cleek reached the Castle gates at last, rang the huge bell, and waited while the lodge-keeper unfastened them for him and inquired his name, went with him up the long sweep of gravelled driveway

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with its bordering of yews and young pine trees lending an air of picturesque gloom to the place even upon that bright morning. And having reached the great oaken front door — a monstrous affair scarred by the ruthless hand of Time as much as by the mailed fists which must have thudded upon it in far-off days, or by the spears and battle-axes of past Duggans who in this fashion had left something more definite than a memory for their ancestors to cherish — pulled the chain of the bell, and waited while the jangling echoes of its noise died away into silence before his summons was answered.

At length the door opened. He caught a glimpse of a dim interior, lofty as a church and dark with the panellings of old oak which flanked it upon all four sides, and then gave his name to the pompous old butler, and was taken into a little ante-room redolent of age — that mothy, curtained odour as of a room but rarely opened and still more rarely used — and within a moment or two Miss Duggan was standing there before him.

"Mr. Deland! How good of you to have come so soon — how very good!" she said warmly, extending a hand to him in greeting. "You must surely stay and lunch with us, now that you have come all this distance. And I want you to meet my father." Her voice dropped a tone or two. "Paula is with him now, going over the housekeeping accounts — it is a daily matter upon which he is very insistent.

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Ross is in the laboratory, tinkering over something to do with the lights, but he'll be out in a minute. I told him I had met you on the train, and that we had got into conversation and found we were congenial friends through Ailsa Lorne. You know her well, don't you, Mr. Deland?"

He smiled, and for a moment his eyes softened.

"Rather well, I fancy, as she has consented some day to throw in her lot with me and marry me," he returned in a happy, low-pitched voice. "And that is why any friend of hers, you know, must be a friend of mine as well. I'd like very much to have a look at the Castle, if I might be so permitted. Architecture interests me immensely. It's a hobby of mine. And this is surely one of the grandest old stately homes that Scotland possesses!"

"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.

"Oho!" thought Cleek, with upflung brows. "So Love finds its way even into these Highland fastnesses. First James Tavish and Lady Paula's

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companion (if what Mr. Fairnish 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 loves?" 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. And 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

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the room, followed by a dark-eyed, dark-haired, sallow-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 their velvet depths for any well-dressed, well-apportioned 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 recognizance.

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 Ailsa 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

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me the very first thing. I have asked him to stay 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 during my short stay in these parts I shall hope 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 Mr. Deland round, won't you? 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 *per-*

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sonal 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. "Spending that which he should have saved, sir, upon a ridiculous experiment which has ruined the atmosphere of the place entirely. Wayward fool!"

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

"As though I *ever* wanted to do anything but wait upon him—dear man!" struck in Lady Paula reproachfully, and with an arch glance at Cleek which did not go unrewarded. "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

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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 lips 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

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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 wild. He is generally with Ross."

"With *Ross?*"

"Yes, the two are sworn friends. Cyril's heart is wrapped up in Ross, Mr. Deland. He never for one moment suspects what his mother is trying to do — wrest Ross's inheritance from him so that he, Cyril, should have it instead. It would break his heart, I think. Wherever Ross is to be found you may be sure Cyril will be there also."

"Damon and Pythias, eh? Strange that the son loves what the mother hates, isn't it? I should like to meet this boy."

"You shall — when we reach the laboratory. He's sure to be there helping Ross. He is like his shadow, that child."

"And he is sixteen, you say?"

"Next October. And a firm believer in our ghost, Mr. Deland."

"Then you have a ghost and all complete?"

"Of course. Hasn't Mr. Fairnish of 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!"

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Cleek threw back his head and laughed. They had entered a long, low-ceilinged 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 a part here and a part there with reverent fingers.

"Yes, I suppose you *would* call it that," she responded, crossing over to him and looking down at the thing in question. "Though, really, why Father has it here I cannot imagine. Its history is certainly not a credit to the line. For it belonged to the very girl I was going to tell you about. It belonged to the Family Ghost. Here is the story. The villagers believe it to this day, and couldn't be persuaded to enter the Castle grounds at night upon any pretext whatever. But of course the educated folk don't. Early in the sixteenth century a wild head of the Macduggan clan abducted a

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young — and I imagine beautiful — peasant-girl when she was sitting at her wheel, spinning, and ran away with her — wheel and all — and brought her here, so legend says, to this very room. The girl, whose name, I believe, was Dhurea, or something like that, stabbed herself with the sharp-pointed spindle of the wheel, and in doing so laid a curse upon the Macduggan clan. She — she was going to have a child, Mr. Deland, and as she was dying, she swore that in every generation a Duggan should die a violent death, and that the sound of her spinning wheel should predict the moment when death was near."

"Oho!" said Cleek, in two different tones. "That differs a good deal from the story Mr. Fairnish tells me. There was a child, I understood, and this child was stolen by the grandparents. That's not correct, then?"

"There are various interpretations of the legend. No one knows the truth — only that she killed herself and cursed the family in that unpleasant manner."

"And has the curse come true?"

For a moment Miss Duggan hesitated. Then she sent startled eyes up into his face. There was the look of a dog at bay in them.

"I don't believe the story, Mr. Deland! I don't believe a *word* of it, for such things cannot possibly be, in this civilized country," she answered in a

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scared tone. "And yet — ever since that day, one at least of each generation has died unnaturally. And now — in *this* generation there is only Father and Ross. . . . This peasant-girl is supposed to haunt our dear Castle, and after midnight to stalk the place over, looking for the man who dishonoured her and who has been dead these many generations past."

"H'm! I see. And so, naturally, she cannot find him. A weird story, and more pleasant in the daylight than in the dark. And this is the lady's spinning wheel, I take it? Your father has it by his writing-table, I see. Rather in the way, isn't it?"

"It used to stand over there, in the corner, but Paula declared that it was too dark there, and that it did not show to its full beauty. So she moved it. Father lets her do whatever she wishes. And of course it does show better there, by the window, doesn't it? And as it's Father's *left* hand that comes beside it, Mr. Deland, I don't really see that it much matters."

"No, I suppose not. . . . Hello! we've been a long time here, haven't we? And I haven't seen the half of the place yet. Isn't that the luncheon gong? Or is it just your tangy Highland air that makes me hungry enough to imagine it?"

"Neither," said she, laughing. "That's Rhea's bell. It hangs just under the bronze statue of Rhea — you remember the one I showed you yesterday

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as we came home together? — and it rings upon the entrance of any one through the great gate. A clumsy contraption, which has never been altered in all these years."

"But quite useful — with unwanted visitors," he replied, stooping suddenly and picking up something off the carpet. "Hello, what's this? Looks like a bit of flexible electric wire. Something of your brother's hobby, no doubt."

He held it out to her in the open palm of his hand. It was just a little scrap of crimson-covered flexible wire, and she barely noticed it.

"And . . . hello, hello! No electricity used in here, either. I suppose that's because your father doesn't approve?"

"Yes. Ross wired the room — or had it wired with the aid of an electrician — and then installed the light. But Father was so angry that he would rarely ever use it. Sticks to the musty old lamp over there, for most things."

"And is the room still wired?"

"Yes. There's a wall plug over there by the door. Why, Mr. Deland?"

"Oh, nothing. Then that would account for this fragment of flexible wire, wouldn't it? H'm. Yes. I see. I see."

But what he saw he did not at that moment mention, and Miss Duggan had to guess at his meaning.

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"But it was done ten days ago — I must really speak to the servants and tell them to keep the place cleaner than they do. Fancy leaving odd pieces about like that!" she ejaculated, sensitive to any suggestion of poor management upon the part of Castle authorities. But Cleek did not hear. He was standing over by the wall-plug, looking down at it, and then kneeling, began to examine it minutely. She watched him in amazement, unused to his methods.

"Why, Mr. Deland ——"

"Oh, just looking at how your brother does his work. Quite a good workman, isn't he?" said Cleek, rising slowly to his feet, and pocketing the bit of flexible wire forthwith.

And that was the last word she could get out of him upon the subject.

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CHAPTER V

A STARTLING DISCOVERY

WITHIN one short hour Cleek had explored the Castle from end to end, in company with a tireless girl for whom every stick and stone of the grand old place held a memory that was as sacred to her as the church is to the priest who has passed all his days in the service of it. But they met no other members of the family just then. Only, as they passed through the left wing, where the servants' quarters lay beyond, Cleek was introduced to Johanna McCall — paid hireling and companion of Lady Paula, and not too pleased with her job, either, if all he read in that frightened face of hers was true.

He found her a little pale slip of a thing, with wide, anxious eyes set in an ivory-tinted, utterly colourless face, and with hair that was "mousey" and straight, and a mouth that might tremble at an unkind word as a child's does.

She bowed to him timidly and extended a slender hand.

"How do you do," she said, in a soft, toneless sort of voice which matched her poor, toneless, ut-

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terly downtrodden personality. "Your stepmother, Miss Duggan? She is in the study, I suppose? I have her embroidery silks, and she wanted them immediately. But it took such a time to get them disentangled. Master Cyril was playing with them last night. I — oh, I do hope she won't be angry!"

"Don't worry, Miss McCall. Rome won't fall, you know, even if she does speak an unkind word to you in her hasty fashion," gave back Maud Duggan, with a kindly pressure of one hand upon the frail girl's arm. "And she's busy just now with Sir Andrew. Looking over some accounts, I believe. I should wait for her in her boudoir, if I were you. She's bound to ring if she wants you."

"Yes, perhaps that would be better."

Miss McCall hurried down the corridor, silent-footed, as a paid companion should always be, and Cleek shook his head as she vanished through an open door at the end of the passage.

"Poor little frightened thing!" he said softly. "And all for a pittance which, in her sort of profession, must necessarily be small!"

"Yes, and she works like a black for it, too," gave back Maud Duggan heatedly. "Slogs away all the day long, running errands for — *her* — sewing, darning, mending, writing interminable letters which Paula tears up afterward and decides not to send. And gets not a crumb of comfort for her pains. Paula is terribly hard upon her, Mr. Deland. I

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wonder the girl stands it; only — there's an attraction."

"And you women are endurance personified — in those circumstances!" he responded with a little significant laugh. "When your hearts are involved, your common sense vanishes to make room for it. I've seen it a thousand times before. . . . Really, Miss Duggan, you have been an indefatigable guide. I don't believe there's a nook or cranny of this place which I haven't seen, is there?"

"Only the cellars — or, properly speaking, the dungeons. And they're of no interest to anybody. Father keeps the wines down there, of course, and anything that does not require too much storage. But, excepting for the cellar, the place is never entered from one year's end to another. Not a servant would go down into them for double wages. The peasant-girl is supposed to stay there when she is not out on her nightly prowl for the man who abducted her!"

"Indeed? That's interesting. I suppose I couldn't go down? Dungeons are a perfect passion with me, for I've an insatiable curiosity, and always want to go poking my nose where no one else does. Sort of brand of my profession, I suppose. Do you think you could find energy enough to take me down?"

"Certainly."

She led the way down an L-shaped passage, which led past the kitchens and the servants' hall, and

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gave out upon a little stone courtyard set apart from the house and bounded about with a high wall through which arrow-slits gave the true mediæval touch, and then down to the right of this through a huge oaken door which opened noiselessly, showing a flight of steep, uneven stone steps leading down into a dark, damp-smelling interior.

At the top of the steps she paused and looked back at him over the curve of her shoulder, making a wry face.

"You still want to go?" she asked jestingly. "I'm a brave woman, Mr. Deland, but I wouldn't undertake this journey alone for anything! There's — *rats!*"

"As well as ghosts? But this is morning, and Scotland, and the twentieth century — so lead on, Macduff," he answered her in the same jesting spirit. "Or would you like me to go first?"

She shivered and twitched up her shoulders.

"No; I'll do the honours properly. This way. If you've a torch on you, you'll need it at the bottom of these stairs. It's as dark as pitch."

"I have."

Cleek produced it, and they proceeded upon the uncanny journey. The steps led down, down, into what seemed the very bowels of the earth (which indeed they were), until they reached a little square opening from which iron-grilled doorways looked out upon them from every side, saving for one oak door

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on the left, which Miss Duggan pointed out as the wine-cellar.

"H'm! And smells like it, too," put in Cleek, with a sniff. "What's behind that door is worth a fortune, I'll be bound. Hello! here's a candle-end stuck in a bottle! Now, who the dickens uses that, I wonder?"

"The servants, I suppose. They come down through their own stairs, Mr. Deland — over there on the left — you can see them if you look hard enough. They're wooden ones, and were put in by my father's grandsire, for the convenience of the house. The servants don't like this way at all. They prefer to come through the butler's pantry."

"And those stairs lead up there? I see. Hello! Here's a chain attached to this iron post. What's that?"

"The prisoner's chain. This room here"—she pointed to the grilled door opening next to the cellar —"was kept for political prisoners, I believe. And those two across the way were for personal enemies of the family."

"And are there any others?"

"Yes — through that first door on the right — but you won't get *me* to go into them," she responded with a laugh. "It's horrible in there. There's a rack and one or two thumbscrews and other articles which belong to the Spanish Inquisition period; as well as rats innumerable. My bravery vanishes at this point. I'll not go a step farther!"

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"But you don't mind if I do?"

"Not a bit. I'll wait here. But there's nothing to see — really. And it's getting perilously near lunch-time."

Cleek cocked his head persuasively at her.

"I won't be a minute — really. But that thumb-screw has got me guessing, as our American cousins say. I suppose there's no lock on the door? Gad! but it opens easily enough. Been fairly recently oiled, I take it?"

"Not that I know of. In fact, I don't believe any one's been in the place since Ross came down here, three months ago, to show a friend round. Perhaps he oiled it then."

"Perhaps. I won't be a minute, really. And I've another torch, if you'd like it. Here." He tossed it to her, and, keeping his spot light ahead of him, entered the dark, dank, evil-smelling place, his footsteps ringing upon the stone flooring and sending the echoes scampering into the corners, together with more tangible — and verminous — things. There was nothing in the first room, but beyond it he came upon the Torture Chamber and all those instruments of cruelty which marked a less kindly period of the world's history. And this Chamber was larger than the other cell. Rusty hooks hung from the ceiling, of incredible size and suggesting unthinkable horrors, and over all hung the odour of damp and decay, mingled with some-

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thing more modern, which caused Cleek to stop suddenly and sniff like a terrier scenting a rat.

"Strange!" he said to the silence and the solitude of that awful place, "but she said the cellars were over there! But if someone hasn't been drinking spirits here a short time ago, I miss my guess! And, what's more, someone *has!* A solitary debauch, I suppose. Now, who the dickens would have thought it?"

His torch caught a glimmer of something that shone like glass — which *was* glass, in fact, and resolved itself into a cracked tumbler beside which stood a syphon of soda and an empty bottle smelling strongly of whisky.

"Whew! Nice little place for a quiet read and a smoke — I *don't* think!" he apostrophized it. "With rats in the corners and ghosts all around — brrh! He's a strange fellow who likes this sort of company, I must say. But there's nothing to be nosed out here in this pleasant little den. I'll just take a glimpse through the next one, and then get back to Miss Duggan, or she'll be getting the creeps and run."

He had started back, and had just swung his torch through the doorway beyond, when of a sudden he stopped, sucked in his breath, and fairly ran into the place, head down, nose to the ground, like a dog, every faculty alert.

What he saw there is not recorded, for just at that

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moment he heard Miss Duggan's clear voice calling him, and he had perforce to answer. But he had time to stoop suddenly and swoop down upon something white but slightly bloodstained which lay on the ground before him, dart a hasty glance at it, and cram it into his pocket, before swinging round upon his heel and answering her summons; and all the time saying to himself: "Who'd have thought it? Now who the dickens would have thought it?"

Meanwhile he fingered the slightly bloodstained handkerchief which he had picked up, and upon which by the light of his torch he had remarked the initials "R. D." embroidered in one corner. And he laughed softly and joyfully clapped his hands together.

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CHAPTER VI

WHEN THE SWORD FELL

LUNCHEON at Aygon Castle resolved itself into a somewhat dull and ceremonious affair, and although there were a good many of them round the festive board, conversation languished and laughter was noticeable by its absence.

"What a devil of a family to live with! — sitting as though there were a cold-water poultice on top of 'em," mentally registered Cleek as he surveyed the company and tried his best to add to the general interest by anecdotes of a recent tour in Ireland; but his conversational efforts evoked only an occasional "Indeed?" from Sir Andrew. Entertaining these people ought to be a paid task in itself, he decided. They hadn't got any further with civilization than the hired-jester period. Gloom was glory to the atmosphere of that room during the interminable meal. He looked from one to another keenly.

First the old laird, solemn as a judge, and concerned only with what was put before him, with the strange greed of the very old; and at the foot of the table, his lady, offering a contrast that was as dark-

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ness to day. Cleek sat on the right of his host with Maud Duggan beside him, and opposite her brother Ross — a big, broad-shouldered, hawk-nosed chap with the small blue eye of the Scot, keen as a knife-blade, and showing in the winged flare of nostril the blood that ran in his veins. A likable, clever fellow. Cleek warmed to him on sight. And yet — his eye swung on him again. Next to Ross sat Miss McCall, eyes downcast, speaking only when spoken to, very patiently the servant of a mistress who would instantly quell any attempt at familiarity or breach of position upon her part; and next to Miss McCall, little Cyril, black-haired, brown-eyed, wide-lipped as any other Italian boy, with the soft olive bloom upon his cheeks that is youth's own birthright.

"And they called him Cyril! — a wishy-washy name like that!" thought Cleek disgustedly, looking long at him. "What a perfectly beautiful boy! And looks delicate, too. No wonder the mother loves him. There's something appealing in those pansy eyes of his that would lure blood from a stone. I must have a chat with him later on. He'll tell me much of this strange family, if I get the right side of him to begin with."

He commenced tactics right away, and caught Cyril's boyish fancy in a wonderful story of a heroic and marvellous engine-driver whom he had known.

"And I'll tell you some more about him, too —

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after lunch is over — if you'll take me out and show me the grounds of this beautiful place," he promised, with a nod and a smile which won Cyril's hero-worshipping soul instantly and gained for Cleek an ally who, if handled in the right way, might prove more useful than he had at first imagined. "There's one story I remember about the Calais express, and how that chap got the better of a pack of Apaches who were after the mail-bags. Gospel-truth! — it's wonderful! We're goin' to be good pals, Cyril, I can see."

"Only, please, *please* do not fill his mind up with any more imaginings, Mr. Deland, than he has already got for himself" threw in Lady Paula, with an arch glance at Cleek and a little self-conscious laugh. "He is already filled to the brim with his stepbrother's electrical madnesses. Ross has woven a spell over him, I think, in which — what do you call it? — flex and tungsten and short-circuits and all the rest of that impossible jargon of these light-fiends are inextricably mixed. I sometimes fear for Cyril's sanity! He talks in his sleep all night long of these things, and then wakes in the morning, pale as death. But I cannot make him do other than spend all these beautiful, long summer days in that stuffy laboratory with Ross, watching him at what he calls his experiments."

She flashed a smile into Ross Duggan's suddenly flushed face, as though the words she spoke bore

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no intended sting and innocence alone had prompted her to speak her mind thus freely. But the timed shaft had its desired effect, for Cyril turned quickly upon his mother with darkening brows.

"So silly of you, Mater, not wanting me to learn all about that ripping electricity. And Ross knows such a lot, too, and I love to sit and watch him. And he lets me help sometimes — don't you, Ross?"

"Yes, old chap."

"Well, then, I can't see what all the fuss is about, Mater. I really can't. Why, that light in my room's ripping for reading at night, instead of the fuggy old lamp we used to have there, and ——"

An agonized look from Maud Duggan sent his brave words trailing off into nothingness. But already the mischief was done. The black cloud had settled upon Sir Andrew's face, and the sluggish blood was clotting in temple veins and cheeks, telling of the anger within. The pin-point eyes under their beetling brows were more steel-like than ever. He rose to his feet suddenly, and brought one shaking fist down upon the table-top with a force that sent the glasses jangling and the table silver rattling to the tune of it.

"Have done!" he thundered furiously, trembling in a rage that had become an old man's obsession, and which responded to the constant playing upon it like a deep-throated viola in the hands of a musician who understood it; "have done with all this

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extravagant nonsense! Haven't I threatened Ross enough as it is, to take his time-wasting, money-eating experiments out of my house? — and now he not only disobeys my spoken word, but actually causes the illness of my youngest son himself. Pale? — of course the boy is pale! Hanging about indoors in a stuffy room, watching his father's money poured out like water to tickle the fancy of a fool who is old enough to know better! I'll have none of him — none of him! He may sing for his bread and butter in future! — go out into the streets and beg for it, as better beggers than he have done! But he'll leave the house — he ——"

"Father!"

It was Maud Duggan who spoke, rising quickly and hurrying round to him, to put an arm about his shaking shoulders. "We have a guest — a stranger ——"

"This is no time for guests or strangers! The moment has come, and I'll have done with it once and for all!" he thundered back at her, with an old man's persistence, and the single-mindedness of the ill and aged. "Mr. Deland will pardon what must seem an extraordinary outburst, but Mr. Deland will not stop it. I am master here, and my will is law. I mean to enforce it. My mind is made up. Shall I watch my boy Cyril grow up into just another such maniac, think you? Until he has not rested content but that the whole Highlands be lit with

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his precious electricity — at the price of his father's fortune? . . . Paula, my dear — m-my medicine ——" He shook slightly, and then an ague took him and he trembled. He dropped back into his chair, a huddled, shivering old man in whom the power of his anger had burnt the frail spirit into a mere husk of its former strength; and in an instant Lady Paula was upon her feet, running round to him, and fumbling as she ran with her fingers in her bodice.

"My dear! — my dear! You must not so excite yourself. It is not good for you. Not right," she said soothingly, taking his head in her arms and pillowing it against her breast; meanwhile with her other hand she deftly unscrewed the top of a little bottle she had drawn from her blouse, and shook out one tiny pellet, which she placed between his trembling lips. "Take this, dearest, and you will feel better. . . . A light drug, Mr. Deland, which the doctor orders at such times. Poor dear! — poor dear! it is such a constant worry to him, this continuous quarrel with his own flesh-and-blood. If you had really loved your father, Ross ——"

"As *you* love him, no doubt I should be able to emulate your methods of attack better," he returned, stung suddenly out of his bitter silence by the reproach. "But I have been brought up in another school, Paula, where we deal square blows that do not strike below the belt, and where we do not let our ambitions play upon a flattered old man's

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affections quite so cleverly or so perceptibly as you do!"

"Stop!"

The mischief was out, the damage was done, and in one moment that dull and insignificant luncheon-table had been transformed into something that was more like a third-rate melodrama than a family quarrel among people of the better class. But the thing had been thrashed out so many times before that politeness had worn thin, and each one spoke his mind with a bitterness which left nothing to the imagination. Here was the actual canker of a family's innermost heart, with all the outer covering worn thin by constant bickerings and the whole ugly reality of the thing starkly revealed.

Cleek's face went grim as he watched the blanched faces about the table. The stammering, broken voice of Sir Andrew tore into the sudden silence. The old man was struggling up out of his chair, and from the detaining arms of wife and daughter, face livid, lips twitching, the vein in his transparent temple standing out like a piece of blue whip-cord. His clenched hand shook in the air, trembling with the force that he put into it.

"Stop it! How dare you say such words to my wife — how dare you! You shall pay for this, Ross Duggan, and pay dearly! To-night I alter my will — to-night I strike your name from it forever and make the estates over to someone else. But

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your name goes out of it — as you do — *to-night!* . . . Paula, your arm."

He swung toward his wife with all the dignity of his years and his inheritance, and took the arm she held out to him, clinging to it as a child to its mother's skirts, and falteringly left the room, where his words had fallen upon those remaining like the sword of Damocles itself. Ross had gone white — deathly white, as had Maud Duggan herself — and all the indignity of this thing before a stranger to their household showed itself in his tense countenance.

"Gad! I'll go — and go *now!*" he rapped out, in a very fever of fury and outraged pride. "And glad to get away, too! Such an infernal hell-nest of a place as *she* has made out of a decent British home!"

"Ross! She's my mater, you know."

"Sorry, old chap! I forgot for a moment. But it shan't occur again. I'll be off, Maud, and get along to Cynthia's. She'll have something to say about this, I daresay, and her Guv'nor will probably give me a leg-up in finding a job. I'm better out of this. Mr. Deland, you've been the unwilling victim of an unpleasant scene — and a family scene, which is most unpleasant of all. I must apologize to you. Had I foreseen anything of the sort, we would have postponed your luncheon until a later date. It might have been more agreeable for you. Good-bye, and I'm sorry I shan't see more of you.

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I'm clearing off now, Maud — you can send along my things later."

Maud Duggan's eyes searched his face, a look in them of agonized question, as if she was unable to believe the evidence of her own ears. Then she ran to him and caught him suddenly by the arm.

"Ross, dear, you mustn't be so hasty! You mustn't!" she entreated, squeezing his arm in her two hands as he looked down at her with his set, angry face. "You know Father, dear. He'll wish in half an hour, he'd bitten his tongue out sooner than spoken to you like that. You know he will. You're his first-born and his favourite — as you have always been. Try and see this thing clearly. Don't act in a hurry, dear. Just wait — wait until this evening, for my sake if not for your own. Don't leave me here to stick the thing out by myself. It isn't fair to me."

That last plea seemed to strike home better than all the others had done, for the anger faded suddenly from his countenance, and he laid a hand against her cheek before swinging upon his heel.

"Well, I'll think about it, and see what Cynthia says, anyhow," he replied, after a pause. "Only, I've reached the end of my tether, and human nature won't stand too much. Sorry, Miss McCall. Did I tread upon your foot? I'm so blithering angry I don't really know what I'm doing, so you must forgive me."

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And for the first time the company seemed aware that Johanna McCall had been a silent spectator of this family scene. For she had kept, as usual, as quiet as a mouse, only, Cleek observed as he looked at her, her eyes had blazed with that one light which no fire can quench, and she had shut them for a moment, as though to hide the secret they revealed from Ross Duggan's troubled face.

"It's all right, really. And I'm so — awfully sorry, Mr. Duggan," she said in her soft, monotonous voice. "It is so unfair, so unjust! And please don't go — without saying good-bye — to me."

Then she, too, turned upon her heel and fled out of the room. And suddenly Cleek saw one thing startlingly clear. Miss Duggan had mentioned "an attraction" in Johanna McCall's eyes. That was why she stayed on here at the Castle and endured so much. But she had given him to understand that it was Tavish.

But it was *not* Tavish who had inspired that unquenching fire in those pale eyes; it was *not* Tavish who had set that hero-worshipping expression upon the plain, unattractive face.

It was the disinherited heir to the estates himself!

That afternoon, after he had left the Castle and its inhabitants behind, he wired Mr. Narkom, as

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he had said he would. The enigmatic words which flew across the wire to Scotland Yard, in their own particular code, and made Mr. Narkom fairly jump with excitement, were these: "*Full up right to the brim. Come along. Cleek.*"

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CHAPTER VII

THE SUMMONS

CLEEK left that house of anger in a strange frame of mind, rather glad to be back again in his own sunny room at the Three Fishers, and away from an influence which seemed somehow horribly malign. The pitched battle that had taken place between father and son — egged on by a designing woman who did not mind to what depths she stooped so that her ends were eventually reached, gave him an eery feeling. There was something venomous about the whole affair, something that reminded him of an asp about to strike. He could not shake that feeling from him. The premonition held firm hold of his faculties.

A walk with Dollops over the moors certainly acted as a refresher, for the lad's ready humour had the true Cockney bite in it and he had seen, with his keen eyes, how the master he loved and reverenced was brooding under the shadow of something he sensed although he could not see. And so his comical faculties were put to good work. Until — tea-time at length reached — Cleek returned to the Inn of the Three Fishers, a little less clouded in

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heart and brain, and with some of the moody depression shaken from him.

He spent the rest of the afternoon and early evening reading and thinking by the open window of his room, looking out now and then at the whole massive structure of Aygon Castle, with its great gateway, above which Rhea du Macduggan stood everlasting guard. Gad! anything might happen there — and the world be no wiser! It was an appalling thought at best. What secrets had that place held in the past and never revealed to the light of day? What secrets might it not hold in the future?

And those dungeons. The thing he had seen there. . . . And that handkerchief — so obviously belonging to Ross Duggan, and which now lay in his inner pocket. He fumbled for it and brought it out to the light, examining it minutely. Fine linen, finely monogrammed. Very obviously the handkerchief of an extravagant gentleman. But what on earth *he* should be doing down there, amidst *that*, was something which sent the grim lines fleeting about Cleek's mouth and eyes. It couldn't be he — the son of a proud old house like this one! The thing seemed impossible. And yet — there was the handkerchief to prove that fact; and then this electricity business, which obviously ate up a good many private funds. H'm. It would want close looking into, if nothing further proceeded with Miss Duggan's part of the affair.

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For an hour or two he sat pondering and dreaming there, the book he had caught up absent-mindedly from the billiard-room book-case lying open in his lap.

The dinner-gong sounding through that quiet house brought him quickly to his feet, a sense of sharpened appetite lending pleasing colour to the thought of what the dining-hall afforded, for mine host believed in setting a good table, and his hospitality was by no means frugal.

Dollops was already standing by his table, expectant eye upon the trim maid who waited upon them, for during this little sojourn in the Highlands Cleek had expressed a wish for the lad's company during meals, and old Fairnish had told his spouse that "Misthair Deland were an unco' queer pairrson tu wish the company of his mon wi' 'im at mealtime, but so lang as he paid his bill prampt, 'twere nought of hees business."

And that was why Dollops was waiting now with that hungry eye of his upon the plate of steaming soup which the maid was bringing to the table. Only his respect for the man who had raised him to his present status kept him from dropping into his seat and gulping the stuff down straightaway.

Cleek smiled as he saw the lad's eager eye.

"Sit down, sit down, Dollops, and set to," he said with a laugh, laying a hand upon the boy's sleeve with something of tenderness in the gesture.

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"Your eyes are like hard-boiled eggs, they're popping out of your head so. Hungry, I'll be bound."

"'Ungry — I means hungry, sir? . . . starved's more like it!" gave back Dollops between mouthfuls of hot soup. "Why, I'm that 'ungry me backbone's well-nigh come rahnd to me front! Nuffink since tea — although I must say as I nabbed a roll from the kitchen table when the cook wasn't lookin', and there was a cold sossidge fairly talkin' ter me from the plate in the larder. And so, as there weren't no one around, I just whistled to 'im, and he 'opped off his platter quite tame-like. But fer anything else. . . !" The last spoonful went down with a gulp.

"Dollops, Dollops! You'll be eating the wake up at your own funeral, you young gourmand!" threw in Cleek laughingly. "You've a constitution like an ostrich. I'm sure, if you were actually starving, you'd manage to gnaw an umbrella — spokes and all! . . . Heigho! This is a queer world, isn't it? Here's me sitting here in this little inn-place, on the top of the Highlands, with the heart of me wandering away in other places, and the soul of me sometimes hungry for the sight of other worlds across the sea — to which I've closed the door of my own accord and shut the sight of their dear blessedness forever from me! And there's those people up at Aygon Castle. Bitter, cruel, hard to each other. Pulling this way and that, until

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their hearts must break with the strain of the fray — and with the whole structure of their dear inheritance forever with them, so that they need never hunger and thirst for a sight of it as — as others do. Heigho! but it's a topsy-turvy, crazy sort of a world we live in, isn't it?"

Something in the tone of Cleek's voice caused Dollops instantly to pause. Eyes wide, mouth open, face gone suddenly pale, he set down his knife and fork and reaching a shaking hand across the table laid it upon Cleek's.

"Guv'nor," he said, in a scared, hushed sort of voice, "you ain't a-wishin' ter go back — to all them Maurevanian royalties, are yer? Wiv a throne an' a crahn and a bloomin' spectur in yer 'and? You ain't a-pinin' fer the Crash Pots, I 'opes? For as sure as I know anyfink of anybody, they'd never let sich folks as Mr. Narkom an' — an' — *me* come within twenty miles of yer. And you ain't — ain't wishin' ter l-lose us, are yer, sir? It would fair break my 'eart if I thought *that*."

Cleek put back his head and laughed, laughed heartily, with his eyes wet. There was a sob in the boy's voice as he spoke, and the look of injured worship in his eyes would have wrung tears from a stone. Cleek stopped laughing suddenly, and sat forward and looked straight at the boy.

"Dollops," he said quietly, "I wouldn't barter *this* inheritance — of Love — which the good Lord

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has given me, for all the thrones and 'specturs' and 'crash-pots' that the world could hold. For true friendship is the best inheritance of all. But there are times when a man must be allowed to go down into the deeps of his memory and take a maudlin joy in counting over the hidden pearls there. I've no doubt you do it yourself, lad — and shed a tear in solitude for the days when you had a mother to care for you, and you weren't just a frightened little sinner of an orphan boy."

"An' that's where you're dead wrong, sir," gave back Dollops with a vigorous nod of the head. "Fer I never does anyfink of the sort. Me muvver — Gawd 'elp 'er! — were a bruiser an' a footballer in one, an' there weren't an inch o' me poor little body which didn't 'ave a score of bruises upon it. As for me farver — well, I doesn't remember 'im, and no doubt it's a good fing, too. . . . No, sir, you've bin and gone and missed the bull's eye this time. I ain't no Wistful Willie, I ain't. You've been Muvver and Farver and Big Bruvver and all the whole darn Fambly ter me, an' if ever I finks o' the blinkin' parst, it's just that I didn't live clean and strite an' — an' *decent*, so's I could be a bit more worvy uv yer precious kindness. . . . Lord! listen ter me atorkin' like a bloomin' sermonizer! But them's my sentiments — strite! An' so long as yer ain't wishin ter go back to — *them* ——"

"No, I'm not wishing that at all, boy," said Cleek

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quietly, with an odd little smile. "So don't you worry your ginger head over such fool notions as that. The day I want to get rid of you all — Miss Lorne, yourself, and Mr. Narkom — is the day that sees me in my grave. And then I'll only be waiting to wring your hands across the Big Beyond. And if you ever mention royalties and 'specturs' and 'crash-pots' to me again, Dollops, I'll — I'll cut you out of my will. . . Finished?"

"Yessir."

"Well, then, come along upstairs and smoke a weed with me. Unless you've something better to do. I've need of a man's company to-night, for my mood's maudlin, and a chat over old times will straighten things out for me."

"*Rar*ver!" Then to himself: "Missin' Miss Ailsa, like any uvver bloomin' lovesick strain," thought Dollops to himself, with a shake of the head. "Well, orl I kin s'y is, Dollops me lad, it's a good thing you ain't in love yerself. You love yer tummy better'n the gels — and a fairer deal it is, too. Fer yer *can* tell when you're proper fed up, and starve a bit in consequence. But the lydies! — well, they never lets yer leave 'em alone! 'E ain't 'ad no letter this mornin' — that's wot the trouble is, bless 'is 'eart!"

So Dollops followed Cleek upstairs to his room, and in the short twilight of the summer evening sat with him, curled up on a cushion at his feet, and smoked and talked and gazed at the great Castle in front of

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them, almost lost in the twilight mists, like the true little *gamin* he was, until the lonesomeness had gone from Cleek's soul, and the night had thrown her mantle over the sky.

Then:

"Time for you to be getting into your little 'downy', old chap," he said, with a stretch and a yawn and a smile down into the eager young face that rested against his knee, as a dog might do, faithfulness in the attitude. "Or we'll be having no salmon-fishing to-morrow, for you'll be oversleeping yourself, and the fish will have swum to other waters, getting tired of waiting for you. Cut along now, there's a good boy."

"Orl right, Guv'nor. Thank yer, sir, for this — this rippin' fine evenin'. And fer lettin' me pertend I was for the moment, like, a real pal to yer. I shan't never ferget that. Good-night, sir, and pleasant dreams."

"Good-night, Dollops. Close the door softly behind you. There's an old lady in the room beyond, and I fancy she's just gone off to bed. I'll sit here a few minutes longer, and then nip in between the sheets myself."

But the few minutes lengthened into an hour before Cleek, about to rise from his chair by the open window to knock out the ashes of his pipe upon the sill, happened to glance up and out of it. Then he stopped of a sudden, sucked in his breath, and stood

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stock-still, staring out in front of him as though he had gone suddenly mad.

For the darkness of that dark night had been cut suddenly by a ray of red light swung to and fro several times from the particular bit of darkness which Cleek knew was Aygon Castle; extinguished; re-lit; sent swinging across the darkness again like an arc of crimson light; and when this was done for a third time, Cleek knew that it was a signal — a signal from Maud Duggan to him — a signal, too, which meant distress. Something had happened out there in that grim darkness beyond the rim of hill and valley in that great, gaunt edifice of mediæval stone, something so serious that she had signalled for him to come, as she said she would.

He drew out his spot-light, and sent it zigzagging in the direction of the red light, just to let her know she had been seen and understood. Then, swinging round swiftly, he caught up his dark overcoat, slipped his arms into it, drew a cap low down over his head, and was off into the shadows and pelting away down the narrow tortuous lane as fast as his swift feet could carry him.

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CHAPTER VIII

WHEN THE BLOW FELL

IT WAS not an easy road Cleek traversed, for in the darkness and in the utter absence of lamps of any sort the lane became a thing of stones and pitfalls for the unwary traveller, and there were many times when he was down upon his hands and knees in the soft, sweet-smelling, heather-thatched hillside, having lost footing with the road altogether, and only his pocket-lamp kept him from absolute downfall and disaster. But the great gates were reached at last, and he saw that they had been set ajar, so that he could slip in undisturbed, if he wished — a little forethought on Maud Duggan's part for which he silently thanked her.

He slid in between them, glanced a moment up at Rhea's great bronze figure etched out against the moonlit sky and taking on a supernatural life-likeness which was eery beyond words, and then darted up the driveway, groping his way in the shadows toward the great house which of a sudden seemed to be blazing with light from every window, as though the soul of it had suddenly been awakened

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out of its sleep and it had come to life in one huge, simultaneous effort.

Under the tread of his light feet the gravel barely moved, and having got his bearings that same afternoon, he pelted up in the darkness toward the front door, stopped suddenly, listened, darted leftward toward the lawns, and came — *phut!* — up against somebody who was running in the opposite direction, swift-breathing like a man pursued, and who, having met the impact of Cleek's tautened body, stationed there for just such a purpose, bounded back again and gave out an involuntary gasp of astonishment and ill-concealed irritation.

"Whew! I beg your pardon, I'm sure," said this stranger, as Cleek flashed on his lamp and sent its rays travelling up the man's slim figure from top to toe. "Who the — why the — what the ——?"

"Awfully sorry, I'm sure," responded Cleek, with a light laugh, in his best blithering-idiot manner, "but I happened to be strollin' up in this direction to pay a call upon Miss Maud Duggan, and fell into you. So beastly dark in these parts, doncherknow. After London, a chap is likely to lose his bearin's. Exceedin'ly sorry and all that."

The man stopped suddenly and, bending forward, peered up under Cleek's tweed cap into the face beneath it. Cleek saw him as a slim, handsome fellow of the leisure classes, lithe of limb and athletic of body, and in that small ray of torch-light,

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augmented by the moon's pale gleams, liked the look of him, though he was startled by the meeting — that was obvious — and a little shaken as well.

"Eh? What's that? Miss Duggan, did you say? Then what's your name, may I ask? You're a stranger to these parts, I suppose?"

"Yes. Up for the salmon-fishin', doncherknow. Strollin' back to the Castle, are you? We'll go together. My name's Deland — Arthur Deland. Am I permitted to know yours?"

"Certainly. But I'm not — going to the Castle to-night. I've — I've just — come from there, you see, and was on my way home again when we cannoned into each other. My name's Macdonald, Angus Fletcher Macdonald. I'm a — particular friend of Miss Duggan's. . . But time's getting along, and I've a good distance to go. So I'll be off, if you don't mind. Good-night."

"Good-night."

Cleek nodded to him in the half dark, then as the man swung away from him down the wide drive, turned in his tracks and watched him till the moon, hiding under a cloud, hid him, too.

"Macdonald, eh? The unfortunate lover whom the father will not countenance. H'm. Wonder what he was doing here at this time of night? Rather nervous, I should say, at our encounter. And why the dickens — if anything's happened — didn't he know something about it? It's a good twenty

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minutes since she signalled to me, and if he's just come from the house——"

Of a sudden he stopped short and sucked in his breath as a new thought penetrated itself into that perfectly pigeon-holed and regulated mentality of his. "Gad! surely *he* hasn't—— Well! I ought to have detained him and brought him back on some pretext — if anything really *has* happened to cause her to want me at this hour of the night. . . Well, I'll nip along and find out. And if anything's really wrong, I shan't forget *that* gentleman in a hurry."

He reached the house without further adventure, and rang the door-bell with a steady hand. But he was hardly prepared for its response. For at the sound of it Maud Duggan came running toward him, her face white as a dead face, her eyes wild, her hair untidy, and clutching him by the arm fairly hauled him into the hallway, just as the butler — stung out of his calm demeanour by the happenings of that night — appeared from the end of the hall and came toward them.

"Oh, I'm so glad you came, so glad, Mr. Deland!" she shrilled out in a high-pitched, terrified voice. "It was lucky you turned up as — as you promised. But I'm afraid our game of c-cards cannot take place. Because — oh, how can I say it? How? A terrible thing has happened, Mr. Deland, and that which I feared has come to pass, only in a much more awful

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manner! My — my f-father has been murdered, in full sight of us all, right there in the library, just as he was about to draw up a new will to disinherit Ross. Foully . . . murdered . . . poor . . . darling!"

Then the sobs caught in her throat, and she turned away a moment and hid her face in her handkerchief, while Cleek, mastering his curiosity and amazement at this curious and amazing statement, waited a moment for her to regain her composure. Then:

"My dear young lady!" he cried in a low-pitched, even voice. "Murdered! And in the presence of you all! Then of course you know who his murderer is."

"I don't, I don't! We none of us know! None of us!" she ejaculated, shutting her hands together and lifting a tear-stained, haggard face to his. "Oh, Mr. Deland, that is the terrible, the mysterious part of it all. It happened in a flash. Suddenly the lights went out; we heard the wheel humming, just as the Peasant Girl said it would hum, and then . . . then . . . the lights came up again, and there he lay, shot through the temple and stabbed to the heart, quite, quite dead!"

"Whew! Rather a marvellous happening, I must say," gave out Cleek, laying a hand upon her shaking shoulder and edging her tenderly toward the open door of that little ante-room into which he had been

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shown only that morning, when the old laird himself had entered upon their conversation, with his lady in attendance. And now he was dead! murdered! It seemed indeed hardly credible. "Sit down awhile, and then tell me at your leisure all the happenings which took place. Got any brandy in the house? Or have you had some? No? Well, I've always a flask handy. Now, take a pull at this, and then lean back in that chair and close your eyes. You'll be a different person, I assure you. Here's my flask. Make it a good peg, too."

Dumbly she did as she was bidden, acting as a sick child does, without question, and thankful only for a directing hand. Meanwhile, Cleek stood over her, watching how the colour ebbed slowly back into her pallid cheeks and the red crept again into her blue lips, and congratulating himself that he had been just in time, and no more, before she would have fainted.

She shut her eyes as he had told her, and when a few minutes had elapsed, Cleek leaned forward and touched her gently upon the wrist.

"Now let's hear all about it — if you're able. Where is your stepmother?"

"Upstairs in her room — prostrate." She spat the words out with positive venom. "Ross is with his father, bowed down with grief, poor old boy; while his fiancée, Cynthia Debenham, who came back with him, and her cousin, Catherine Dowd,

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are in the house somewhere, seeing to the necessary household arrangements."

"And you've telephoned the police?"

"Yes. And then signalled to you. They'll be along presently, I suppose?"

"Possibly — yes. I'd have brought my own man if I had only known. Mr. Narkom will be here in the morning to take charge of affairs. I sent for him to-day. And the rest of the household?"

"Cyril is with his mother. Wakened up out of his sleep, poor boy, by all the commotion, and of course hardly aware yet of what a terrible tragedy has happened here in his own home. The servants are huddled together like frightened rabbits, and the women refuse to put in any appearance at all. Miss McCall has been trying to get them in hand — she's so quiet and yet so resourceful, you know, Mr. Deland — and she has helped us such a lot in that way."

"And that accounts for every one, then? No one left the house since the — the thing took place?"

"Not a soul. There was no reason to, you see. And no one has been here, either. Callers to Aygon Castle are few and far between, Mr. Deland, as you can imagine. We're so very far from civilization."

"I see. And no one's been to the place at all, you say? Beyond the immediate family, and this

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Miss — Miss Dowd and your brother's fiancée? They returned with him, I suppose, after having persuaded him not to take such a foolhardy view of the case which I heard this morning? Well, I'm glad he came back, if only — for this. Poor chap! it will ease his conscience, at any rate. And those are the only people who have entered this place to-night, Miss Duggan? You are positive of that?"

She lifted wide eyes to his face. There was conviction in every line of her own.

"Absolutely positive, Mr. Deland."

"Well, that's all right, then." Cleek nodded slowly at her but his lips were grim. Either *she* or Macdonald had lied. For he had heard him say, in that broken, staccato voice of his, "I've just — come from there, you see, and was on my way home again." And a dollar to a ducat that *she* was not at fault. Well, the man Macdonald would want watching. And if he *had* "done a bunk," as the boys say, he would know his man instantly and scout all Britain over for him — though at present his motive for connection with the crime was certainly unknown.

He sent his keen eyes over her wan face, and came to his own conclusions. Here was no liar, if he knew the signs. Then he leaned toward her.

"Now," said he, "just tell me — what happened. All about it. Don't leave anything out — not the veriest little thing. How did you all happen to be in the library in the first place?"

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"As I told you, Father had summoned us all there for the purpose of disinheriting Ross by crossing his name from his will, and in the presence of witnesses substituting another instead."

"And whose name, may I ask?"

She bent her head suddenly, and put one hand against her cheek.

"Mine, Mr. Deland."

"*Yours?* . . . Oho! And not young Cyril's, then?"

"No. Upon that Father was adamant. He said justice must be done to the elder family — that is Ross and me, as you know — and he would see justice done. If Ross could not have the rightful inheritance because of his unfitness (poor Ross!) then it was to come to me, unless I saw fit to marry Captain Macdonald. In that event it all went to charity. Naturally, I protested with him."

"Why?"

"Because, don't you see? I hoped he would perhaps relent and leave Ross's name where it was. The ignominy to the poor boy would have been so terrible — if he had struck his name out. Ross would never have got over it — never! He is so proud of his house, so wrapped up in it in every way."

"And did your father manage to destroy the will then before it — happened?"

"No. He had it in his hands. I was wrestling

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with him, trying to get it away, and Paula had caught me by the shoulders and was endeavouring to get me away, too, when the lights suddenly went out, and — and came up again. And there he was in his chair — *dead!*"

"And you say that you heard the sound of the spinning wheel 'humming' in the darkness? You really did hear that, Miss Duggan?"

"Yes — I would swear to it on my oath."

"And how then did your father die? By what means?"

"By a shot through his temple, I suppose (though he was stabbed as well) — although there was no noise, Mr. Deland, nothing to tell us that the awful thing was happening, save the failing of the current at that moment."

"H'm. I see. A soundless pistol — in fact, an air-gun. Any one in the house got such a thing, do you know?"

She shook her head.

"Not that I know of, unless . . . but he gave his away long ago."

"Who, may I ask?"

She sent suddenly startled eyes up into his face, as though she realized that she had unguardedly been trapped into a damaging admission.

"Why — why — my brother Ross, Mr. Deland," she said in a hoarse, frightened voice.

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CHAPTER IX

A DOUBLE TRAGEDY

CLEEK sat forward in his seat suddenly, every nerve alert at this somewhat startling piece of news. Oho! So Ross Duggan was the only person possessing an air-pistol — and the laird had been killed by means of one, shot through the head in a dastardly fashion. Gad! it certainly wanted looking into! And the moment had been chosen with such precision that the alteration in that self-same will had never been made, and Ross Duggan still stood as chief heir to his father's estates!

That was a queer thing — a very queer thing! He flung up his eyebrows and twitched the corner of his mobile mouth.

"Your *brother*, Miss Duggan? I see. And how long ago was it that he bought that pistol, may I ask? And for what purpose?"

She gave an uneasy laugh which ended in a little sob that brought a look of pity to his eyes.

"Oh — ages and ages! Quite a couple of years ago, I think. Ross and a fellow-officer who was here for the fishing got it together. Ross had thought

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of a new idea for killing the big salmon after they had been played so long, and though exhausted were brought to shore alive. Everyone laughed at him, of course, and the thing never turned out to be anything; but Ross's idea was to shoot them as soon after swallowing the hook as was possible, and the soundless pistol wouldn't frighten the other fish. It was a ridiculous idea — but Ross imagined it would be more humane, though not nearly so much sport from the fisherman's point of view, as you know, Mr. Deland — and he tried it only once. He was teased out of it after that."

"And the pistol?"

"I really don't know . . . what became of it. I never saw it again, and, in fact, forgot all about it. But of course, Mr. Deland, Ross couldn't — *couldn't!* — oh, I beg of you, don't think of such a terrible thing for one instant! Ross adored his father *always*, in spite of the bad blood between them of later years."

"Quite so. Only, naturally, in the pursuit of duty one must ask all manner of irrelevant questions. You understand that, Miss Duggan, I hope? Of course your brother Ross would not think of such a thing. But if he is the only possessor of an air-pistol, well, naturally, circumstantial evidence will be rather unpleasant for him — unless something else turns up. I'd like to see your brother, if you please, and have a little chat with him. And then

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he will show me the — your father, and let me make a little perfunctory examination . . . By the way, how far away is the nearest police-station?"

"A matter of three miles. But the men have motorcycles, and should be here at any moment. Hark! that's Rhea's bell, isn't it? No doubt they have already come. Oh, Mr. Deland, *what* shall I say to them? I don't feel as though I could face a stranger *now!*"

Cleek laid his hand upon her shoulder as he rose to his feet.

"And you're not going to — have no fear of that," he replied kindly. "Remember, I represent Scotland Yard, Miss Duggan. This thing lies in my hands, and I am in command of it. I shall see the police-sergeant and make all necessary arrangements. The formalities will have to be observed, of course, for to-night, at any rate. No one must leave this house under any pretext whatever — neither servant nor guest. All doors and windows must be locked, and I shall set a guard about the place. But that will be my duty to attend to — not yours. So go and rest a little, if you can — and emulate your worthy stepmother (who, by the way, I want to see as soon as possible), after you have taken me to your brother, and we have had a little talk together. . . Would you mind conducting me to him now?"

She bowed her head dumbly, and passed out in

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front of him, down the long narrow passage with its armoured figures standing out in niches cut into the wall and its air of brooding mystery which so well fitted this tragic affair and lent still further colour to it. At last they reached the library. At the door of it she paused, hesitated, put her hand upon the handle of it, and then drew back with an involuntary shiver.

"I can't — I can't!" she said brokenly. "It's asking too much to go in and see him now — not until he has been placed as he ought to be, poor dear old Daddy! But Ross is in there with him, Mr. Deland. So if you just knock, and then enter, and tell him who you are, that will be all right . . . Those men are coming in, I know. I can hear them at the door now. Oh, please, please don't let me see them — I don't feel as if I could!"

"And you shan't — have no fear of that," he replied. "So be off with you as quick as you can, and lie down for half an hour, at any rate. And if I have need of you I'll send someone along with a message . . . Ah! they're coming . . . Good evening, Sergeant. You've been exceedingly prompt in coming along, I must say. And brought four men with you, too? That's good. We shall want 'em in this place. There's been a murder here — old Sir Andrew Duggan has been done to death in a mysterious manner — shot and stabbed at the same time. I've not yet looked at the body, but shall do

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so presently. Mr. Narkom will be down in the morning."

"Mr. Narkom? The Chief Superintendent, eh? Then — then may I ask who *you* are, sir?" responded Sergeant Campbell, in a deep, ringing voice which exactly fitted the huge figure of him.

Cleek bowed. He looked keenly into the gray eyes under the beetling brows, came to the rapid conclusion that here was a man who could keep his tongue in leash if required, and then with a glance over the four police-constables standing behind him, handed him a card upon which he had scribbled one word, and then watched the effect of it with dawning amusement as the knowledge soaked into the Inspector's consciousness.

"Name's Deland," he said with a knowing wink, speaking in the nick of time, before the Sergeant in his astonishment and admiration for this man who stood before him, and whose name was a household word upon the tongue of every policeman the world over, had quite given the show away to the rest of his followers. "Arthur Deland. You've probably heard of me, Sergeant, if you follow the doings of Scotland Yard at all. Came up here under Mr. Narkom's orders to handle another case, and then dropped — *plop!* — upon this one. Better come along now. I want you to set a couple of men before the library door, where the thing took place — nothing to be moved, of course, or touched in any

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way, until Mr. Narkom arrives — and then send another of your men back to fetch ten more reserves, and stand guard all round the house from the outside. Tell 'em to report to you every half hour, and if there's anything doing bring it along to me at once. You understand?"

"Yessir. Certainly, sir."

"Then come along."

He led the way through the long hall, past the gaping butler to whom this stranger, whom his master had entertained at lunch, and who was now so mysteriously in charge of affairs, seemed suddenly to have assumed a principal part in the affair, and to be showing his "nerve" in a good many ways; and with a quick order to him to see that all doors and windows were securely bolted and locked, so that no one could get in or out of the house save at the instigation of the Law and the Law's minions, Cleek passed on to that chamber of death where the old laird lay, and turning the handle softly, led the way in.

There was a light shining in the centre of the room from an old-fashioned lamp which stood upon the desk-top and sent a soft effulgence round and about it that lay like a halo upon the peace of that silent place. At the desk sat Ross Duggan, head in hands, shutting out the sight of the Thing that faced him in all the majesty of death, that Thing which so short a time back had been his own father, and

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now sat huddled forward in a fallen attitude in the swing-back office chair opposite Ross, transparent hands lying aimlessly upon the desk-top, head down-thrown, jaw dropped, and with a little sinister blackened puncture in the temple telling the tale of the air-pistol's accurate aim only too well.

Cleek went up to the desk and laid his hand upon Ross's shoulder. In an instant the young man sprang to his feet, eyes ablaze, face chalk-white, startled and not a little displeased at this intrusion upon him and his dead by a man whom he had met only casually a few hours back, and who had witnessed that never-to-be-forgotten quarrel between him and his father which would sear his memory now forever.

"I — I —— This is hardly the hour and the time, Mr. Deland," he began in a hushed voice; but Cleek silenced him, the queer little one-sided smile travelling up his cheek, and his eyes serious and not a little sad as they rested upon the haggard face of this heir to an unhappy inheritance.

"That's all right, my dear chap — really," he said in his clear, low-pitched voice. "You see, my profession happens to be that of a detective, and I stand at present as official representative of Scotland Yard. The Sergeant here has come to do his unpleasant duty, and place a guard over the body. It would be better for you, really, to go and lie down. After such a terrible shock . . ."

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"I'll go, and gladly!" returned Ross with a grim nod of the head and a sudden warming of colour in the pale cheeks of him. "It's not been the pleasantest task sitting here with — him — like that, Mr. Deland. And as you happen to have jumped up from nowhere and taken matters so entirely in hand, I'll relinquish my trust. But I didn't somehow like to leave — him — alone. After what's happened — the strange method of his death — and all the rest of this ghastly affair, I meant to keep the rest of the world away from him, if possible, and if the murderer should chance to come back!" — a sudden light flashed into his eyes and involuntarily his body stiffened — "then I should be ready for him."

"Spoken like a soldier and a gentleman," said Cleek softly, with a nod of understanding. "Now I want to have a look at your father, Mr. Duggan. And I'd like it if you could just find it in your heart to stay here with me for a moment or two, and acquaint me with the facts. Your sister has told me the rough outline, and ——"

"My sister?" His voice showed the surprise which this news elicited. "How did you see her, then?"

"That is a long story, which you shall hear some other time. At present she simply sent for me in a very quick and excellent manner, and I came at once. The worthy Sergeant and his men followed. . . . Now, Sergeant, place your men as I told you,

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and I'll get on to the business of examination. I only want to get a rough idea of the true method of death, and glean what clues I can for Mr. Narkom, who will arrive in the morning . . . And, gad!" He glanced up at the huge clock which was ticking away the minutes and hours with sonorous voice. "It's getting on that way now. Now, Sergeant, if you can get one of your men to give me a hand with the body ——"

Speaking, he moved it gently, until it lay half upon the pedestal desk-top, so that the light shone full upon the ghastly face, and rolled it tenderly over. There was a thin trickle of blood still oozing thickly from the left side of the breast, where the fine puncture of some almost needle-like instrument showed how successfully it had done its horrible duty. Cleek tore away the coat and waistcoat, stripped back the shirt from the frail body, and examined the wound through his little glass. In size it was no more than what might have been caused by a heavy bodkin, and in depth — so deep that it had no doubt punctured the inner walls of the heart, and, if successful in this method, caused immediate death to its victim.

He looked up quickly into Ross's downbent face, his own rather grim.

"A stiletto wound," he gave out in the sharp staccato of excitement. "See that fine, clean-cut edge? I've seen similar ones in Italy and in the

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southern parts of America. The blade's squarish, not flat as in the cases of most daggers. And it is amazingly sharp. That blow would cause a death-wound, undoubtedly. But I understand there was a shot fired as well — from an air-pistol, I imagine, as there was no sound. Now, the question is, where is that bullet, and from what direction was the shot fired? That'll tell us a lot."

Ross Duggan's face changed suddenly, as though a shadow had passed over it.

"That's the question, Mr. Deland," he replied in a tense voice. "If we could find out that, we could find out a good deal. But why this double crime should have been committed, Heaven alone can tell. My father had many enemies — but none who would have stooped to kill him — of that I am positive. And it is obvious that two have tried to do so. Look, here is the wound in the temple, just above the left eye. And it has gone clean through the head. Poor old Dad! Poor, misguided old Dad! How I hate that woman Paula and all her wiles and ways! If any one's at fault in this dastardly business, Mr. Deland, you can count upon *her!* Her father swung for a similar crime (she doesn't know I know that) and if she has done this terrible thing, she, too, shall swing, as he did! Whoever has done this cruel, wicked thing, Mr. Deland, shall be brought to justice, if I have to scour the world over for the murderer."

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"Ah — who? That is the question, my friend," returned Cleek quietly, stooping over the bowed white head with its thatch of snowy hair, and tracing the path of the bullet through it in his mind's eye. "H'm! Went through here and came out — Gad! here's the puncture! Right here! So that somewhere in this room that bullet has lodged itself, and when that is found we shall have our finger upon the pulse of this dreadful tragedy more surely than we know . . . Heigho! It's two-thirty, and in this semi-darkness little to be done until the morning sends us its kindly rays. So we must leave things as they are for the present, and later go over the whole thing with clear heads and rested minds. . . . Sergeant, I put you in charge. A man outside of the window there, please, and another one in this room, and still another outside the door, and if any one tries to get in or out, blow your whistle and I'll be with you in a jiffy . . . Come, Mr. Duggan. You're looking terribly white and fagged. Let's have a whisky-and-soda — if you'd be so good as to extend your hospitality so far — and then I'll make myself a shake-down in the next room, if you've no objection. I've given orders for no one to be allowed to leave the house until morning and until parole is given to do so, so you need have no fear of one of the murderers escaping."

"I — I —— What's that you say?" stammered out Ross, swinging round and looking at Cleek with

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drawn brows and flashing eyes. "You've given orders in *my* house! I say, you know, this is a bit thick; and — and who the dickens do you think would have done the thing in this place, may I ask? You're rather overstepping the bounds of common hospitality, Mr. Deland, in your rôle of private detective. And I must ask you to leave the ordering of things to *me*."

"And that, I am afraid, is exactly what I can't do, my friend," replied Cleek serenely, with a crooked smile. "Simply because, according to your somewhat one-eyed and one-sided English law, every one is a suspect until he is proved innocent. You, your sister, your stepmother, even your fiancée — who, I suppose, is spending the night here with her cousin Miss Dowd, under the present circumstances, as my orders were issued a little earlier in the evening — every member of this household comes under the unwilling stigma of a possible perpetrator of this crime."

"Damn it! — I say — how dare you ——"

"We policemen dare everything, Mr. Duggan, because that is our duty, you know," he responded smoothly. "And, besides, there's one thing more. Someone here has an air-pistol, and the owner of that has got to be found. I've an inkling, supplemented by a few words dropped by your sister, but we'll let that pass. Only, the owner of the air-gun is not going to escape this house to-night. That's

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all, I fancy. Sergeant, good-night. Or, rather, good morning. You'll call me if necessary, won't you? I shall be in the very next room. And — Mr. Duggan, if you don't happen to have that whisky handy, you needn't bother. I've a flask in my pocket."

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CHAPTER X

THE WOMAN IN THE CASE?

THERE was no call during the long watches of the night, no untoward happenings of any sort. Cleek, sleeping with one eye open, rose now and again and crept silent-footed out into the passage, doing a little bit of listening in upon his own account. But nothing of any moment happened. And so when at length the house was astir, and the sound of servants with their brushes and brooms began to make their usual early-morning clamour, he shook himself awake, got to his feet, and went off into the bathroom, where Ross Duggan's safety-razor worked wonders with his over-night beard, and a wash under the cold-water tap still more.

Returning, he stopped at the door of that chamber of tragedy where the one-time master of all this vast inheritance of stone and moorland lay, Death wiping from his aged face every line and leaving it as smooth as a child's.

"I want to have a little poke round for myself," he told the constable on duty outside the door, who instantly let him in, as became a representative of

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Scotland Yard. "You might send someone up to the Inn of the Three Fishers with this note, and see that it gets delivered immediately into the hands of a chap named Dollops. It's important."

"Very good, sir."

"And in the meantime, I'll see that no one enters this room, I promise you. Inspector Petrie himself will be around presently. And Superintendent Narkom should be with us at twelve o'clock or thereabouts."

Left alone, therefore, in the early morning sunlight of that perfect June day, Cleek made his way into the still room, closed the door behind him, and then, glancing up, caught sight of the stolid back of the constable on duty outside of the courtyard window, and not being wishful to enter into conversation with him, began to poke about of his own accord.

But the room held little or no clues for him to go upon. Not in the first rough glance, at any rate. Over by the window, where it had stood upon the previous day, when Maud Duggan had shown it to him, stood the spinning wheel, innocently incongruous indeed in this room of Death. He gave it a casual glance, and then turned to the desk-top where a pile of papers lay scattered in some disarray upon its leather surface.

Cleek ran his fingers quickly through these, glancing at each of them in turn.

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"He was just about to alter the will, was he? Well, if that were so, the will should be here now — and it isn't," he said to himself, with suddenly upflung brows. "Queer thing! Unless someone put it away. I'll try the drawers. There should be no secrets from a detective, my poor misguided friend, and if the drawers don't answer to my fingers, I'm going to search your pockets for the key — though to steal from the dead is a ghoulish business at the best of times. . . . Hello, hello! Locked, of course! Brrrh! I don't fancy the task at all, but I mean to have my little look-in before any of the other members of the family get downstairs for their breakfast. So here goes."

Still mentally talking to himself, Cleek went over to the Thing that had once been Sir Andrew Duggan, and plunged his hands in the trousers' pockets without more ado. A bunch of keys rewarded the search. He ran them over adroitly in his fingers; chose one which he thought would fit the lock of the drawers, found it didn't fit, chose another, and this time was more successful. For the top left-hand drawer of that handsomely carved desk slid noiselessly open for him, stopped automatically, and gave a funny little click. In a moment he had slid down on his knees beside that gruesome figure which so impeded his progress, and slipped his fingers up under the drawer (which was half full of papers and so allowed him to do so), touched something which

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felt like a button, and *was* a button. Then the drawer came forward in his hand, and revealed at back of it another one, which at a touch of that button had dropped its front panel so that it formed a pigeon-hole. As he peered into the recesses of this, he saw a bundle of yellowed papers tied about with a faded piece of pink ribbon, and immediately drew them forth into the light.

"Whew! What a beastly dust! Well, I've met this kind of a desk before, so fortunately you're no closed book to me, my friend," he apostrophized it, as a powder of dust flew over his fingers as he touched the packet. "Here's something which wants looking into, so I'll appropriate it now, and have a squint at it later. Secretive old chap he was, then! With his secret drawers and all! Looks like a bundle of old love-letters to all intents and purposes, but written on paper that one would hardly have called suitable for such tender epistles. Commonest kind of note-paper — village note-paper." He drew a sheet from the packet and held it up to the light. "And with a water-mark of a crown and anchor. . . . Hello! bit of an illiterate lady, wasn't she, who penned these lines! For the spelling's pretty shaky. And signed *Jeannette* . . . H'm. Some pretty little amour which has held such savour as to be preserved in this form until after death — poor old fellow! Well, I'll look into it later. Couldn't have been from the first Lady Duggan, for *her* name was

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Edith. Miss Duggan herself told me that. And . . . Jeannette! Now, I wonder . . . ."

But what he wondered was never recorded at that time, for just then came the sound of a soft footstep upon the hall without, the rattle of a door-handle, and the gentle opening of the door itself; and Cleek had just time to whisk away the packet, and assume an appearance of stolid nonchalance, when someone came into the room on silently shod feet, stepped a few paces forward, and then, seeing him, gave out a little shriek and shut her two hands over her breast spasmodically.

"Oh! — *how* you startled me!" gave out Lady Paula breathlessly, as she recognized who the intruder was. "What can you be doing here, Mr. Deland? The police . . . this awful tragedy . . ."

Cleek bowed and came toward her with outstretched hand.

"My dear Lady Paula," he said suavely, "I represent the police myself. I happen to have taken up criminology many years ago, and came up here to Scotland upon a little holiday. This terrible thing that has happened brought me immediately here to do my duty and to give what little help I could to you all in your bereavement. And so here I am. I beg of you, don't stay in this apartment now. It is no place for a lady — particularly a lady so highly strung and nervous as yourself."

"But how — did you ever — come to hear about

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it?" she demanded, stepping back a pace or two, with her eyes carefully avoiding that Thing which lay huddled there before them — mute reminder of all the terrors that had happened the night before. "How could you have known, Mr. Deland ——?"

"I mentioned the fact of my profession to your stepdaughter yesterday, and she immediately summoned me here. And, of course, I came. Anything which I can do . . ."

"Thank you. But there is nothing — nothing! I came in now because last night I — dropped my handkerchief, and it was one which I very much value, because my dear husband gave it to me upon the anniversary of our wedding-day. Duchesse lace, Mr. Deland, and with my name embroidered across the corner. And I knew, if the police found it, that I — I should never get it back again. Everything, you see, becomes a clue, doesn't it? But it seems not to be here."

Her agitation was very apparent, and Cleek mentally registered the fact that the excuse was a tame one, and utterly untrue.

"No," he said, "it isn't here, Lady Paula. And, as you say, if it were, I could not give it to you. Go back to your room, I beg, and lie down. You look ghastly pale; and after breakfast I shall have need of your help, believe me. So go, please. And leave me to this gruesome vigil alone. . . . Oh, by the way, do you happen to remember, during last

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night's many and terrible happenings, whether the will which Sir Andrew was about to alter (I have the facts of the case, you see, from Miss Duggan herself) was put away by any member of the family? Because it isn't here, you know."

He swept his hand out across the desk-top in an expressive gesture. Her face flushed rosily, and something like a startled light, half of gladness, half of fear, showed in her wide, velvety eyes. But she shook her head.

"It was never touched — to my knowledge," she said emphatically. "And I happen to remember that fact, for in the confusion of everything that followed, when we were looking at my poor, poor husband, it fell to the ground, and Maud picked it up again and laid it over there, under those other things that my husband had been looking into. I noted the fact, even in my despair, as one does note these little trivial things in the midst of a great trouble, Mr. Deland. But it *was* there — I am positive. And you can't find it now?"

"No, Lady Paula."

"Oh! Then undoubtedly Maud has hidden it away somewhere, in case I might *steal* it, I suppose, and so do her precious brother out of his inheritance, if such a thing were possible."

The venom in her voice was like the bite of a serpent — positively poisonous, and Cleek gave her a quick, keen look.

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"Hardly that, Lady Paula. And — well, I don't happen to be well up on these matters at all, the law, y'know, and all that — only the law of criminals, and that's an altogether different thing. No doubt one of the family has put it away. It will turn up in time. Now, please go away before the rest of the constables arrive. You will want every atom of your strength to see this appalling thing through, believe me, and therefore I insist that you harbour it."

She smiled up at him sadly, and turned upon her heel, her trailing pink negligée whisking across the thickly carpeted floor like the tail of some sinuous snake, weighted as it was with one heavy beaded tassel.

"Very well — if you wish," she said quietly, with an arch glance at him; but as she went something white fluttered to the ground in the wake of her, and Cleek, waiting until she had gone, closed the door softly, and then bent down and whisked it up.

It was a handkerchief — a mere wisp of gossamer, with Duchesse lace edge, and the name *Paula* written in embroidery across one corner of its fragile square.

A little twisted smile flitted across his face as he looked at it, and then suddenly his mouth went grim. This was obviously the handkerchief in question — and she had had it upon her person every moment of the time! So *that* excuse was a

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false one, from the start-out. Then, too, a woman who could look archly at another man over her own husband's dead body was surely no woman at all, but a harpy in woman's guise. It was ghoulish, horrible! . . . And if the excuse were false, what did she come for — in the early hours of the morning, when servants were only just astir in the other wing of the house, and she knew that there was that dead Thing who had been her husband to be confronted? Would a woman face a murdered man for a mere handkerchief? . . . She would lose a thousand such sooner, from what *he* knew of the feminine sex.

No, there was some other reason, and that a secret one. Was it the will? But that was already gone. Was it to remove some distinguishing clue which she feared might be found to connect *her* with this crime?

What was it?

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CHAPTER XI

A NEW CLUE

IT WAS a silent, horror-haunted breakfast-table that morning at which, however, every member of the family appeared, as though driven downstairs for the mere comfort of being among familiar things, and with one another, in this time of tragedy. Cleek partook of breakfast with them, but the black looks which Ross directed at him would have made a weaker man lose his appetite.

He smiled to himself now and again, missing nothing of what went on about him, yet seeming, indeed, to see nothing at all but his own plate, which was plentifully filled in response to a hearty appetite.

He found Cynthia Debenham a bonny, red-cheeked country girl of the best type, athletic and muscular as a boy, and very obvious in her expressions, as just such a normally healthy girl of her generation usually is. Her cousin, Catherine Dowd, was on the contrary a black-haired witch with slanting eyes and close mouth and the finely chiselled nostrils of a thoroughbred mare. He did not take to her upon sight. There was so much concealed behind those closed lips, so much that was secretive

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in the whole type of her. But she was obviously very fond of them all, and upon excellent terms with every member of that ill-assorted family. So that at least Miss Dowd of the black locks was endowed with the mixing spirit, which was very much in her favour.

Cyril, large-eyed and serious, sent his glance roving from one face to another, as though seeking for the secret of this horrible thing that had taken place here in the midst of them, and Cleek could not refrain from a pang of pity for the white-faced boy. He looked so frightened and miserable, and now and again his eyes roved up into Ross's face with something of inquiry in them, as though he felt that this big stepbrother must surely hold the key to the tragic happenings of last night.

Ross, indeed, ate nothing and said less, although his fiancée did all in her power to bring some sort of a smile into his morose face. While upon the other side of him Maud Duggan sat in a silence which was fraught with all the dreadful happenings of that dreadful night, showing a face to the world which spoke mutely of the fact that sleep had not visited her during the long dark hours. Lady Paula alone tried to make some sort of desultory conversation, aimed at random at each member of the party, and missing its mark each time.

It was as though a pall had been dropped over them, shutting out the possibility of speech.

Breakfast at length over, Cleek took the situa-

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tion quietly in hand, and turning toward them in the open doorway, made his desires known.

"If you will all be so kind as to step into the library in an hour's time," he said blandly, "I should like to reconstruct the scene of last night's tragedy in the presence of all those who took part in it. . . . No, Miss Duggan, you need not be afraid. Your father's body will have been removed by then. But if any one of you have any knowledge whatever to impart to me — representing, as I do, Scotland Yard in the absence of Mr. Narkom (who is already upon his way here), I shall be only too pleased to speak with you in the little ante-room close by. I may use that as a sort of office, for the time being, may I not, Lady Paula? You've no objections, I trust?"

She shook her head at him, flashing him a killing glance from under her full lids. The flattery of his choice of her as principal of the bereft family pleased her immensely.

"None whatever."

"Thanks very much."

Then he withdrew to the said ante-room, took out pen and paper, and began figuring out something upon it which caused him not a little worry, by the look of his face.

Five minutes brought a gentle tap upon the door, and without raising his head from his work he called, "Come in."

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Catherine Dowd stood in the aperture, looking more like the Mona Lisa than he had ever seen a living person do before. There was something of the same inscrutable smile lingering upon her lips, the same mysterious impassivity in her quiet countenance.

"I've brought you something, Mr. Deland," she said in a soft purring voice. "Something which I imagine has great bearings upon last night's tragedy, and which I found hidden in the left-hand curtain of the window. It was stuck carelessly into the inner lining of the green silk, and hung there. Here it is."

Cleek was on his feet in an instant, face alert. She handed him the object, and then nodded at his exclamation of surpise.

"Yes. A stiletto. And in the face of the fact that Sir Andrew was stabbed as well as shot, something of importance."

"I should think so, indeed!" Cleek's face fairly radiated excitement as he bent over the object that lay in his open palm, touching it with light, nimble fingers. "Gad! yes! A stiletto — and a South American one at that! See the curiously squared blade? If that isn't the identical instrument that stabbed Sir Andrew's breast, I'll eat my hat! Miss Dowd, you have brought me a clue which may lead to the tracing of the murderer himself — or one of 'em, as there must have been two. Now, tell me

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exactly the circumstances in which you found it, and why you kept the fact hidden until now?"

She came a little nearer to him and leaned against the edge of the desk-top, a sort of secretive nonchalance in her attitude.

"I don't say everything I know, Mr. Deland," she said smoothly. "For a person who tells everything he knows leaves nothing within to show that he has anything of interest left for the next person who comes along. It was shortly after the tragedy had taken place. Everything, as of course you know, was absolutely in confusion. People rushing about here, there, and everywhere, as though they had gone mad, which indeed they must surely have done in such tragic circumstances. I was as bad as the rest, and with Cynthia searched the room for any clues or anything which might lead to the tracing of the murderer. I had just gone to the open window and ——"

"Oho!" said Cleek in two different tones, "so the window was open, was it?"

"Yes — about half-way up from the bottom. The centre one, Mr. Deland. Someone had asked me to shut it — it was Ross, I think, poor distracted boy! — which I immediately proceeded to do, and brushed against the curtains — the big green plush ones which hang at the outer edges of the bay window — when something clattered lightly to the floor. Cynthia was at the other side, looking out

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into the darkness, everyone else was occupied with Sir Andrew himself, so I bent down quickly and picked the thing up. And there it is."

Yes, there it undoubtedly was. And undoubtedly, too, the weapon which had stabbed Sir Andrew so cruelly, if Cleek knew aught of such things. He frowned a moment over it, and then looked up into Miss Dowd's dark face through narrowed lids.

"And you know to whom it belongs?"

"I cannot say for certain, but I fancy it is Lady Paula's. She had one similar, I know, but whether it is the same one I am not prepared to say."

"Showing yourself a very wise young lady," put in Cleek with a smile.

She acknowledged the compliment gracefully.

"And that you are a very gallant gentleman, Mr. Deland — in spite of your somewhat unusual rôle," she supplemented. Then, becoming serious again, "But don't you think it — well, queer, that if this were the instrument which stabbed Sir Andrew, that there should be no mark of stain upon it, no blood of any sort? The blade when I found it was absolutely clean."

"H'm. Yes. Rather extraordinary. Unless the murderer had time to wipe it upon anything, Miss Dowd, before consigning it to the curtains. And now, another question: What made you keep the thing secret?"

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She hesitated a moment, as though uncertain what to answer, then, blushing faintly, confronted him.

"I have often seen that thing in use in the Duggan household. It has laid claim to many a theatrical bout upon an impromptu stage. It has cut pages of books, and slit edges of papers, and ——"

"All the more reason why there should have been some significance to every member of the family in it, Miss Dowd."

"That's one up to you — certainly. But you see the last person I had seen using it, the day before yesterday, when I was here with Cynthia, spending the afternoon, was — really, I'd rather not say, Mr. Deland."

"I'm afraid you must, Miss Dowd."

Came a moment's hesitation; meanwhile Cleek watched her narrowly. He saw the colour come and go in her ivory-tinted face, saw the light that came into her eyes at mention of the name which followed, and drew his own immediate conclusions.

"Oh, very well, then. There can be no harm in *your* knowing. It was Ross Duggan himself. He had been reading a new book which he had sent to London for — 'Poisons and Potions of Other Times', I think it was called — and used that very same stiletto to slit the pages with. But that was a couple of days ago, Mr. Deland. Who used it since, I couldn't tell. Or how it got in those curtains, either."

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"I see. And that's all you have to tell me?"

Cleek's voice was normal, though he was not a little startled at the news she had imparted to him. Ross, indeed — and reading the musty old book upon "Poisons and Potions", a replica of which stood upon his own study bookshelf in his rooms in Clarges Street, and every word of which he knew by heart! H'm. Strange literature for a young man of normal tastes. And the thing had been in his possession then. Gad! All roads began to lead to Rome with a vengeance! And surely Ross Duggan had the greatest motive for the crime of any one of that strange and unhappy family. And Sir Andrew had been killed, they said, before the name was altered in that will — which at the moment was missing from its hiding-place.

He looked up suddenly into Miss Dowd's eyes. Perhaps this very secretive young woman who was so deeply in love with Ross Duggan as to spirit away clues which she felt might incriminate him under the very noses of his unsuspecting family could enlighten him with regard to that document.

"Tell me," he said rapidly, "did you see anything of the will — after the tragedy took place?"

She nodded.

"Yes. It was lying upon the table in front of Sir Andrew, and when the lights went up again, I saw it from my place at the back of him. I saw it distinctly. Why? Has anything happened to it?

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Lady Paula picked it up once, I remember, and glanced at it; then she put it down again, I think. But my mind was distracted in another direction and I don't remember anything more concerning it. It's not *gone*, is it? Surely Ross can't be done out of his inheritance that way? Oh, if that woman . . ."

The venom in her voice was appalling to Cleek. There was something inscrutable and oddly snake-like in the methods this young woman employed. It repulsed while it fascinated. And no doubt she could strike with a poisoned tongue upon aggravation.

"Well," said he, "I didn't happen to see it there this morning, Miss Dowd, but no doubt it had been put away for safety. I have had no opportunity of interviewing any one but Miss Duggan — and now yourself" (he made no mention of his early morning visit from Lady Paula), "and probably it has a very meek and mild solution."

"I hope so, indeed. I'll be going now, Mr. Deland. You think I did right about the stiletto? — knowing the bad blood which lies between Lady Paula and Ross? It wouldn't do, you know, to place any possible weapon in that woman's hands. She'd use it for her own ends immediately."

"As you would do also, my dear young lady," registered Cleek silently as she left the room. "Gad! Well, here's evidence for us to investigate, anyhow. She's a strange mixture, that girl, and one who would

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stop at nothing. . . . By George! no, but she wouldn't, even for the sort of love that *her* kind would give a man! And it was *his* inheritance which was in jeopardy, don't forget that! . . . It's a pretty kettle of fish, indeed! And this Ross Duggan seems to have half the countryside in love with him! That's the third woman, including his affianced bride. His is surely the deadly kind that they all fall for! Well, I'm glad the inheritance isn't mine, at any rate. There is no fury like the fury of a woman scorned — and a chap can't marry three women at the same time, and live within the law. . . . If he ever did live within the law — in the face of — *that* — which I saw in the dungeon! But I can't somehow credit him —— And yet, who else? . . . Hello, there's Rhea's bell, and Mr. Narkom, I'll dare swear. Well, I'll be glad enough to see his rotundity, bless him! — more glad than I had at first imagined."

And that's exactly who it proved to be. Rhea's bell was certainly useful, that was one thing. It did keep tally of every incoming visitor. And with that huge, high, iron-spiked wall which surrounded the grounds of Aygon Castle so utterly insurmountable, surely the murderers couldn't have got away very easily last night. Whew! Cleek whistled suddenly, and sat up. He hadn't thought of that! Then the murderers must be here in this household, or in the grounds of the place still — unless Rhea's

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bell had acquainted the family of their entrance or exit through the great gate.

But the gate had been ajar last night! And he had met Captain Macdonald prowling around on that nocturnal visit of his just after the time when the murder must have taken place. Then *who* set the gate ajar? Someone in the house, of course! Someone who knew about the thing — *beforehand.* . . . That opened up another avenue. He'd ask Miss Duggan. Perhaps it hadn't been opened especially for *him*, then? Perhaps it had been opened for — someone else. It certainly gave one to think, as the French say.

And he was thinking to such good cause that he did not hear the door of the ante-room open, nor the voice of the butler Jorkins repeat a name, and it was with genuine astonishment that he sprang to his feet and saw the portly figure of the Superintendent standing before him.

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CHAPTER XII

CLEEK MAKES A STARTLING ASSERTION

CLEEK and Mr. Narkom spent a busy fifteen minutes. Meanwhile, the Superintendent learned of the tragedy which had taken place and of what evidence Cleek had got together for him, had a cursory look round the library and at the body itself (which they examined more minutely), and generally took a survey of the whole appalling affair.

"Cinnamon!" ejaculated the Superintendent for the thirty-third time since the recital of the thing. "It's a teaser, I swear! If someone in the house hasn't done it, who the dickens *has?* When your wire came for me to run up here, yesterday, I was up to my eyes in work. But I knew you wouldn't send unless you really wanted me, and when *you* do that ——"

He stopped speaking and let the rest of the sentence go by default. But Cleek had seen, and Cleek *knew*. The friendliness in their two pairs of eyes deepened to a fellowship which is rare — and good to see.

"I know, old chap. But we mustn't go wander-

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ing down those particular primrose paths just now. You're a bully old boy, and I'd back you against every other man in the kingdom. And you've been a sort of a guardian angel and a blithering idiot all rolled into one! And that's a combination which I, for one, have strong leanings for! . . . Now, then, what about it?"

What, indeed! He swung around in his tracks, hands outthrown, and surveyed the Superintendent with tilted head and narrowed eyes. "Any ideas, eh?"

"Not a single, at the moment. Have you?"

"Oh — several. But they're too uncertain at present for utterance. There's one thing I do know: That if I could find out certain items that went to the laundry from this household last week I'd know a great deal more than I do now. And I'd be able to nail — someone — with a good share in this beastly business. Also . . . You saw Dollops, of course?"

"Yes. Young beggar! — he was on tenterhooks. Afraid some ghostly lady had caught you last night and hugged you to death, or some such rubbish. Until I assured him that your biceps were equal to all the ghosts in the world. Yes, I saw Dollops, all right. And he said he'd got work to do for you, or something. Some constable had called with a note early in the morning. . . . "

Cleek looked up quickly from a survey of the window-sill.

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"Yes — yes. Had he discovered what I asked him to?"

There was a sort of dumb tolerance in the Superintendent's unimaginative countenance. He shrugged his shoulders off-handedly.

"My dear chap," he responded, "here's his identical message, only I can't imitate his inimitable accent. 'Tell the Guv'ner, sir, as that there "Crahn and Anchor" wot he wants ter know abaht is an inmate of the post-office!' . . . Now, if you can make any sense out of that, Cleek. . . ."

"Deland, my dear chap, Deland, I beg of you!" interposed Cleek hastily, whirling about with upraised hands. "Not a soul in the place knows who I really am. Even Highland fastnesses, you know, have their leaking spots — and I'll show you one of 'em by-and-by that'll make you sit up! . . . But he *did* get it, the young beggar! Well, well, well! that points nearer home, anyway, and it'll be something to go on. . . . What's that? A clue? Well, perhaps, and perhaps not. Anyhow, it's not clue enough at present to hang any ideas on. But the stiletto's done the thing in one instance, and the air-pistol in the other. But how? — but where? — but ——" Then he whirled around suddenly and stood a moment looking at the spinning wheel as though, of a sudden, it had actually come to life of its own accord, and then darting forward scanned the spindle. "H'm. Perhaps not the stiletto —

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perhaps *this*, and the peasant-girl story to make a cloak of! The points are much the same — stiletto or spindle? But — which?"

"What the dickens are you mumbling over?" threw in Mr. Narkom at this juncture, as Cleek stood surveying this instrument of a bygone year, and pinching his chin between thumb and forefinger thoughtfully the while. "Spindle? You don't suppose the spindle of *that* thing could have anything to do with it, eh?"

"Stranger things have happened, my dear friend, though I'm inclined to think that in this case they have not!" responded Cleek serenely. "The spindle theory is thin — deuced thin. But it's often in the thinnest material that the thickest things are hid. . . . Now, if we could only find the bloodstained article with which the stiletto was wiped, we'd settle that question once and for all. I — Gad! yes, I remember now! I'll ask her later on what they were. H'm — ah! That's possibly where it is."

But Mr. Narkom's patience was running a close race with his curiosity, and both in the same direction. He gave an exasperated sigh and rubbed the top of his bald head disconsolately.

"You're the most amazin' beggar," he gave out finally, in a tense voice. "Mumbling away like a lunatic, of laundry-bills and spinning wheels and 'crowns and anchors' which are 'inmates of village post-offices,' and I don't know what all! If I didn't

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know something about you, I'd say you'd gone suddenly balmy, and light out for little old London before you turned your hand on *me!* But you might let a chap have an inkling ——";

"When you've been in this house as long as I have, you'll have more than an inkling — you'll probably *know*," returned Cleek with a little laugh. "But, look here, my friend, we've got to get the body out of here — presto! — or we'll be having the ladies fainting away and upsetting the apple cart with a vengeance! They're due in here inside of a quarter of an hour, when I'm going to give a little 'turn' of the whole thing again, and see if we can't reconstruct it a bit. The constable outside will lend a hand. Here, Peters!"

"Yessir?"

"Get you friend from the outside window for a moment and give a hand to get — This — out of the room before the ladies come. I want to reconstruct the whole affair in the presence of all concerned. And we'll take away all the gruesomeness that's possible. . . . Poor old chap! Poor old tight-fisted laird! Eh, man, but you've got a sterner judge to face now than ever you were yourself! And this time Justice has to be done, and no gainsaying the fact, either!"

The unpleasant task was barely finished before the sound of footsteps and the humming of many voices in the hallway without told those within that

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the family were reassembling for the "performance." Cleek, with a hasty glance to see that all was right, threw wide the door.

"Come in, come in," he said in a pleasant, friendly voice. "There's nothing now to be seen but that which all may see, Lady Paula, so neither you nor Miss Duggan nor any other member of the party need fear. If you will all kindly take your places exactly as you took them last night, I'd be immensely grateful. At any rate, Mr. Narkom here" — he introduced him to the assembly with a slight bow — "will be able to get some kind of an idea of exactly how things were when the — tragedy happened. Hello! Where's Miss — Miss — er — McCall? Wasn't she a member of the party, too?"

Lady Paula entered the room with a rustling of soft black silk, and came toward him with sadly smiling countenance.

"I hardly thought, you know, that you would require her presence, Mr. Deland, and so I told her she might attend to her duties instead. But of course if you wish ——"

"I do wish ——"

"Then she shall be immediately sent for. Maud, my dear, will you kindly call her?"

Maud, thus addressed, turned silently away and went out of the room, but in a few moments was back again, the slim, shrinking form of the girl following closely behind her.

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Cleek came toward her and smiled down into her pale face.

"If you would be so kind, Miss McCall, as to take up your position as it was last night when — when the murder was committed, I should be exceedingly grateful. Thanks very much. You really needn't be so frightened, you know. It's only a sort of grim dress rehearsal after the show instead of before. Just to get some sort of idea. . . .

"Now, then, Sir Andrew, I take it, sat here in this chair" — he seated himself forthwith at the desk, and looked about him. "And you, Mr. Duggan, were in the centre, opposite, with your sister here at your left. You were at your husband's right hand, a little way back, Lady Paula? Oh, I see — just halfway behind his chair, in case he might need you. Of course, of course. The right position for a lord's lady to be. . . . Now, let me see. You, Miss Dowd, stood at the left hand, right back against the wall, with Miss Debenham on *your* left — oh, a little forward, eh? And Miss McCall on the other side of her. That's it. Now, I suppose, we are all in our places. Now, Mr. Narkom, if you'd be so good as to take up my present position and represent the ill-fated gentleman for one moment, I'll hop up and look about a bit. The scene's set, and we'll try and reconstruct the drama from anything any one would like to tell me. I believe one of the windows was open, was it not, Lady Paula?"

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He turned to her so swiftly that she was taken aback, and in her nervousness went a shade pale under her olive tan.

"I — don't know, Mr. Deland. I really never noticed. . . ."

"But *I* did." It was Catherine Dowd who spoke, a note of decision in her clear voice. "The centre window was open, Mr. Deland — from the bottom. Wide open."

"Yes — of course it was," Maud Duggan broke in excitedly. "I remember noticing how the curtains blew while poor Father was speaking. Don't you, Ross?"

He shook his head miserably.

"I don't remember anything but what actually took place," he returned, in a low, unhappy voice. "I was so furious, Maud; you must remember the ignominy of — of Father calling in everyone like this to see my name struck out of the will! If he'd done it in private, even, it would not have been so bad, but in front of others, people who were not of our family" — his glance travelled from Johanna's mouse-like countenance to the inscrutable Catherine's. "It — it seemed hardly cricket to me, and I was boiling over. I wish to God I hadn't been! It would have made it much easier to bear — now!"

"My poor Ross!"

Cynthia's voice, very low and tender, crept across

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to him, and he gave her a weary smile in acknowledgment.

"Well, now," said Cleek evenly, "let's start away at this wretched affair. Mr. Duggan, you were the only other gentleman present besides your father. Perhaps you will tell me how things went. The ladies look somewhat pale. It's rather an ordeal, I'm afraid, but a very necessary one. Your father, I understand, seated himself and began to denounce you in a loud voice, and you ——"

"Retaliated, Mr. Deland. Yes, I'm afraid I did. Poor old Dad! But I was pretty well strung up. And then, just as he had sat down again—he was standing up before, waving his fist in the air and calling me all sorts of names"—his voice broke a tone or two and then recovered itself—"just as he had taken up the pen and was about to scratch out my name and substitute my sister's, out went the lights; we were plunged immediately into utter darkness, and in the midst of it——"

"We heard distinctly the sound of the spinning wheel, humming just as the Peasant Girl said it would hum upon the approaching death of any male member of the family," supplemented Maud Duggan feverishly and with much excitement. "Hum-hum-hum! it went, Mr. Deland; then there was a swishing sound as of someone moving hurriedly—a sort of half-gasp—a—a—oh! how shall I describe it?——"

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"A whizz and a whirr, and then the lights came up and there lay Sir Andrew in his chair—dead."

The finale came from Catherine Dowd, who spoke in a low, tense voice, every note of which sounded in that quiet room, and made the atmosphere vibrate with the feeling of it.

"My God!"

The exclamation came from Lady Paula's and Mr. Narkom's lips simultaneously, but from very different causes. For the lady had gone suddenly white as death and fallen back against the wall, both hands pressed to her face and her shoulders shaking.

Maud Duggan hastened to her immediately, while Miss McCall, like the perfectly trained companion she was, produced smelling-salts from the capacious pocket of her blue serge coat-frock, and held it under her mistress's nose. A dose of brandy set the lady to rights, and her Southern emotionalism subsided when she sat down in front of the open window.

She looked up into Cleek's downbent face with wide eyes.

"I am so sorry," she said. "But it brought it all back—so dreadfully—so terribly! Oh, I shall never forget it—never! Miss McCall, my smelling-salts, again, please. . . . Thank you. Mr. Deland, you have still—much more to proceed with?"

He nodded.

"A good deal, I'm afraid. In the first place, I

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must tell you that we have discovered one of the weapons—the stiletto which stabbed your husband, Lady Paula. There remains but the air-pistol—and that will not be a difficult matter, either, I imagine." He looked significantly at Ross, whose face went suddenly scarlet.

"I say—if you dare to accuse—*me*. . . ."

"Not so fast, my friend; I'm accusing nobody," returned Cleek serenely, "and too much protestation often hides a guilty conscience. Please say nothing until you are questioned. It is the safest way. First—the stiletto."

He drew it from his pocket and held it aloft where they could all see it, the sunshine lighting upon its fine blade and turning it into a narrow ribbon of brilliancy.

"Can any one claim this, please?"

There was an instant's hush of amazement as all looked at the thing, as of the stillness before the storm, and then Maud Duggan hurried forward and seized it in her two hands.

"It is my stepmother's!" she exclaimed emphatically, and at the sound of her voice Lady Paula sprang to her feet, instantly upon the defense, and her faintness forgotten in this exciting moment.

"Mine — mine! Oh, of course it is mine!" she shrilled like a veritable harpy. "Every one of you would like to accuse me of this terrible crime, I suppose. Mine? — yes, it is mine. But who had

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it last, I ask you? That is another question to answer. Who but yourself, Maud?"

"Not yesterday, Paula."

"The day before, then ——"

"It was I you lent it to the day before, if you remember, Paula," struck in Ross's voice quietly. "Please try to stick to facts as much as possible."

"Well, you, then — or your wretched sister — one or the other of you," she returned vehemently, stung out of all thought of good-breeding by the sudden appearance of this thing of ill-repute. "What does it matter, so long as it was used by one of you?"

"And you will remember, if you think back, that I myself brought it up to your boudoir and handed it to you, Paula, and I myself saw you place it in your top drawer," interposed Ross, still in that ice-cold terrible voice which is so much more horrible to bear than red-hot anger.

"You lie! — you lie!"

"He does not!" It was Johanna McCall who spoke at this juncture — Johanna, with two red spots of colour in her usually pale cheeks and her eyes fairly blazing. "I saw him do it, too — *I* saw you, Mr. Duggan. Don't believe what she says, Mr. Deland! It is she who lies — I swear that!"

To and fro the evil words flew like vultures seeking to peck each other's hearts out in the combat. In the sudden hush which followed this last denounce-

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ment, while Lady Paula was accumulating her forces to retaliate, Cleek held up his hand.

"Then I take it," he said, "that the stiletto is the property of Lady Paula, but that it was last used by Mr. Duggan, who returned it to Lady Paula in the presence of a witness, and she put it back into her drawer. That is correct, is it not?"

"A lie — an absolute lie!"

"Perfectly correct, Mr. Deland."

"Thank you, Mr. Duggan. At any rate, the ownership of the thing is established, which, by the way, Lady Paula, makes no assertion whatever as to incriminating *you* in this disastrous affair. Miss Debenham, would you mind coming over here for a moment? I would like to look at your dress ——"

"My *dress*, Mr. Deland?"

He smiled at her with disarming frankness.

"No wonder you think I am mad, but — ah, yes! see, right here on this panel — I thought I was not mistaken. If you wouldn't mind turning round a little more toward the middle of the room, Miss Debenham — thank you — right here; those dark stains." He went down on his knees suddenly and sniffed them, rubbed them with his fingers, and then beckoned the mystified Mr. Narkom, who joined him immediately. "You see, Mr. Narkom, what it is? Rather peculiar, isn't it?"

"What the devil are you driving at?" demanded Ross at this juncture, striding around the desk and

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taking up a stand beside his fiancée as though to shield her from the hands of these merciless probers of human hearts. "I wish to God you and your kind had never showed up here at all, I do, indeed! You always bring trouble in your wake."

"*Follow* trouble, I think you mean, my friend," supplemented Cleek quietly. "The trouble is generally there first. It is our business to see that it is thrust upon — the right shoulders."

"Then Cynthia — what are you driving at now?"

There was a moment's tense silence. Then Cleek's voice sounded clearly:

"Simply this. Those three stains there — long, narrow ones — upon Miss Debenham's gown (I noticed them this morning at breakfast) are — bloodstains, Mr. Duggan — *bloodstains!*"

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CHAPTER XIII

MR. NARKOM VOICES AN OPINION

BLOODSTAINS?"

Three pairs of feminine lips voiced that sinister word simultaneously: Lady Paula's, Cynthia's, and Maud Duggan's.

"But how, Mr. Deland? — But why? — And upon Cynthia's dress, too!"

"Well, I'll swear I never had anything to do with it, anyhow!" threw in Cynthia emphatically and in a voice of astonishment. "How *could* they be bloodstains, Mr. Deland? and how could they possibly get on *my* frock? Solve that question, if you please, first of all."

"Quite a simple one, Miss Debenham. Just this: The murderer — or one of them, as the case may be — entered this room by that middle window, stabbed Sir Andrew with the stiletto, stolen for the purpose, of course — then, in a frenzy lest he be discovered, caught hold of the nearest thing and wiped the bloodstained instrument upon it, and then made off as quickly as possible. You happened to be the nearest, no doubt. So you were the person chosen. Did you not feel anything at all of the action?"

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She shook her head.

"Nothing that I remember. We were all so astonished when the light failed that I don't remember anything at all about it. If it was done, it was done gently — and my skirt is wide."

"And you think the murderer, the perpetrator of this wicked crime, was a man, then, Mr. Deland?" put in the soft voice of Lady Paula at this juncture.

Cleek spun around toward her, nodding emphatically.

"I do, indeed. No woman could have arranged the thing like this, Lady Paula. The electricity would have been too difficult a problem for her, in the first place, and then the shooting ——"

"And how do you account for *that*, Mr. Deland?"

"Ah, that is a more difficult matter. How? By whose hand? We will get back to our stage rehearsal for that, I think. Mr. Narkom, would you sit down again in the chair? Thanks very much. It's only just for a moment. Now, if you ladies would take up your positions again as they were, I'd be very much obliged. Let me see. The shot entered the temple here above the left eye and passed clean through the head into the wall of the room beyond. An acute angle of fifty degrees. H'm. That would bring it to about over there and to a level with the top of that wood-panelling. Then the bullet must be located somewhere in that vicinity, from all logical reasonings. But where?

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Come, Mr. Narkom, just a moment. Lend me your keen eyes, will you? And we'll have a look together. It'll want careful looking, I'll warrant. But the panelling's in fine condition and shows every mark. I — Gad! and here it is, too!"

His finger paused upon a slight, dark puncture in the darkness of the wood, and he whirled round and faced them all, eyes alight, face aglow, and marking the spot with his finger-nail. "Here, lend me your knife, my friend, and we'll dig it out. That will establish a pretty good clue, I can promise you. And a soundless pistol-shot — an air-gun. It ought to be easy to trace the owner of *that*, in desolate parts like this. Well, here goes!"

A moment's careful prodding with the point of the knife, and the thing was done. The bullet — an infinitesimal thing — fell out into the palm of his hand. Then, of a sudden, he swung around in his tracks toward them. His face was grim.

"Look here," he said, in the sharp staccato of excitement, "what I want to know is, who of this company possesses an air-gun? For that someone does I am certain. That shot must have been fired at close range — by the depth to which it was embedded in this wood. Mr. Duggan, do you happen to own an air-pistol?"

The last remnant of colour drained itself out of Ross Duggan's already pale cheeks. His eyes nar-

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rowed down to pin-points in the frame of his face. Then his chin went up.

"I do, Mr. Deland."

"H'm. I thought as much. And if you were standing there, opposite your father, and with no one at the right side of you, and only the space of the bow-window between you and the outside world — taking into consideration the enormous amount of misguided reason which you might have to commit such a terrible crime — as I said before, if you moved quickly over there, side stepping, so that the shot might miss any of the ladies opposite after passing through Sir Andrew's brain, and — if the lights failed at a given and arranged moment, and you whipped out your revolver and fired, it *might* bring about just this identical result."

"I . . . my God! man, you're not accusing me of murdering my own father, are you? You're daft — insane — idiotic!"

Cleek held up a silencing hand.

"I'm not accusing anybody, Mr. Duggan; simply reconstructing matters for the purpose of finding out the true assassins. And, as I told you last night, every one, according to English law, may be considered guilty until he be proved innocent. Suspicions seem to point heavily to you, I must say. But we've got to have more facts, of course. . . ."

"He didn't do it, Mr. Deland! Of course he didn't do it!"

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Cynthia shrilled out these words suddenly, rushing toward Cleek and fastening her hands about his arm. "You're mad to suggest such a thing, to even think it! My Ross wouldn't stoop to *murder* for a beastly inheritance! You don't know him as I do — as all these others do. It's incredible."

"Quite true, Miss Debenham. But let's ask Mr. Narkom what he thinks of it. He's kept his peace during this session, proving himself, no doubt, a wiser man than I. Mr. Narkom, give us your views, please. Who do *you* think has committed this crime, according to present evidence?"

"That man!" Mr. Narkom pointed excitedly in Ross's direction, his fat face red with excitement, his forehead perspiring with the heat of his excitement. "*He* fired the shot. But the stiletto — that is a more difficult question."

"And you think Mr. Duggan actually did kill his father, then? No, no, sir, I beg of you, let us finish this discussion before you interrupt. It might lead to something really enlightening. You think that, Mr. Narkom? Considering the position in which the shot was fired, and the position in which Mr. Duggan himself stood last night?"

"Decidedly I do."

"H'm. I'm sorry. But I'm inclined to agree. But the evidence, I admit, is at present slight — the actual circumstantial evidence, I mean. You're not going to — arrest — him on that, I hope?"

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Arrest! The fateful word fell upon that assemblage with truly sinister meaning. Arrest Ross! Arrest him! Impossible! Upon every face these thoughts might be read — except upon Lady Paula's, where, indeed, a sort of secret and hidden triumph seemed to glow like a light lit from within. Cleek flashed his eyes over every face. He paused at Lady Paula's for one moment, and then went on to Ross's — and ended up at length upon Catherine Dowd's. It was transfigured! Transfigured with hate of himself, with love of Ross: the two most intense feelings in human nature warring with each other upon it to be uppermost. That look of hatred made him positively shiver. If the woman had had any real reason for the crime, could she not have been the perpetrator of the stabbing episode? But she hadn't any reason, at least none that could be at present discovered. One would have to go deeper than that for motive.

"Well, Mr. Narkom?"

The Superintendent was looking frankly uncomfortable. Cleek's direct action in front of them all had somewhat winded him. He was not used to such out-and-out tactics, even in the methods of a man who was the most amazing beggar he had ever struck.

"I — I — well, hardly that, my dear chap," he responded awkwardly. "We've got to have more proof than that, you know. A judge won't hang

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a man upon the evidence of his possible position in a room when the light went out. It — it isn't feasible!"

"Well done, well done!" Cleek laughed the words softly into his ear. "So, Mr. Duggan, you are free — for the present. But understand, you are on parole and must not leave this house unaccompanied by a constable or plain-clothes man. This thing's got to be sifted to the bottom, and, what's more, it's going to be, too. And whoever has murdered that poor old man will swing for it, so help me God!"

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CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH RHEA TAKES A HAND

THE silence that followed this last solemn remark of Cleek's was fraught with unknown, tremendous issues. One could have heard a pin drop in the still room. Then at last Lady Paula stirred.

"You have finished, Mr. Deland — Mr. Narkom? I may go now?"

"In one more moment, Lady Paula. There is simply the matter of the will now to be thrashed out before you disperse and leave us to work out the problem as best we may. You have, no doubt, put it away, Mr. Duggan? I didn't see it here when I investigated early this morning."

"I've done nothing of the sort, Mr. Deland."

"Oh! — is that so? I beg you pardon. Then perhaps you, Miss Duggan?"

"Certainly not. I've never laid a finger upon it!" returned she, with a shake of the head and amazement written all over her countenance. "I've never thought about it again from that moment to this! Why, of course it must have been upon the table when — when poor Father met his — death.

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He was just about to alter the name when the light went out."

"Then you were using the electric switch last night instead of the customary lamp, I take it?"

"Yes. Father did use it at intervals, and I suppose in this case he thought it better for seeing with. For it was certainly on. A lamp could never have failed as that light did, Mr. Deland. No doubt it would have been better if we had not used the electricity, for the dreadful thing could never have taken place then, could it?"

"And so we must put that down to Ross, and lay the whole blame upon *him*, at any rate!" snapped out Lady Paula in an angry voice; and Cleek thought, for a woman so shortly bereft, she was singularly well recovered from the shock — if it had ever been one in the first instance. "For if he had not installed this dreadful thing, then surely, surely my poor, poor husband would never have met with his death at all!'

"Oh, have done with your nagging, Paula!" responded Ross irritably as she ceased speaking.

And Cleek obtained silence simply by stepping into the breach himself.

"Well," he said serenely, "the will has disappeared, at any rate. No servant has touched it, I suppose? Or entered this room last night before I came, Miss Duggan?"

"None that I know of. It's peculiar, to say the least of it."

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H'm. Then among this little company around and about him Cleek registered the fact that one might include a thief and a murderer. Not any too pleasant a thought, when the guilt could not definitely be fixed upon any single one. But stay! — there was the boy Cyril, and if that will had been stolen, why should not he have done it as much as anybody? He and his mother would benefit more if the will disappeared entirely than by the simple bequests which Maud Duggan had told him had been left to them. A widow had always a third share by law, that was an understood thing; and a third share of this enormous estate meant a good deal more than one at first imagined. The boy Cyril must be interviewed in due course.

Then there was another point to be taken up, the question of Captain Macdonald's presence in these grounds last night, shortly after the murder had taken place. That gentleman must account for his movements in the proper quarter. And if by any chance there were footprints outside that very window, then — b'gad! he, too, might be included in the circle of possible criminals.

He strode quickly over to the window and leaned out of it, looking down upon the flower-bed beneath it, just a matter of three feet or so, and the little walled-in courtyard that girt it about. Eh? what? There were marks in the soft earth, and plenty of 'em!

Then the assembled company fairly gasped at his

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next action, while Mr. Narkom, knowing him better than they did, pelted over to the window and leaned out of it. For Cleek had climbed upon the ledge and had let himself down — light as a cat — down on to the bed, and stood looking in through the window at them with serenely smiling face.

"Gad!" he ejaculated excitedly. "Well, and why not? Footprints! . . . Constable, just nip along into the village, and fetch me back Captain Angus Macdonald. I want to speak to him rather particularly. Tell him it's the Law — and that he's got to come — and he'll come along pretty lively, I can promise you."

The constable nipped along forthwith, while of a sudden Maud Duggan's flushed face went white as a dead face, and her eyes fairly blazed at him.

"Captain Macdonald! Oh, it's ridiculous, Mr. Deland! — absurd! What on earth are you dragging *him* in for? You must be mad to think for one moment ——"

Cleek held up a silencing hand before he dropped to the ground and began peering at the footprints in the soft earth through a magnifying glass.

"I don't think, Miss Duggan — it's a policeman's business to *know*," he retorted; and then set about his task, while those others in the fateful room crowded about the open window and stood looking down at him with blank, unhappy faces.

Carefully he measured their length with his little

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foot-rule and noted the size down in his pocketbook. Then he fitted one of his own slim feet into the indentation, saw that it was rather larger and broader, stepped back upon the courtyard and faced them, all clustering about him, with serene countenance.

"A fair-sized boot, ladies and gentlemen," he remarked; "quite a fair-sized boot! Number tens, if I know anything of sizes. And looks like hunting-boots, too. Evidently a chap who rides. Now, this Captain Macdonald, Lady Paula ——"

"One of the finest horsemen in the country," she returned, with a shrugging of shoulders and an uplifting of brows.

"Ah! Just so. That was what I imagined when I saw — when I encountered him here in these grounds last night. Light of foot, and the proper build, too. He'll no doubt be along in the course of another three quarters of an hour (if Jameson doesn't have a dickens of a job locating him), so in the meanwhile, if Mr. Narkom is willing, we'll take a little turn together and talk over things, and then come back to you here in the allotted time. Willing, Mr. Narkom?"

"Perfectly willing."

And so it came about that, arm in arm, the two friends went off together down by the wide driveway that led to the great doors of wrought-iron which Rhea so ably guarded, and Cleek, stopping in the pathway, pointed up to the statue etched out against

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the sky in sinister outline, and told Mr. Narkom the story of it.

"Cinnamon! But what a magnificent thing it is!" ejaculated that gentleman with awe, when the tale was finished. "That's something to be proud of — eh, old chap? Now, if I had a fellow like that for an ancestor there'd be no living with me at all! These old families! — there's certainly something in this thing they call Birth and Race — though for the life of me I never can make it out."

"No," thought Cleek, with a smile, "you wouldn't." But he said nothing, merely passed on toward the iron gates, and seeing that they had been left ajar, clanged them to sharply behind them.

"He'll ring his great bell when the latch falls — that's his ceremonious way of welcoming the coming and speeding the parting guest," threw in Cleek with a laugh. "I'm going to shove down the latch now, so watch him, my friend. Here goes!"

He sent the door clanging to with a vigorous pull, but — not a sound rang out over the still air. Rhea had failed in his duty for once in his whole long, dutiful lifetime. Cleek spun round and looked at him, face gone suddenly blank.

"What the — that's the funniest thing! It's never failed before, except last night, when I found it conveniently ajar," he ejaculated, staring up at the sky. "Unless — perhaps it would have failed last night, too. There's no knowing. But Miss

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Duggan assured me positively that the thing had never been stopped. But if it *had* been stopped for this very happening last night, to silence the approach of an unwanted visitor, what's to prevent 'em from swaddling the clapper up — and not had time to undo it again? And yet, when the Inspector came it rang all right. No — *that* theory won't hold water, my friend."

"What's that you're mumbling about, Cleek?" threw in Mr. Narkom at this juncture. "Clapper swaddled up? You surely don't think the bell's been stopped for any purpose?"

"No — simply to protect the sensitive ears of the housekeeper," threw back Cleek with a contemptuous laugh; and then whirled around upon him and caught him by the shoulder. "Forgive me, old friend. My tongue scampers ahead of my heart sometimes, which is a very poor trait for a policeman to possess. What I mean to say is simply this: Up to yesterday that bell rang — even when we came here for the first time — for I have the evidence of my own ears to prove it. And now — it doesn't ring. So what's prevented it? I'm going up to see."

"Cleek, my dear fellow! — to climb that height! And in daylight, too!"

"What's the harm? say I — if you'll keep watch and tell me of approaching visitors. Here goes! Keep your eyes peeled upon the high-road, Mr.

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Narkom, because it wouldn't do to be seen, y'know, and if any one approaches, whistle 'God Save the King,' and I'll slip into a hiding-place somewhere until the coast's clear. And don't tell any strangers who you are, will you?"

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 himself 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 dallied with him for so long, passing the time of day and making tactless inquiries about the murder, in his blunderbuss fashion ('Dear old

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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

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lodged there and stopped the thing? I'm on tenter-hooks 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 to-night 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 to-night, 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."

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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 sendin' 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

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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 schoolmate 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 — a policeman! Damned funny!"

"As you say — *very* funny," returned Cleek, with

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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 knows that. And as all this is entirely 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? That's what I want to know."

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 very 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."

"Oho!" said Cleek in two different tones, arching an eyebrow in Mr. Narkom's direction. "Still more emphatic, I must say! And 'absolutely re-

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fuse,' 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 ——"

"But forbidden the house, I take it?"

Macdonald flushed an ugly crimson.

"You're exceedin'ly well informed upon family affairs, I must say!" he retorted tartly. "Yes — forbidden the house by the master of it (poor old chap!) and therefore — well, I'm not goin' to say any more. It may implicate someone else who's entirely innocent, and you won't get my mouth open with a sledge-hammer and a nail!"

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"And no necessity for it, either — you dunderheaded young donkey!" thought Cleek amusedly. "For if you haven't given the whole show away, and made it perfectly plain to everybody that you were meeting your sweetheart — or about to do so — then my name's not Cleek — which, of course, it isn't! And there's no telling but that you're a better actor than you make out! And this may be a 'blind' — but at present there's no 'cover' to draw, so we'll be off cantering in the other direction until the scent's a bit stronger in *yours*." Aloud, he turned to the irate young man with a slight bow, and spoke in his easy, calm manner.

"Well, if you won't, you won't. These are not the days of the thumbscrew and the rack, Captain Macdonald, and a man's tongue cannot be made to speak by any other means than a little confinement in a prison cell. And I don't think that's really necessary, in your case, do you, Mr. Narkom? So we'll let that pass for the present. But I'd like you to understand that — on account of your refusing to acquaint us with the facts of your presence here in the grounds of this place last night — we are obliged, in the maintenance of Law and Order, to put you upon your parole."

"Thanks very much."

Captain Macdonald bowed, with much mockery of lip and gesture, and then, turning to the others in that silent little knot of spectators, made his way

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over to the side of Maud Duggan, whose face was as pale as a dead face, and in whose eyes lurked the suspicion of a great fear, and laid his hand upon her arm.

They conversed for a moment or two in low voices, utterly oblivious of those others who were searching their faces with curious eyes, while in the background Ross Duggan fidgeted with his watch-chain and sent his handsome eyes searching each figure in that still room, as though in an endeavour to find a clue therein which would lift the pall of hateful suspicion from his own shoulders.

Cleek surveyed them critically. It was an abominably personal sort of case, to say the least of it. And not much to his liking. But the element of mystery in the whole affair gripped his interest in spite of these other drawbacks.

Of course there was no truth in the cock-and-bull story of the Peasant Girl — that went without saying. But that it had been used as a "blind" to cover the real perpetrators of the crime was evident to his mind. And why *two* of them? For in each case death would have been caused instantaneously. He looked down at the spinning wheel standing there in the recess of the window, and tried to link the thing up with it. But there seemed no peg to hang a clue upon there. Obviously the thing had been "worked" with just such an idea to disguise its real purport.

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Then he thought of the letters that he had found in the desk, hidden away and yellowed with Time's fingers, and tied about with faded ribbon. And of a sudden something flashed across his face which, Mr. Narkom watching him as a cat does a mouse and knowing to a nicety what those expressions so often meant, made that worthy gentleman positively jump with excitement.

Cleek smiled at him and shook a head over his eagerness. Then he turned to the rest of them.

"No need now to prolong this unpleasant and unhappy interview," he said quietly. "Mr. Duggan has given his parole, and also the worthy Captain over there. The Yard's men will do the rest. But I must renew my request that none of you leaves this house to-day, or goes beyond the walls of the garden, unless under special permission from Mr. Narkom or myself. Just for to-day, my friends. By to-morrow perhaps the riddle may be solved, or its end in sight. But for the next twenty-four hours I must beg your assistance, every one of you, to bring it to a successful and definite close."

His request had an immediate and almost eager response. For there was not one of that little band of anxious people who was not glad to be released from the unpleasant and searching questionings of the Law, as represented by this bland gentleman of the fine manner and the polished ways, who seemed, indeed, as good as they were (if not better),

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and who met them upon the grounds of an equality which was hardly to be expected from one of his calling.

Maud and the Captain walked away together, conversing in low voices, their faces grave. Ross, Cynthia Debenham, and Catherine Dowd — lagging a little behind, and favouring Cleek with a look of venomous hatred cast back at him over her shoulder as she passed through the open door — turned toward the terrace, where they all sat down and discussed the thing from every point of view within their reach, and came to no definite ending at all; while Lady Paula, summoning Miss McCall with a regal gesture, rose from her chair, bowed charmingly to each of the two men left in the room, and withdrew to the safety and peace of her own boudoir.

When the door had shut upon the last of them, Cleek began pacing the room excitedly, pulling at his chin and gnawing at his lower lip, which gestures brought Mr. Narkom to the conclusion that he was indulging in a "jolly good think!"

"There's more in those letters than meets the eye," Cleek said aloud, apostrophizing the wall-paper and the fireplace in turn. "H'm. Not a doubt of it. 'Jeannette.' Something Scotch in the flavour of that, eh, Mr. Narkom? . . . Yes, that's my opinion, too. It wouldn't take a hammer and a nail to drive *that* fact home, anyhow. And the date of 'em

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some seventeen years back. . . . But it's the 'humming sound' which gets me, I swear. Can't account for that, anyhow. Might be a dynamo, but there isn't a dynamo in the place, and no need for it, either. Plain stabbing and shooting upon the face of it. We'll go for a prowl this afternoon, old friend, and see what new lands we can discover."

"All right. I'm your man, Cleek — the same as always," returned Mr. Narkom affectionately, as he slapped Cleek on the shoulder with his broad hand, and then slipped it about his ally's neck and kept pace with him up and down the narrow room.

"Anything that's going — with *you* in it — will find me on the spot, too. I'm a bit of a slow-mover, I know — but you're such a lightning-bug of a creature that there's not a soul on earth can keep pace with you. Have you looked into that laundry-bill question you were dickering about a while ago?"

Cleek threw back his head and laughed.

"I have. But there's nothing doing there, as yet. The particular maid I questioned has got a bilious attack this afternoon and can't go over the lists for me. But I'm to hear to-morrow morning for certain. . . . It *is* rather a teaser for you, isn't it, old chap? But you must bear with me until I've unravelled the ends myself, and when that's done, I'll put 'em into your hands, and you can wind 'em up for me into a tidy little ball. Let's get a

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move on now, there's a good fellow. By the way, who's the guilty party *now*, eh?"

Mr. Narkom scratched his head perplexedly and let a full minute elapse before replying.

"It's a dickens of a tangle, looking at it any way," he returned dejectedly. "I could have sworn that chap Ross Duggan had murdered his father for the simple motive of keeping his name in the will, and of course the name *wasn't* erased, after all, was it? That's a black point against him. But this flustery-blustery-Captain-chap with his lord-high-almighty ways rather took the wind out of my sails. And when you said you had encountered him last night, Cleek, you could have knocked me down with a feather. How did it happen?"

"Oh — caught him running as hard as he could from the direction of the lawns beyond this window, and fell plump into him as the best way to attract his attention," returned Cleek serenely. "I thought it strange that he should be there at such a time. And he looked half-scared out of his wits, too. Expected me to tell the household, I suppose. Rather officious young chap, I must say — but I've a sneaking liking for him, all the same. D'you think he did the shooting, then?"

"Not a doubt of it!" Mr. Narkom was emphatic.

"Oh! And why, do you suppose?"

"Um — ah! Well, that's got to be discovered yet. Never know, Cleek; there might be some hid-

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den business in this affair in which this Captain is involved. Anyhow, I doubt him — tremendously. Didn't ring true, I thought. Rather too noisy and all that."

"And you believe in the adage that 'empty vessels make the most sound,' I take it?" rejoined Cleek with a smile. "Well, perhaps you're right. Only I wouldn't call that young gentleman an empty vessel. . . . Anyhow, this evening will elucidate matters a little. For I'm going to remove that muffling for the nonce, and substitute another one. And it ought to prove quite an enlightening job, too!"

So saying, he swung out of the courtyard of the house, vaulting the window lightly, and reaching a helping hand up to Mr. Narkom, who came through less easily, perspiring at every pore. And suddenly Cleek's finger went up to his lips, and with a hasty "Hush!" for his wheezy comrade, he drew back into the screen of the bushes, standing as still as a statue, all eyes, while the amazing thing came to pass!

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CHAPTER XVI

"TENS!"

DID you see that, Mr. Narkom? Did you see that?" rapped out Cleek excitedly, when — a few minutes later — he stepped free from the detaining bushes and beckoned the Superintendent from his hiding-place. "Recognize the cut of *that* lady — eh? And notice anything else about her?"

"Only that she looked like that Lady Paula Duggan who was here a few minutes ago," rejoined Mr. Narkom breathlessly. "But what had she got that black thing over her head for? — sort of veil, wasn't it? Couldn't see her face through — and gad! but how lightly she stepped!"

"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. . . .

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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 idea 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

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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 fiancée 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

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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 hill, 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 told 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

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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

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went taut as iron. For the paper — innocent as it looked — contained news which certainly 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,

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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 *'ow*, 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

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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 to-night. 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?"

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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 Three Fishers. Name of Macdonald — Captain Angus Macdonald. Writ inside 'em as

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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. "Why, 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 Inheritance Game is, and — nipped it in the bud! . . . Gad! — Captain Angus Macdonald! And — tens! . . . Now, who the dickens would have thought it?"

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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 scoundrel enough to steal the heart of a good woman, such as Miss Duggan undoubtedly was, a good, honest, straight woman, then he were a blackguard 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

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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 more from the estates than that will of Sir Andrew's 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

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worthy Captain? H'm. That certainly was possible. And the initials were the same. Gad! it gave one to think, as the French say. It did, indeed! For 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 her 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 Duggans 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 poignard had pierced. And Catherine Dowd stood there.

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And it was she who had brought him the poignard 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, "Yessir," and it was not many seconds later when Maud Duggan herself appeared, looking pale and distraite 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 marquetrie 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.

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"Angus's!" 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 inside. My man 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 see, 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?"

"Were left behind by mistake. He called for them, but I asked 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

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loved to see them with the other men's boots — Ross's and Father's and Cyril's and Mr. Tavish's — in our harnessing-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

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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 upthrown 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 unworthy scent!"

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."

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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 eights. He has a small foot, like poor old Father had. And Cyril's, of course, is just a boy's foot — sevens, I think."

"Any one else?"

"The butler, Jarvis. Our groom, Batchett, and the old gardener, McGubbins — and Mr. Tavish; but he's a huge man, and would take elevens, 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.

"Only that she is Cynthia's cousin," she returned

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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 aloud! 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 stiletto which so obviously stabbed your father. She says she found it sticking in the curtains. Have you ever discovered that the young lady lies, Miss Duggan?"

She 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 girls do 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.

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"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 land 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 had to suffer in consequence. Such a nice little thing, too! It's common knowledge that she is engaged to Mr. Tavish — though we've heard nothing definitely. But it will be an excellent match. More in her own station of life; and they're both such dears. . . . Anything else, Mr. Deland?"

"Nothing else, thanks."

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"Then I'll be off. And back again in twenty minutes. And in the meantime, Mr. Deland, you won't — you won't think too hard of my Angus, will you? Even if he had done such a terrible thing, whatever reason would he have had to do it?"

"Has he any debts, Miss Duggan?"

She laughed a little and shrugged her shoulders.

"Heavens, yes! Heaps of them. That was what Father had against him. Father used to say that a poor man should own nothing, because there was little chance of paying it back. But so have I, for the matter of that. Over a hundred pounds — and bridge debts. But it's my only recreation, Mr. Deland, and I can easily pay it back, so that it's nobody else's business, is it? But I wouldn't have Paula know 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, I imagine. And that poor girl has 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

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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 puzzler! 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.

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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 bootmaker'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,

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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 are elevens, 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 upthrown 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 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,

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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 silently.) Then, without more ado, bowed and left her, and went off in pursuit of the 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 downthrown, 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 person, nevertheless. "They'll never make a detective of *you* if your methods of attack don't

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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 bally lot of 'em. Said you'd threatened to arrest Ross and put — 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 tinkering with the electric switches in the library lately?"

Of a sudden the boy's face went red and white

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by turns. Then he averted his head and pretended to inspect a fly that was crawling upon the opposite wall.

"Er — I don't really know," he replied in a confused voice. "I haven't the faintest ——"

"You do!" Cleek had caught him by the shoulders and whirled him around so that eye met eye squarely, and he saw that the boy dropped his. "Come, now. Play the game. I can't expect to find the true murderer unless you tell the truth. Listen to me, Cyril. Was it your brother Ross?"

Came a long silence, followed by a quickly drawn breath. Then:

"*I* have."

"You? What the dickens did you do? Tell me all about it, quickly. I found a bit of flexible wire upon the carpet yesterday morning when I was looking over the house with your stepsister, and came to the conclusion that someone had been altering the lights. And it was you, was it?"

Again the flushed cheeks and quickly drawn breath. Oh, this quixotic family! — that muddled a decent man up in trying to do his duty by their perpetual affections and efforts to shield one another.

"Yes — and no. It was the day before yesterday. Ross and Mr. Tavish were in the library going over some land accounts and looking at the weekly wages bill, which is part of Ross's work for Father that he's been doing the past two years.

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I was there, too, mending a damaged switch which wouldn't go right, and Ross had promised to help me when his business was finished. Well, when it was done, and they had smoked a cigarette together — Mr. Tavish is awfully popular with the whole place, you know, Mr. Deland, and Ross liked him immensely — well, as I was saying, when they'd done, they came over to me, where I was tinkering away at the switch by the wall, and while Ross explained to me what exactly was the matter, Mr. Tavish stood over us and made remarks."

"Can you remember what any of those remarks were?"

"Yes. He said he thought I was growing to be a clever youngster, with a turn for electricity which ought to drive my father nearly mad, and then he shook his head, and Ross laughed sort of uncomfortably, and agreed with him. And then Ross asked Mr. Tavish if he knew anything of electricity. 'Not a blessed thing!' Mr. Tavish said, with a loud laugh. 'I don't know the difference between a short circuit and a Bath bun.' And of course we all laughed again, and then Ross explained a little of it to him, and he seemed to catch on awfully quick, and asked some jolly interestin' questions."

"And what were the 'jolly interestin' questions,' may I ask?"

"Oh — I've really forgotten. Whether one could get a shock from that sort of thing when you were

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working at it, and Ross said you could; and electricity could kill a person instantly. And then they began to talk about electrocution and the electric chair which criminals had to sit in instead of being hanged, as they used to do in the old days. And Ross, who simply loves anything to do with the subject as much as I do, Mr. Deland, began to explain how a man could be killed by leaving a live wire somewhere near where he could grasp hold of it, and then taking a long piece of flexible wire in his hands, he wired it along the edge of the room from the ground plug to the window, just to show what he meant by it."

"Oh, he did, did he? And what colour was the flexible wire?"

"Crimson. Usual shade. Mr. Tavish was awfully interested at what Ross did, and Ross got so enthusiastic that he carried the piece of wire up to the window and left the raw edge of the wire exposed, and when he put a piece of stuff against it, it singed up immediately, and, my word! there *was* a stink!"

"Naturally. And then?"

"Ross said a lot of things about the power of electricity that seemed to interest Mr. Tavish, and of course *I* was frightfully struck, as you can imagine, and kept my ears open. And just then, who should come in but Mother, and of course Ross and all of us stowed the conversation for the time being, and Ross nipped off the length of unnecessary wire with

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pincers and left Mother with Tavish to discuss some changes she wanted made in the poultry runs. She's rather interested in chickens, you know, sir."

"I see. But this was a bird of another colour, eh? What's that? No, my lad, you've said nothing to incriminate anybody, and I'll keep your confidence about this conversation, if you're worrying about it. Now, then, you'd better nip along, as it's nearly tea-time, and when I was your age clean hands were an absolute necessity even in the — er — austerity of my home! I've no doubt they're the same in yours."

"But I haven't said anything to — to incriminate Ross, have I, sir?" reiterated Cyril anxiously. "That thing about shooting a chap with the aid of electricity — of course it couldn't be done, I suppose, and Mr. Tavish didn't know enough about it to contradict Ross — and anyhow he was only gassing and not really meaning it at all. I — I'd give my right hand, sir, for Ross. He comes next to my mother in my estimation. And that's saying a good deal!"

"Not so much as you might think — if you know that lady as well as I do, my lad," apostrophized Cleek as the boy sped down the passageway and left him alone. "Gad! here's a new outlook altogether. And that conversation actually took place! He wasn't lying, the straight young devil. And he never realized that he was plunging that precious

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brother of his deeper and deeper into the mire! . . . I say — Cyril!"

The boy turned at the end of the passage and came slowly back to him.

"Yes, sir?"

"By the way, what size shoes do you take? Gad! your foot's pretty hefty for a sixteen-year-old, I must say! What's the number of those delicate little trotters?"

Cyril laughed self-consciously.

"They are rather huge, aren't they?" he replied. "But they're tens. Same size as Ross, you know, so that I can often borrow his shoes — and Captain Macdonald's as well. Funny we should all be the same size, isn't it?"

"Yes — deuced funny," returned Cleek, sucking in his lips suddenly and his face gone grim. "Tens — eh? Thought it was sixes for you and sevens for your brother."

"Who the dickens told you that fairy-tale, sir?"

"Oh, nobody particular. I must have dreamt it, I suppose," returned Cleek with a shrug of the shoulders. "And — I say, Cyril. Your man Jarvis seems to have trotters, too. What size are his boots now, I wonder?"

Cyril's eyes flew wide.

"You must have made a mistake," he said in a surprised voice. "For Jarvis's feet are awfully small. Eights, I believe. Anyway, I can't get 'em

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on, because I tried once. Stole his dress clothes and dressed up in 'em. But the mater was furious! Hello! there's the tea-gong. I must be off!"

Then he went off forthwith. Meanwhile Cleek, with his finger upon his chin, stood stock-still in the middle of the hallway and pinched up his brows.

"Now, why the dickens did she lie to me — unless she wanted to shield her precious brother?" he said ruminatively. "And why in heaven's name are they all so anxious to pervert Justice and to deny truth?"

But there was no one to give him any answer to that most difficult question, and he had perforce to possess his soul in patience for the present.

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CHAPTER XIX

DOLLOPS MAKES A DISCOVERY

THE rest of the day passed comparatively uneventfully for all those concerned in the drama of a night's doings, and save for a searching scrutiny of the library by Cleek, carried out under the noses of the village policeman, with Inspector Campbell very much to the fore as being in command of the local constabulary and anxious to make a good impression upon the Yard's Superintendent (with an eye to future promotion), and the discovery of one or two minor details which had passed even his searching eye before, Cleek's time hung fairly heavily upon his hands.

Dollops, keen as mustard upon any task which involved the imagination of his beloved master, spent the rest of the afternoon and a goodly part of the long twilight in scampering over the countryside in pursuit of various "facts," by the aid of a borrowed bicycle, which Mr. Fairnish had charged him seven-and-sixpence for in advance, being obviously doubtful as to whether the young man would return it or not, for Dollop's Cockney countenance was not one to breed immediate trust on sight.

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His efforts in this direction proved fairly fruitful, for after having scraped acquaintance with one of the grooms at Captain Macdonald's stables — the worthy Captain meanwhile champing furiously at the "bit" which kept him tethered to his present quarters for another night, when there were other affairs at his own place that wanted looking into — and in his own inimitable fashion managing to wangle an old letter written by his master to himself from the groom, Dollops, whistling vociferously, came spinning back again to Aygon Castle to present his find to Cleek, and receive the reward in Cleek's instantly spoken pleasure.

But to see Cleek was a different matter altogether. He had been told to "lie low" where Lady Paula was concerned, and not poke his nose in anything within reach of her ladyship's sharp eye. And as he did not possess Cleek's marvellous birthright by which he was able to alter his countenance in the space of a second, and become to all intents and purposes another man, Dollops was certainly "floored."

"Better try rahnd the servants' quarters, an' see what I kin see there," he decided after a brief survey of the land from an adjacent laurel bush which immediately faced the Castle. "The Gov'nor'll be ready ter split my nob open if I ups and goes inter the plyce by the front door, bless 'is 'eart! And it's shorely the back door for the likes o' *you*, Dollops me lad! So here goes!"

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So to the servants' quarters went Dollops forthwith, and scraped acquaintance with Jarvis, the butler, by offering him an impossible cigar, and asking off-handedly for Mr. Deland in the meanwhile.

"Dunno where 'e is at the moment," replied Jarvis, with a wink and a smile. "Seen 'im talkin' to the lydies only a few moments back, in the drorin' room. But since then. . . . Lunnon chap, ain't yer?"

"Yus!" Dollops's voice rang with pride of birthplace. He threw back his narrow chest and stuck his fingers in his waistcoat and surveyed his interlocutor with upthrown chin.

"Well, so'm I. Come dahn with the family last January from their Lunnon 'ouse. Park Mansion, it's called. Big plyce in Eton Square. Know those parts, I'll lay."

"Every inch of 'em," vociferated Dollops with emphasis. "Luvly plyce, ain't it? They tells me yer got a ghost in this 'ouse, and blimey! I'm that frightened ter meet 'er, me backbone's almost come rahnd ter me front. 'Ugs the gentlemen at night, don't she?"

Jarvis threw back his head and let his hearty laugh ring out over the rafters of the servants' hall.

"Wouldn't 'ug *you*, young 'un, not for nothing — if it were light enough ter see yer face by," he re-

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torted with heavy wit. "But it's truth. And the wimmenfolk is that nervous at night there's no managing with 'em nohow. Some sprightly feller in a bygone century went and man-'andled a girl from these parts an' carried 'er 'ere by force. Then 'e got 'er into trouble, so the story goes, an' she up and stabbed 'erself with the spindle of her spinning wheel — that there contraption wot stands in the library terd'y and makes a rare job er dustin' fer Minnie the under 'ousemaid. She don't 'arf kick at it, I kin tell yer! Anyway, that was 'ers! And we 'ad a footman 'ere last May wot fancied 'imself very partickler as a braive bloke. Well, he says, says 'e, 'I'll sit up ternight and go dahn by the dungeon door, where she's supposed ter come from, and see wot I kin see.' 'Course we laughed at him, and there was a bit of friendly gamblin' done — *you* know — an' I backed the blighter for a pound-note."

"An' what 'appened?"

"Ah, that's the scrub of it, as Shakespeare says, me lad. Young fool sat up there, and then abaht three o'clock in the mornin' we 'eard 'im come a-screamin' ter 'is quarters, lookin' as pale as death. 'E said 'e'd 'eard the Peasant Girl rustlin' abaht in her room, and the chink o' chains, and then the iron grille door began to open, and an unearthly voice called out, 'Avaunt ye, varlet, or I'll break yer bones!' and then . . . 'E was off like a pea from a cata-

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pult, and that was the last we ever 'eard of *'is* bravery. 'E gave notice next day, and forfeited a month's money ter get away from the plyce. And I lost me money, of course! That's wot comes of backin' a bad starter — mostly orlus loses yer money, I find."

During this enlightening recital Jarvis had been polishing the table silver, pausing between his task to relate the story, while Dollops's pale face went the colour of ivory, and the hair at the back of his neck began to prickle with fright.

"Gawd's troof!" he ejaculated, stung to some show of feeling by this gruesome tale. "Ain't that orful! 'Oo'd 'ave thought it? I wouldn't spend a night down there fer a mint of money — would you, Guv'nor?"

"Not if I knows it. But no one never does go dahn very often, only ter the wine-cellar. See that door there? Open that and you'll find a set o' stairs leadin' right down inter the cellar, and the rest of the pleasant little dungeon-places where they used ter put bad men like you an' me, my boy. Orl right in daytime, er course, an' nothin' much ter see. And perfectly safe. 'Ave a squint, won' yer? — while I send a maid ter find yer gentleman. Quite a nifty little 'idin'-place 'twould be fer any one, but as safe as 'ouses in the daylight. *Go* on. Ain't scared, are yer?"

Now, if there is one thing in the world which is

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likely to upset a nervous man more than anything, it is to be designated "scared" in that precise tone of voice. It is from such efforts that heroes are made. Dollops, whose heart had turned to water within him, found it instantly hardening at the butler's joking tone, and the bantering look upon the man's rosy face settled the matter. He squared his shoulders and threw back his head, though his jaw was chattering like a chimpanzee's.

"'Course I ain't — stoopid!" he said stammeringly. "Show us the way, and I'm orf at once. Any other entrance but this one?"

"Yes. Through the courtyard and down the stone steps. But it ain't never used. Your gentleman went dahn yesterday mornin' with Miss Maud, just for a bit of fun like. I'm needin' a couple er bottles er best port up, if you've a mind ter fetch 'em fer me, an' when yer gets back I'll give yer a swallow er Burgundy ter warm yer. 'Ere's the keys. Bottom of the steps and first door ter yer right. You'll see a lot of others, but I wouldn't meddle with them if I was you. Them's *'er* preserves . . . I believe you're scared stiff — even at this time of day?"

Dollops favoured him with a withering look, being perfectly unable to find his voice, and then proceeded to the door with steady step, flung it open, and straightway began to descend the staircase to the cellar, his rubber-soled shoes making no sound upon

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the wooden stairs with their carpeting of thick felt, and with his heart literally in his gaping mouth. Down, down, down the stairs led him, and then he heard a laugh from the top of them, turning suddenly to see Jarvis's smiling face above, framed in the open doorway, heard the door slam loudly, and the key grate in the lock, and realized that he had been the victim of a pleasant little practical joke.

The palms of his hands went wet. He felt a mad impulse to bound up the stairs again and hammer upon the door until he gained admittance, but his pride held him back.

"No, I'll see 'im in 'ell first, the blinkin' practical joker!" he apostrophized the absent butler in tones of blackest rage, and then, curiosity getting the better of him, seeing that there was no other alternative but to go down and then return by the *other* way, "which was scarcely ever used," proceeded on his journey into blackness, which grew each second more black, until he was stepping carefully, with one hand pressed against the stone of the wall and his eyes goggling through the darkness from sheer fright.

He reached the bottom of the stairs at last, and paused to take breath. He was as winded as a spent runner, and as white as a sheet, and trembling in every limb. The place was as black as a pocket, save for where, through a grille-door on the left-hand side of him (which was actually sup-

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posed to be *her* door, if he had but known it, and led through to the torture-chamber which Cleek himself had traversed), a single candle shone with a pale, sickly light, sending a tiny shaft in his direction, though, with peering through at it, he could only just see its vague outline in some room beyond.

"Gawdamassy!" he ejaculated, his eyes fairly popping out of his head at this sight. "Someun's 'ere, that's a fact! And from what I knows er ghosts, they shine wiv a more unearthly light than wot comes from a candle in a bottle. Now, 'oo the dickens ——"

But his searchings after light on this subject were cut off short by the sound of softly speaking voices creeping to him through that grilled door, and coming from some long distance away within it. He darted back against the wall and, groping with his hands, found a cupboard door ajar, slipped into it, and drew himself up taut against the inner wall, and waited for that which might come to pass, every nerve a-tremble, his eyes fixed upon the crack of the door, which at present showed black as a pocket.

The soft voices continued — men's voices, too, and one with the changing inflections of the foreigner.

"Blinkin' German!" thought Dollops excitedly. "Or a Chink! Don't know the difference between their parley-vous meself, but it's orl alike wiv *foreigners*. But the other 'un — 'e's English orl right.

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Never 'eard 'is voice before, that's certain! Gawd! they're comin' out now, an' I prays 'eaven they ain't a jossin' ter fetch nuffin' from this 'ere cupboard, or little Dollops's number'll be up with a vengeance! I don't fancy bein' done in by a blinkin' pigtail, neither! Nah! — then! Keep still, Dollops, me boy, and stop yer tremblin'. You'll 'ave the 'ouse a-shakin' in a minit, an' they'll fink it's a earfquake instead of a boy-quake—strite they will!"

Having wrestled himself into some sort of quiet of heart and brain, Dollops continued to lie in wait until the strangers had come out through the grilled door, and stood a moment with the candle between them, talking in low tones, and glancing occasionally up the flight of stairs by which he had only just descended. One of them had his back to him, but the other's face was in full view. It was a dark, swarthy-skinned face, with black eyes and crisp black moustache curling upon the upper lip, the slim nose and aquiline features revealing to the watching lad the very evident fact that here was a genuine Italian.

And the other? He'd seen that tweed coat before, surely — but where? Where? He racked his brains to think. Somewhere that tweed coat had crossed his vision once before during that day, and in some unaccountable manner it was associated in his mind with Sir Ross Duggan himself. . . .

The men moved quietly, blew out the candle, and then opened the door opposite and began to climb

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up the stone stairway into the fresh air, creeping about like mice.

Meanwhile Dollops, afraid no longer, and all his being afire to get to his master with news of this new development — and so make up for his slowness this afternoon, when the lady had so successfully given him the slip right here within his reach — stood stock-still, raking every corner of that fertile young brain of his for the clue which eluded him.

And then — quite suddenly — he *knew*.

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CHAPTER XX

"PINS AND NEEDLES"

TWENTY minutes later he presented himself once more at the back door, and asked in scathing accents for Mr. Jarvis, dangling the keys of the wine-cellar in one careless hand.

That gentleman appeared to him, changed for his evening duties in the dining-room, and with one eye upon the clock, clapped him upon the shoulder and guffawed into his face.

"Blinkin' idiot!" thought Dollops, as he grinned back. "Might er frightened me into foamin' at the mouth like a bloomin' 'oss, he might." Then, aloud: "Nice practical joke ter play upon a feller, eh, Mr. Jarvis? Nah! if I'd been sufferin' wiv me nerves and 'avin' calisthenics wot's so fashionable just at presint, you could of sent me to my coffin — strite."

"But you're alive an' kickin' now, me 'earty!" returned Jarvis, with another guffaw, "an' lookin' in the pink, I must s'y. What about them bottles of port? — or didn't yer stop ter look into the wine-cellar? Didn't bring 'em up, I notice."

"No." Dollops's smile was catching. "But I nearly brought up sumthink else, I kin tell yer —

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an' that's me 'eart, for it were a-sittin' in me mouf like as though it would choke me! I've 'arf a mind ter cut you out of me will, Mr. Jarvis. But, seriously speakin', where's my gentleman? I've a note fer 'im if 'e's engaged, and if not, I'd like ter see 'im. Say it's important."

"News from the Front, eh? Fahnd out 'oo committed that there crime last night, I don't think," said Jarvis, with his heavy humour. "Well, I'll send along Minnie after him. Dinner's bein' prepared, and no doubt your boss'll be dressin'. If 'e ain't nosin' round after clues, with that there fat Superintendent. Wot's 'e, anyway? — your Mr. Deland? Amachoor detective?"

Dollops nodded.

"That's the line. Tell 'im I've got summink ter say about his blue trousers wot I've been a-pressing at the Three Fishers. An' it's most important."

"Oh! — very. Blue trousers *is* an important matter when a man's been murdered in 'is own 'ome, I take it. Orl right, orl right; don't lose yer temper, sporty. I'll see to it at once. Like ter go up to 'is room, would yer?"

"No. Rather wait 'ere for 'is message."

"Very well. Sit down and make yerself comfortable, and no doubt there'll be a bite er dinner fer yer, if you're patient. Won't say 'no' to a nibble er chicken, I lay, follered with a dash er Peach Melba? . . . I thought not."

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So saying, the garrulous Jarvis proceeded kitchenward to summon Minnie and entrust her with the message for Mr. Deland, and then returned to the servants' hall and passed the rest of the time with Dollops, talking of London — a subject which appeared to be dear to both their hearts, and which certainly gave them something in common with each other.

Minnie returned in ten minutes bearing a little note upon her silver salver, which she presented to the smiling Dollops with a mock bow and a courtesy. She was a pert little country thing, with a trick of the eye that took a man's heart.

"'Ere's a note fer yer lordship," she said smartly. "Your gentleman says 'e's sorry 'e can't get down, and it don't matter about the blue trousies a particle. And 'e don't need you this evenin', so that you kin explore the countryside if yer want to. Wot say to a little walk, Mr. Ginger-'Air? It's my evenin' out, and I don't mind if I do."

Dollops winked and nudged her with his elbow.

"You're a pretty piece, *you* are, and if we was in Lunnon I'd be takin' you to the pickshurs," he returned with a grin. "But I've an appointment rahnd about ten o'clock up in the village. I'm yer man till then, Saucer-Eyes. No, Mr. Jarvis, a bit of dinner, as you s'y, wouldn't go quite amiss. I'm that 'ungry me insides rattle."

And while Jarvis was carving the chicken for the

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servants' hall, and giving him a generous portion, and Minnie was off to her room to prink up and change for the evening, Dollops opened his master's letter and scanned the few lines written upon it.

"Be under the big gate by twelve o'clock to-night," it said. "Hear all news then. Burn this."

So when Jarvis returned Dollops was lighting a cigarette from a twist of notepaper, which, upon sight of the big plate of steaming-hot chicken that awaited him, he promptly threw into the fire, watching absent-mindedly until it had become a charred fragment, and then set to upon the feast with a vengeance.

Meanwhile Cleek, dinner at last over — a meal passed in sober silence, with the shadow of that dead Thing still hanging over the diners and wiping the joy of life from their faces — went with Mr. Narkom out upon the terrace, cigars alight, and discussed with him the probabilities and possibilities of the whole affair, comparing notes with the Superintendent and jotting down in his business-like way any ideas that occurred to him as they talked together, until his cuff was covered over with pencil scrawls and the furrow between his eyes had deepened considerably.

Slowly the evening wore itself away, the presence of the silent-watching constabulary in the house making all friendliness between hosts and unwanted

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guests a matter of impossibility. Women and men drew together in little knots, discussing the affair in low-pitched voices, and even Maud Duggan's eyes held something of accusation now when they dwelt upon Cleek's face, so that at length he took Mr. Narkom by the arm and drew him toward the door.

"Come, old friend," he said quietly. "We are intruders here, you and I. These other poor folk cannot be at rest in our presence. Come along to the library once more, and have a look about it. The place draws me, I must say. For I still believe that the secret of the whole terrible thing lies there. To-morrow afternoon is to be Coroner's Inquest — a hateful proceeding, to say the least of it — and I've given myself just that time to solve the mystery."

"Cinnamon! And you don't imagine you're going to, do you, Cleek?" returned Mr. Narkom excitedly, as they passed down the passage together and entered the room. "That's rather a tall order, I must say. Seems as if we'd scoured this room from end to end."

"And yet, from what I heard from Master Cyril a short while ago, that is exactly what we have *not* done," rejoined Cleek, dropping to his knees and examining the wall plug which had interested him before. Meanwhile, Mr. Narkom strolled to the other side of the room, leaned against the spinning wheel in an attitude of ease, and then . . . as

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Cleek's fingers began to trace an invisible path along the edge of the carpet, the Superintendent gave out a sudden little cry and jumped as though he had been shot.

"Eh?—what's the matter, old friend?" Cleek was on his feet in an instant, for the Superintendent had gone a little pale, and was running his hands up and down his back in a curious fashion.

"Pins and needles! Funniest sensation I've ever come across. Brrh! Just like a slight electric shock."

Electric shock! Cleek was beside him in an instant, his face suddenly alight, and his hands searching over the instrument, here, there, and everywhere. Electric shock, eh? That was peculiar, to say the least of it.

Then he stopped suddenly and sucked in his breath, and, whipping round upon his heel, clapped the Superintendent upon the shoulder.

"And it takes *you*, after all, to lead us to the actual secret!" he said affectionately, smiling into Mr. Narkom's astonished face. "For here's the thing in a nutshell. What a blind fool I've been all the time, old friend. Here's the murderer, the perpetrator of last night's crime — the mechanical means of doing away with human life in such a perplexing manner. Here — right here. See?"

"What the — what are you driving at, my dear chap?" ejaculated the Superintendent excitedly,

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stooping at the pressure of Cleek's arm upon his shoulder. "This — spinning-wheel thing? You don't mean to tell me that *It* murdered Sir Andrew, do you? Because I'm not fool enough to believe *that* story — and not dunderhead enough to be taken in by a practical joke. What *do* you mean, old chap? I'm on pins and needles to know."

"And it's just those particular pins and needles of yours which have found the thing out," returned Cleek in the sharp staccato of excitement. "Look here! It's as easy as A B C — once you've got the hang of it. And that sensation of yours *was* an electric shock all right. And it was just this spinning wheel which gave it to you. The thing's wired — see? Devilishly well done, too, and disguised very successfully. But here it is. Under the wheel. And see that funny box-like thing attached, which looks as though it belonged to a part of the machinery? — and doesn't. That's a battery, by all that's good! Now, what the dickens does that battery do, I'd like to know? . . . 'A whirring sound' — 'hum-hum-hum!' That's how they described it to me this morning, do you remember? Gad! And this is the thing that produced that supernatural sound, then! Just a touch of a switch somewhere, and the thing sets in motion. Now let's follow this wiring along to its destination, and that will tell us a good deal."

He traced the line of palish flexible wire — so

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nearly the colour of the old wood as to be hardly discernible unless one really knew of its presence, round the wheel, and down on to the floor — the thing stood a mere matter of inches from the window-sill — and then disappeared up through a narrow piece of oak-coloured woodwork which was entirely unnoticed from the panelling it covered, until it reached the window-ledge and ended at the extreme right-hand corner of the middle window, and vanished in a cluster of ivy which clung about the outside of it, sending its tendrils right up to the edge of the sill itself.

Mr. Narkom followed the thing with fascination, poking a finger here and there to help discern its threadlike and imperceptible progress, and was almost as quick as Cleek in leaping out through the low sill to the flower-bed below upon which those tell-tale footprints had made such a strong impression. Then, of a sudden, they both stopped and stared blankly at each other. For the end of the thing lay beneath the ivy covering, in a little home-made switch which, touched by the finger, obviously set the whole contraption in motion.

Cleek hopped back into the room to see that no one was about, but the constable in charge stood outside the door, not in it, and they had closed that door carefully behind them upon entrance. Then he leaned out over the top of the window-sill and spoke softly to Mr. Narkom.

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"Put your finger upon the switch when I say 'Go,'" he said in a tense whisper, "and I'll stay inside here and watch how the thing works. Now, then . . . *Go!*"

Mr. Narkom applied his finger forthwith, while to Cleek within came a soft whirring, drumming sound, and then — an almost imperceptible "click" and — the most amazing of all these amazing matters came instantly to pass! For as he leapt out of the path of it, led by some mysterious, intuitive impulse, a bullet sped rapidly past his ear, and lodged itself in the woodwork, just a fraction of an inch below the spot where that other bullet had lodged, and — the secret was out at last!

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CHAPTER XXI

"A LUNNON GENTLEMAN"

BY ALL that's good!" he ejaculated, as Mr. Narkom jumped into the room somewhat heavily at sound of his hastily spoken ejaculation. "See that mark there in the woodwork, above the spot where we dug the bullet out this morning? Nearly shot me through the head, old friend, and made an end of your troublesome ally at last! Gad! the ingenuity of it! The devilish ingenuity! So *that's* how it was done, eh? We'll look into the thing a bit closer, but from what I have already seen I'd say there was a pistol hidden inside that wheel, but the thing's so perfectly done that it must have taken a master-hand to have done it. And where's the master-hand here? Ross Duggan? — with his hobby for electricity? He's not got the face of a man who could contrive a thing like that, and carry it out to such a pitch of perfection. And yet — it's a soundless pistol, all right, that did the deed. But the patience of the manipulator! the straightness of vision, to be certain of the moment to operate it! That man would be a useful adjunct to Scotland Yard's force, Mr. Narkom, with knowl-

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edge such as that. It's the most diabolically clever thing I've ever encountered!"

"It is — by James! it is!" returned the Superintendent, mopping his forehead in his excitement and going very red in the face. "Sure it isn't a woman, old chap? Women are pretty tricky people in affairs of this kind. And the contrivance of it, too! . . . So *that's* how it is done, is it?" as Cleek's agile fingers slid over the wheel and stopped upon a faint line which showed how the thing had been cut out and then stuck in again after the pistol had been lodged in its hiding-place. "Here; use my knife and dig it out, won't you?"

"Never! The time for doing that will be after I have given a demonstration of its prowess before the assembled company. I'm no master at intricate woodwork and mechanism such as that, Mr. Narkom, and I want to keep it in perfect working order for the crucial moment. If I extracted it now, ten chances to one I'd never get it back again. The thing to be discovered is to find out the man in this establishment whose fingers give him away as a delicate worker. And there's just one I've noticed that ——"

And it was just as the name formed itself upon his lips that Cyril Duggan burst hurriedly into the room, despite the detaining hands of the constable on duty outside the door, and beckoned hastily to Cleek.

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"Your man wants you, Mr. Deland," he said breathlessly. "Says it's awfully important and must see you at once. He wouldn't come in, but asked me to tell you, would you come round to the servants' quarters as soon as you could? He's waiting in the outer courtyard. Ginger-headed chap by the name of Dollops. I'd only just gone out for a breath of fresh air before Mother packed me off to bed — ten o'clock is the latest hour I'm permitted to sit up to. But he seemed so anxious to see you that I promised to come along at once. It's gone ten now, I think, and Mother will be after me if I'm not off — she's frightfully particular on little matters. But the policeman here said you and Mr. Narkom were busy and were not to be disturbed . . . I say! What's the matter with the old spinning wheel, eh? You seem to be frightfully interested in it!"

"I am — as you say — frightfully," returned Cleek with a smile. "But nothing of any more consequence than an outsider's interest in something he knows nothing about. Ever looked at the thing, my boy?"

"Yes — heaps of times. And experimented upon it, too! Tried all sorts of ways to make it go, until Mother put a stop to my touching it, and said I should probably hurt myself with the spindle and break the thing."

"Oh, she did, did she? Well, perhaps you might. It's more harmful than people give it credit for.

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All right, Cyril; many thanks for telling me. I'll be along in a moment or two. You'd better get off to bed now, or Lady Paula will be on your track, I'll swear. Good-night."

"Good-night, Mr. Deland; good-night, Mr. Narkom."

He was off again like a shot, and Cleek could hear his light steps running down the hallway and up the stairs, like the big child he was.

"Funny thing," he said to Mr. Narkom as the two left the room together and walked down the corridor toward the servants' quarters, "but that young gentleman always seems to turn up in the most unforeseen moments. Notice *his* fingers, did you, Mr. Narkom? No? Well, they are as delicate as a woman's and as strong as a man's. Curiously strong for a fifteen-year-old, I must say. Now, if I didn't know better, I'd lay a ducat to a dollar that that lad is a good sight cleverer than either you or I give him credit for, and with his mother's blood in him and a portion of his rascally grandfather's, too, there's no telling just exactly where he will end up . . . Hello! is that you, Jarvis? I'm told my man wants to see me very particularly. Know where he is by any chance? It's probably about that blue suit of mine. He worries more over my clothes than any woman. In the courtyard? Thanks, very much. You coming along, too, Mr. Narkom?"

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"Don't mind if I do," returned the Superintendent off-handedly, "seeing that there is nothing more to be discovered to-night. My man's in charge, so we might go over to the Three Fishers and have a quiet smoke in your rooms. That is, if you'd care about it?"

"Love to, my dear chap, love to. Through this door, eh, Jarvis? Nice snug place you've got here, I must say. Family do you well, I suppose?"

"Yessir," Jarvis's voice bordered upon the confidential. "Tight-fisted where the money is, sir, but — that's Scotch, you know."

"And you're London, eh? — and naturally generous! I understand. Well, here's something to buy yourself a drink with." And Cleek dropped half-a-crown into the butler's hands.

As the two men disappeared through the kitchen door and out into the courtyard, the highly elated Jarvis turned to his fellow servants with a genuine sigh of admiration.

"Amachoor detective or not," he apostrophized the absent gentleman, "an' queer in the top story though 'e may be, that's what I calls a right-down Lunnon gentleman!"

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CHAPTER XXII

DAMNING EVIDENCE

THEY found Dollops waiting in the little squared-in courtyard which led down to the dungeons, and in a state bordering upon hysteria from the excitement of all those exciting things which had just come to pass.

He blurted out his story of Jarvis's practical joke and its ultimate consequences in a helter-skelter fashion, anxious to get on to this new development, and except for a "By James!" from Mr. Narkom and a nod of the head from Cleek, pursued his course without interruption.

"And when we'd walked a mile or so over them 'ills and dahn inter the dales, Minnie ups and says ter me, 'Come an' 'ave a drink, Ginger-snap!' And er course I was nuffin' loaf, as they s'y (though what bread 'as to do with it I niver could tell). Sc we comes upon a pub in a little bit of a shanty built of timber dahn in the nest of the 'ills, and she tykes me by the arm and pulls me inter it."

"And what did you find there, Dollops?" put in Cleek, with a smile for the lad's poetical expression.

"A bit of a bar full of Scotties wot looked as

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though they'd come 'ome from a funeril, from the h'expression of their fyces," he returned emphatically. "Them Scotties do take their pleasure sadly, not 'arf! Not a blinkin' one of 'em got a bit er jollyin' left in 'em. "'Ello, Minnie-gairl,' they s'ys to 'er wen we come in, 'who's the noo mon ye ken?' — talkin' in their silly langwidge wot an Englishman can't unnerstand. 'Pal o' mine,' s'ys Minnie, pert-like, 'come ter visit fer a little time. Gen'leman's st'yin' at the Castle.'

" 'Where that there wee beetie o' crrime has taken place?' puts in a sandy-'eaded feller wiv beetling brows an' a complexion like a bit er red granite. 'Yes,' says Minnie. 'Then better give 'im a wee drappier ter warrm 'is freetened hearrt!' "

Dollops paused a moment, and Cleek threw back his head and gave vent to a smothered laugh.

"You'll be the death of me yet, lad," he remarked merrily, "with your Cockney and 'Scotch' rolled into one. But let's hear the end of the story. What happened then?"

"They giv me a drink, Guv'nor, of very strong whisky it were, an' when I asked 'em where it come from an 'oo made it, thinkin' I'd lay in a bottle or two fer when we gets back ter Clarges Street, a feller wot just come in (an' a bit tight 'e were, too) slaps me on the back and says, 'Hoo noo, laddie? It's frae the valley, under the little brookies and amangst th' gravel.' "

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"And what did you say, Dollops?"

"I told him in good old English ter go tell that ter the marines and stow the gaff, and he ups and larfs at me, and he says, says 'e, 'I'll show ye if I speak the truith or no.' And then a lot o' 'em says, 'Hoots' and 'toots' and 'nah,' as though they was monkeys in the zoo, and set up such a gabbling as you never 'eared of, and the end of it was that ole Barmy tykes me by the arm and pushes me through the door. 'Come from Lunnon, does yer?' he says ter me. 'Well, then, never any tellin' but ye can gie us a han' wi' disposin' of our wares.' And with that he ups and pulls Minnie along with him, in spite of them uvvers, and off we goes dahn th' 'ill inter a deep sort of gravel-pit, and there — the blinkin' thing was, sir, as large as life and twice as nateril!"

"My dear chap! — what the dickens does he mean, Cleek?" threw in Mr. Narkom at this juncture.

"Simply what he says. And it was there, was it, Dollops?"

"It were, sir"; Dollops's tone was portentous with mystery; "and what's more, there was that black-eyed Dago feller wiv the chase-me look and the hearf-brush moustache, talkin' fifteen ter the dozen in sevin different langwidges, and makin' more noise than all the rest of 'em put together."

"Gad! you've surely found out something, Dollops, and done a good day's work, bless your heart!"

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said Cleek admiringly, slipping his arm through the boy's on one side and through Mr. Narkom's on the other. "Well, it's to the gravel-pit with the lot of us this evening — at least for you and me, Dollops. You had better remain here at the Castle, Mr. Narkom, while we're gone. And meet me at midnight under the big gate. But let's not be seen, Dollops, else the fat will be in the fire with a vengeance. Anything else?"

Dollops bent nearer to the man he loved best in all the world, and put his mouth close up against Cleek's ear.

"One uvver fing, sir — an' wot I calls the piece of resisters," he said in a low voice. "As I comes aw'y, 'oo should I see a-runnin' dahn the 'ill, side by side with Dicky-Dago, but that there young feller as they calls Cyril (sickenin' sissy sort er nyme ter give a chap, too!), an' I jumps back inter the bushes wiv Minnie clinging ter me arm, an' waits till they've gorn parst. An' I 'ears the youngster s'y you nyme — 'Mr. Deland,' he says, 'an' "clever"' — and then summink else, wot I didn't 'ear, but wot made Dicky-Dago give out a sort er garsp and gurgle in 'is froat, an' says something which sounded like a Russian patent medicine, an' — that's all."

"And a very good 'all', too, Dollops," ejaculated Cleek, giving the boy's arm a squeeze. "You have surely done your share of unravelling in this case,

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at all events. What do you say about it, Mr. Narkom? . . . There'll be a nice five-pound note to add to that growing account of yours for this night's job, I promise you. . . . And so Cyril is mixed up in it, too — *Cyril!* That boy! Gad! what does it mean, eh? And in league with those scoundrels . . . 'Ten o'clock for bedtime,' says he, so frankly. Ten o'clock! And the young underhanded rascal roaming the countryside just before that in company with an Italian of questionable character! Looks bad, every way you look at it. And with Lady Paula's actions and secret meetings taken into account as well, puts a pretty black face upon *their* little share in last night's tragedy. Now, I wonder if this Dago, as Dollops calls him, is a lover of the lady's or what? . . . Gad! Mr. Narkom, what's your opinion?"

The Superintendent waited a moment, and cleared his throat, and when he spoke his voice was emphatic and a trifle bored.

"No two questions about it, to my way of thinking," said he quietly, as they traversed the darkness together. "That Captain Macdonald did the thing — because of those footprints of his outside the window — and as he couldn't or wouldn't give the reason of why he was in the grounds here last night at that identical time. And the person he was shielding was obviously Lady Paula. She, too, has been involved in this, though whether in the

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actual murder or not, I'm not prepared to say. And Ross Duggan, too. I imagine the whole thing is a put-up job; don't you, Cleek?"

"I can't rightly say," returned Cleek in an uncertain tone. "Sometimes it points one way and sometimes another. And I'm inclined to agree with you where Lady Paula is concerned. She knows a good deal more than she says, and is wily — deuced wily, as all drug-takers are. And the motive would be there all right, judging from what Maud Duggan told me was the share which Sir Andrew had apportioned out for his widow and her boy. She'll double that easily enough. But to *kill* for such a thing seems incredible — though I've known of worse crimes for less reason than that. But Ross Duggan's is the greatest motive of all, taking into consideration just when the thing happened — *before* his name was erased, you must remember, Mr. Narkom, and as he's a dabster at electricity and the only person with an air-pistol in the house . . . well, circumstantial evidence looks pretty black against him, doesn't it?"

"It certainly does." Mr. Narkom's voice was a trifle apologetic. "Well, I hardly know what to think, Cleek. And you're such a beggar for stringing evidence together, and never forgetting it! And there's such a dickens of a lot of evidence in this case that a chap gets horribly involved, and his memory is likely to play him tricks. And then

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that Italian chap whom Dollops has seen such a lot of to-day — where does he come in?"

"Right into the midst of the whole caboosh," returned Cleek enigmatically, "and don't you make any mistake about that, my friend. Dicky-Dago, to use Dollops's name, is one of the prime movers in this little inheritance game, and in another one also. A dollar to a ducat he knows the whole thing, and Tweed Coat's with him."

"Who the dickens is Tweed Coat?"

"The gentleman whom Dollops so aptly described a few moments ago," returned Cleek quietly. "Perhaps you didn't notice Ross Duggan's coat this morning, Mr. Narkom? No? Well, it was made of a very sweetly smelling cloth called Harris tweed; and when Dollops described the one he saw to me this evening, I recognized it at once."

"Then Tweed Coat is Ross Duggan, Cleek?"

Mr. Narkom's voice was a trifle shrill. Cleek's eyes met his squarely, and his eyebrows went up.

"Who else?" he said.

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CHAPTER XXIII

A STARTLING DÉNOUEMENT

AND so it came about that Dollops and Cleek, both wearing dark suits (procured in Cleek's case at the Three Fishers, and from his own dressing-bag), and with caps pulled down over their faces and false moustaches decorating their upper lips as a protection against unforeseen discovery, made their way out in the clear moonlight toward that "gravel pit" of which Dollops had spoken, and padded soft-footedly down the hill toward the little "shanty" to which Dollops guided them, and after a quick glance at it, pushed on into the darkness of the night; down, down, down into the valley — to the thing that lay there revealed in the moon's rays, and which in the face of the to-morrow's sun would have vanished like the picture upon an exposed camera film.

But to-night — to-night they could see the whole panorama of it, lying close to the earth, concealed behind a huge furze-bush upon the hillside, stomachs flat against the face of it, eyes sharpened upon that identical spot which told so much to them of what they sought. Perhaps a dozen men worked there

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— perhaps more — coats off, shirt-sleeves rolled up; big, bonny men of brawn and muscle, come of a stock as tough as the granite of the hillside itself, and hardened by the keen winds and the keener air of the Highlands that had given them birth.

"Giants!" whispered Dollops awe-inspiringly, his lips close against Cleek's ear.

"*Thieves!*" responded Cleek, with a quick intake of the breath. "Gad! they're a lot, Dollops! And if they caught us up here, hidden away, our chances would be exactly nil. Where's your friend Balmy, eh?"

"Dahn there — under that big flare, sir — 'im wiv the blue shirt and the red neck-cloth. Likely lookin' blighter, ain't 'e?"

"H'm. Not very. Not a sound, boy! There's a couple of 'em coming this way. Got it in barrels, have they? Gad! I'd like to have a look at one of those homely articles. I'll swear there's a false bottom to it, if I know anything of this kind of trickery. . . . Hello! — there's Tweed Coat!"

"Tweed Coat," thus named, passed a stone's throw in front of them, his arm linked with another man's, his head down-bent. But Cleek had seen the moonlight upon his face, and knew his man at last. Ross Duggan had worn that coat this morning, or one so like it that even he, hawk-eyed detective that he was, could have told no difference between them. The moonlight struck upon the white bosom

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of his evening-dress shirt, making it shine like a strip of ivory, and at something which his companion said to him, he caught it close together, and turned the collar of the jacket up about his throat.

First the handkerchief so plainly marked "R. D." and now this! But that such a man should be mixed up in a thing of this sort, an illicit thing which was against all laws and regulations of the land that had borne him, made Cleek's mouth go grim. The handkerchief, the coat; and now — the man. That little chain was completed, and every link welded together. At least some part of the mystery was clear at last.

The pair passed close against them where they lay in the darkness, so close that Cleek's fingers might have reached out and caught at the other's trouser-leg and tripped him. But the time was not yet ripe for arrests. Better let the thing go unsuspected until to-morrow afternoon, and then, when the Coroner's Inquest was at hand, rally them all together in the library once more, and make the final settlement.

Here was only a part of the thing, not the whole thing itself, and if he knew one of his men, he did not yet feel certain of the other. The night should bring that uncertainty into clarity if possible.

The darkness hid the couple from view at length, and when their footsteps had died away into silence, Cleek touched Dollops upon the shoulder and com-

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menced wriggling upon his stomach down toward the next furze-bush, and out into the open, lying flat as Indians do, until they had slid the distance between the two clumps of shrubs, and lay concealed, some twelve feet nearer to the scene of operations.

"See anything of your Dago friend?" whispered Cleek, after they had watched for a while in silence at this hive of living industry which, when the dawn had penetrated through the veil of night, would have passed out of sight and vision as though it were a mirage of their own imagining.

Dollops's voice was barely above a breath.

"Yessir. Just dahn there ter the right. Feller wiv the big black moustache. Slim-'ipped Johnny in the dark suit. Got blinkers on 'im like black velvet from wot I sees. Proper furriner — the dirty dog! Find 'im, sir?"

"Not yet. Oh! yes, I see! H'm. An *Italian* all right. But what the dickens is an Italian doing in these outlandish parts? And what attraction can this perishing climate have for people of their ilk? First the Lady of the Castle — and now this one. Unless . . . Gad! there might be some connection between 'em. Did you find any trace of Captain Macdonald's handwriting, Dollops, to show me?"

"Yessir. Got a letter from 'is groom. Pinched it while we was a-talkin'. 'E showed it ter me, an' it's in me pocket. Summink wrong *there*, Gov'nor?"

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"So wrong that it will take more than a little explaining upon the gentleman's part to put it right, my lad," responded Cleek in a whisper. "I want to see that letter — badly. But it will have to wait until we are back again at the house. And we'll be back in a jiffy. I'm satisfied with the result of this night's work, in this direction, at any rate, Dollops. You've done well — better than I could have done in similar circumstances, and I'm downright pleased with you!"

"Lor', sir!" Dollops's voice was choking with joyful emotion. "If yer goes and frows any more buckets at me, me chest will expand that big wiv pride as they'll be spottin' us in a trick — strite they will! But I'm glad I've made up for that footlin' mistyke over the lydy . . . Gawd! Look, Guv'nor — look! 'Oo's this a-comin' now? A woman — strike me pink, if it ain't! And a lydy, too, from the cut of 'er. Now, 'oo in 'eavin's nyme is *she?*"

His pointing finger brought Cleek's eyes instantly into the line of it, and Cleek's face in the moonlight went suddenly pale. Dollops's eyes rested on the grim mask of his face, palely visible from the moon's rays. Then, at a sign from Cleek, he ducked his own head into the grass and lay motionless, as his master had already done.

And by the sound of the soft footsteps, coming from somewhere behind them, Cleek and his companion knew that the woman had reached the spot

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where they were lying hidden under the great clump of gorse. Then a hand reached down and touched Cleek softly upon the shoulder, and a woman's voice spoke into the darkness with a tender inflection; and at sound of it every nerve in his body tightened like wire for the tensity of the situation.

"Ross," said the woman's voice tenderly, "Ross dear, get up — get up! I followed you here tonight, because I — I wanted to talk with you — I *had* to talk with you, to tell you something! I simply had to. But I've been a fool to break parole, as you have done, with that man with the hawk eyes in the Castle even at this minute. But so much hangs upon it — Ross, so much! Look up and speak to me, and, whoever your companion is, tell him to go away until we have had a word together. Look up, look up — *do!*"

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CHAPTER XXIV

HARE AND HOUNDS

TO SAY that Cleek was startled was to underestimate the matter altogether. Here was a pretty kettle of fish indeed! It took exactly three seconds for him to act, and to act in such an extraordinary fashion as to call forth a gasp from Dollops, whose head was still half ducked, with one arm upthrown to hide it from the woman's eyes, and to register in his loyal heart the fact that this master whom he served was a miracle-worker indeed.

For Cleek's hand had flashed up in the darkness and taken the moustache from his lip, and as the woman still continued to plead with him in her soft voice Dollops, peering through the upthrown arm, saw the features of the man he loved writhe suddenly as though they had been made of rubber, saw him twitch up his hand and muffle his coat-collar about his neck, and then realized with a gasp that here at his side lay such a fair representative of Ross Duggan as might even be mistaken for that gentleman in this dark hour of the night.

And from the lips of this astonishing person

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proceeded Ross Duggan's voice, with its curious clipped Scotch inflection and the little habit of clearing the throat which was so indicative of the man, and which Dollops — trained as he was by Cleek's quick observation — had already noticed for himself in the couple of times he had seen and listened unseen to the gentleman.

He saw Cleek get to his feet, and twitch his shoulders up and his cap down, as he faced the lady in her thin dark wrap through which the glimmer of some light satiny material showed like a line of fire.

"My dear girl," said Ross Duggan's voice a trifle testily, "what a fool you are to come out here at this time — if you'll excuse my saying so! Sit down, for heaven's sake, if you must be here, and don't let those men down there see you. I'm — I'm making some observations on my own, but at any minute someone may come up here — and I wouldn't answer for the consequences. You've fallen into a hornet's nest, Catherine, and only a woman with some desperate plan of action would do that. Don't you know what's being carried on down there?"

She shook her dark head, and dropped instantly into a little heap of satin and dark-coloured velvet beside him in the darkness.

"No," she whispered softly. "I wondered what you were doing, and who your companion might be.

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Send him away, Ross. I *must* speak with you alone!"

"All right." The inflection of voice was so identical with that of the new lord of the manor as to make Dollops fairly jump at sound of it. He would hardly have been able to believe the evidence of his own ears if he had not seen this thing done before in those old Apache days, in the Inn of The Twisted Arm, when the notorious Margot and her crew had run them to earth and this was the only way out: "Get along there, Parsons. There's nothing more to be seen now. You can meet me some time next week — if things go all right with me and I'm not already swinging at the end of a long rope! And we'll have another confab together. But you'd better make yourself scarce now. There'll be a dickens of a kybosh if they find we've broken parole, and I don't want you hauled into the beastly thing. So long. And *listen — listen:* be careful — do!"

Dollops nodded his head forthwith, and by dint of wriggling and scrambling made his exit from this astonishing pair, and, free of the bare moorside at last, broke cover and started off at a good run, wondering what the dickens they had stumbled into *now*.

Meanwhile the erstwhile Ross and his lady friend sat on behind the furze-bush in their somewhat ridiculous predicament, and talked in whispers.

"What is it you want to say to me?" said "Ross,"

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a hint of sharpness in his low-pitched voice. "That you should run this risk — it is madness, Catherine — madness!"

"Nothing is madness that I could do for *your* sake," she responded passionately, putting a hand over his as it rested upon the brown earth, and bending toward him. "Don't you know, Ross, haven't you guessed my secret yet? Surely you must have *seen* it? I have tried to tell you with my eyes, time and time again, and when I have caught that odd look in yours when you looked at Cynthia. I felt my heart bound with gladness that you did not care for her. And that has made me brave. Oh, my dear — my dear! Listen to me, and do what I ask of you. If you *did* kill your father, Ross, that man down there at the Castle will make you swing for it. I know it — I feel it here — here! Those penetrating eyes of his can see beyond the veil of deception right down into your heart. If you have done this dreadful thing, tell me, and I have made all arrangements that you can escape at once. I've a car waiting in the lane. I 'phoned for it at the garage by the station only a bare two hours ago — and I had a difficulty, too, as you can imagine, with the whole house full of policemen and our every action watched. But I was desperate — desperate! I couldn't see you arrested for *that!* And so, while there is yet time . . . . Oh, don't you see? It's your liberty I'm offering you! And

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we could start away together and make our lives afresh in a new country. Ross, Ross, don't you hear, don't you *see?* Every minute is precious while that man is in command at the Castle. He looks a fool — but he is a clever fool at that. I don't trust him. I'm not a weak woman, Ross, to be afraid of a murderer — pshaw! what is that? If a man has need to do it, and the courage, I can even *admire!* And I love you! Don't speak now, Ross — just come, and let us slip away together. In this wild country we can soon be lost — slip down the coast and get away on the first steamer to — anywhere! I've money on me — see here. Plenty of it! I sent Hilda down to draw it all out of the bank this morning. (Thank God for the comfort of your telephone!) She'd do anything for me — that girl — since I caught her stealing Cynthia's pearl necklace, and threatened her if she didn't return it to tell the whole sordid story to the family. And she swore to help me any time I needed her. So come, Ross — come now — come quickly! but come — come!"

Her whispered words trailed off into silence at last, and Cleek, catching his breath for a moment at the whole audacious plot which she had laid so successfully, could not help but admire, even as he felt the rush of contempt that a man must feel for every woman who can cheapen herself thus in his eyes. But here was a pretty kettle of fish indeed!

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What to say to her? what to do? It took time to think, so he merely caught her hand and squeezed it, and felt all sorts of a beast for making such use of her confession as to lead her on to even deeper things.

She reached a hand out at the pressure of his fingers, and wound it about his neck.

"You'll come?" she whispered close against his ear.

He shrugged his shoulders. The issue must be faced, and faced now.

"Let's get out of this danger-zone, where we can talk in a little more comfort and less fear of our lives," he responded quickly, casting his eyes about him to see if the coast was clear. "Quick! draw your dark wrap over your head and make for cover. That furze-bush over there! Get behind it, and drop down, and I'll follow. From there, there is a chain of bushes behind which we can make for the high-road at last. Quick! the men are coming this way, some of them. And if we're caught . . . !"

Her face was fearless. She acted instantly upon his suggestion, gathering her dark velvet cloak about her and pulling it up over her face and head, and then sped out suddenly across the open space like a fleet shadow, until a shaft of moonlight, penetrating through the clouded sky, fell full upon her hurrying figure, etching it almost as clearly as though it had been day.

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Cleek sucked in his breath and, half-crouching, half-running, sped after her. God! what if the men had seen! He glanced back quickly over his shoulder, and then redoubled his pace. For, of a sudden, with the speed of a lightning-flash every flare in that valley had gone out — zip! — like that. Every voice had dropped to stillness, and the night was a hideous thing of running footsteps, pelting, he knew only too well, up the hillside after them — those watchers who had seen the secret of the night, and to-morrow might give it forth to an unsuspecting world. Their lives wouldn't be worth much if *this* crew caught them, that was certain.

Panting, he reached her side, caught hold of her elbow, and pinning it close in his fingers hurried her forward, every faculty alert, every nerve a-tremble. Her panting breath was like the breath of a spent runner; she wouldn't last far in those high heels, he knew; the going was too hard. It was only a matter of time now. The hurrying footsteps seemed to be coming nearer and nearer.

He bent his face down to hers.

"The motor-car? Where?" he said in a quick, panting voice.

She managed to stammer out a reply, stumbling feet falling over the rough ground, tripping in clumps of heather, bruising themselves against harsh stones.

"In the lane — beyond — over there! I've been a fool — leave me and go yourself!" she panted out

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in disjointed sentences that were ringing with despair.

"Never! We'll get there yet. Gather up your skirts. . . . Gad! you're done!" It was his own voice that spoke to her, and for a sudden moment he had forgotten the part he played in the exigencies of this distressing situation. He heard her gasp suddenly, send startled eyes up into his face, and then sway against him, and realized his folly — too late. The shock of the thing had unnerved her. In the darkness she could not see his face clearly, but the voice had been — different. He'd brought the whole structure about his ears by one foolish momentary mistake. Then quite suddenly she fainted against him.

"Fool!" he apostrophized himself. "Blind fool!" and, stopping instantly, caught her up in his arms just as the lane hove in sight, and throwing her across his shoulder, took the added burden in his best athletic fashion, and ran.

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CHAPTER XXV

THE MAN IN THE BLACK MASK

THEY reached the motor only just in the nick of time, for already the darkness behind them was rent with cries of "There they are! Head them off! — there they are!" making the night hideous with the noise of them, and the stampede of feet seemed to grow more dense with every minute.

Cleek flung his unconscious burden in the car, leaped in after it, and tapped the chauffeur upon the shoulder.

"Extinguish your lamps and make for Aygon Castle — as quick as you can!" he gave out in the sharp staccato of excitement. "And the quicker the better! There's trouble here, and if those men catch up with us to-night I'll not answer for the lady's safety."

"Yessir."

Then with a whizz and a whirr the car was off, rocketing down the lane and taking the corners upon two wheels, so that Cleek had hardly a breath left in his body, and the rush of air that swept them as they sped away began to revive the unconscious form of Catherine Dowd who lay upon the seat beside him.

A drop of brandy, rather uncertainly administered

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because of the darkness and the jolting of the car, revived her still more, and in another moment she had opened her eyes and let them dwell upon his face. In the darkness they glowed like two lamps. And her face was very frightened.

"My God! Not Ross!" she broke out uncertainly, shutting her hands together across her breast in her agitation. "Then — who are you?"

"Who knows?" he responded with a touch of gallantry. "It was your mistake in the first place, remember, not mine. A friend in need, perhaps, who has been able to save you from the consequences of a very foolish action. You know what those men were doing?"

She shook her head dumbly.

"Then you will learn to-morrow from the lips of a man whom you have learned to distrust, because he has proved more than a match for you already. That is so, isn't it? Your Mr. Deland up at the Castle. From what I heard, you have broken parole, and to do that —— "

"You won't tell? — oh, surely you won't tell!" she gave out in a low, wrung voice. "How you could mimic Ross Duggan as you did is beyond me. But you stole my confidence, and I demand its return: that you tell nothing of to-night to a living soul. Will you promise me that?"

He paused a moment and looked down at her with frowning brows. Then his face cleared.

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"Very well, then. That is a bargain. But I don't think you realize just how near to actual danger you ran to-night in your mad pursuit of Ross Duggan. What made you think I was he?"

"I don't know. Only I had followed him from the Castle down the lane, and then lost sight of him at the edge of the little burn which skirts that particular valley. And then I saw — you. And somehow, to my untrained eyes in the darkness, you looked like him — perhaps I was so anxious to find him that I willed myself unconsciously to think that you were he — but be that as it may, I made the profound mistake, and — now the mischief is done with a vengeance. What shall I do now? What *shall* I do?"

"Return to Aygon Castle, my dear young lady, by the route by which you left it, and leave things in Higher Hands than yours," Cleek returned gravely, as they whizzed past in the darkness, the motor thrumming a purring accompaniment to his low-pitched voice. "Never urge a criminal to flee from justice, for as surely as he remains alive justice will find him — and make him pay the penalty all the more severely for his pains! Justice must be done in a civilized country, my dear young lady; that is what we pay our taxes for — to uphold those same judges who will mete out justice in a proper, unprejudiced fashion."

"But Ross — you think he is guilty?"

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"Who knows? Time alone will tell. And his innocence will be better proved if he is not urged to fly away from the outcome of his actions. I must ask you, too, a favour. Rather, I must exact a promise. Please leave Ross Duggan alone until after to-morrow."

"And then?"

"If I know aught of anything, he will be beyond the power of your assistance — and perhaps not in need of it," he replied quietly. "Here is the Castle. Slip in, now, through that wicket-gate that the tradesmen use, I believe, and get back to the house as quickly as you can. I'll give your orders to the chauffeur."

She got out unsteadily, and then stood looking up at him, her eyes glowing darkly in the frame of her pale, serious face.

"And you won't tell me who you are? Something — somehow — seems familiar about you, but I cannot place it. You won't help me?"

He shook his head.

"Better let this night's doings be buried in the Limbo of Forgotten Things, dear lady," he said, his hand resting for a moment upon her shoulder. "And if you know not who the sharer of your — er — adventure may be, surely it is better that way. Good-night and good-bye. You will keep your promise?"

She gave him a sudden inscrutable look from

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beneath her dark brows. Then she flung up her head.

"Of course. Thank you for what you have done."

"That is nothing. Good-night."

"Good-night."

Like a shadow she was fleeing up the wide drive, her feet barely making any sound upon it; then, even as she disappeared from view, Cleek turned swiftly to the chauffeur who sat in the front seat of the car, goggles hiding his eyes from view, and clapped him upon the shoulder.

"Well done, Dollops, well done!" he rapped out with a soft laugh. "I thought it was you the minute my peepers rested upon your Cockney countenance, you little bundle of indefatigability! How did you do it? You caught my meaning, of course? Deuced keen of you, I must say!"

Dollops grinned, and slipped his goggles into his pocket.

"Yus," he returned, with a vigorous nod. "I caught the signal orl right. '*Listen*,' you said, didn't you, Guv'nor? So I listens, and then I makes a little plan all on my lonesome. 'The Guv'nor's up to summink,' says I ter me, 'an' I'll lay 'e wants me ter tyke a little 'and.' And so I ups and makes fer the road, and there I find the shuvver a-waitin' in this 'ere little snortin' machine."

"He was there, then, was he?"

"Large as life and twice as nat'ril. 'Now, then,

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me lad,' I says ter me, 'git on the right side o' 'im, an' if yer carn't git on the right side, git on the wrong side, s' long as yer gits 'im out of 'is seat.' But a couple er bob to a Scotsman is as big as a legacy, sir, an' I soon puts 'im strite wiv a message from 'is missis. 'Snoop along an' send a wire ter town,' says I, *Comin' later in the day, wait fer me,* an' address it ter the Commander-in-Chief of the Generil Post Office, Lunnon.' An' he looks at me an' swallows the gaff like as it were plumduff. I could 'er larfed, sir — strite I could! And I gives 'im the tip ter get a drink, and before I'd finished speakin', 'e'd gorn!"

"Good lad! good lad!" Cleek's laugh was merry if low-pitched. The London address of the telegraph message tickled his sense of humour immensely. "And what did you do then?"

"Drove dahn the road a little just ter keep me 'and in, and then, when I 'eard you call out ter the lydy, and knew you wuz in danger, sir — why, I slipped in the clutch and come rocketing toward yer as farst as I could."

"Oho! And you were nearer than the lady had arranged, then?"

Dollops drew a long breath before replying; and his voice was solemn.

"That little distance of a quarter of a mile might 'ave done for yer entire — an' I weren't tykin' no risks," he replied heavily. "An' if anyfink was to

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'appen to *you*, sir — well, it's me fer the river 'fore you kin wink an eyelash. Dollops ain't a-stayin' 'ere wiv you on the uvver side of the sky, sir, an' don't you myke no mistake abaht *that*. Where you goes, I goes, too — if it's to 'eaven or 'ell. An' I'm thinkin' I knows the w'y the ayngels 'll tyke *you*."

"Well, they're not taking me yet, dear lad, so don't worry your ginger head about it!" returned Cleek, with a little gulp of emotion for so staunch an adherent as this wisp of Cockneydom who stood before him. "But it's friends like you and women like Miss Lorne that keep a man straight and strong and true, and don't let him turn down the wrong path instead of the right. Come, now, there's still more work to be done. Mr. Narkom will be waiting, and I told him midnight under the big gate. Slip up the driveway and see if you can see him while I go round by Rhea's gate and see how the coast lies."

Dollops disappeared forthwith, and it was but a moment or two later that he returned in company with the Superintendent looking a little round-eyed and scared until he saw Cleek standing in the shadow of the big gate, and going up to him flung an arm about his shoulders.

"You've frightened me into forty fits and out of 'em again," he cried with a little sigh of relief, "for I'd made up my mind that something had happened, and was on the way down here to see if you'd kept

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your appointment, and if you hadn't — well, every man-jack of 'em at the house would have made an all-night search for you, till we'd found you, Cleek."

"And now that you have, you bundle of fussy-dom, you see I am still all of a piece and, as Dollops says, as large as life and twice as natural," returned Cleek with a smile. "Gad, but there's not much moon about now, is there? And it will be dark work climbing —— "

"But you intend to do this mad thing, Cleek?"

"Certainly, my friend. And it's not the maddest I've done this night — by a long chalk. I'll tell you all about it later on, when there's more time and less chance of being overheard. Now, then, step softly, you two. If there's any one there, we don't want to let 'em think an army's approaching. You gave Inspector Petrie the word if we needed him? That I'd ring Rhea's bell in case of immediate help required?"

"Of course. And that one toll would mean one man, and *two* tolls, three; and three tolls, as many as they could spare from the duty of guarding the house and letting no one go out or in."

"And they've already let almost every inmate of the place roam about at their leisure this night — to prove their trustworthiness!" threw in Cleek, with a short laugh. "A fine lot of disciplinarians up in this part of the world, I must say — though of course the country's difficult, and you want about

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fifty men up here to one in London. I'll have a word with the Inspector before I leave — with your permission, Mr. Narkom."

"Certainly."

"We'll get along now, Dollops. You stand here under the gate, and keep watch *toward* the Castle; Mr. Narkom, you stand here, and guard the road-end, and make the usual signal of a night owl's hoot if you see any one approaching. I'll slip on my rubber sand-shoes to grip with, and shin up in a moment."

And suiting the action to the word, that was practically what he did do — though the climb up there in the darkness was certainly more than momentary. For with no light and very little moon it was a more difficult task than Cleek had anticipated, and he had to tread carefully to avoid slipping on the narrow shelves of stone and iron that girt it about.

Up, up, up he went, like some dark fly crawling across the face of the night, and to those watching below, their hearts in their mouths at sight of his perilous progress (which at times they could not follow for the pitchy darkness, and knew not if he were safe or not), those moments seemed hours indeed.

But Cleek had been in tighter corners and more difficult places than this in the course of an adventurous lifetime, and the poise and sureness of the man were amazing. Up, and along the stone para-

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pet he went, sliding face toward the stone wall of it, until he could lean back a little and look up at Rhea standing out against the midnight sky like a monstrous splotch of black ink in a lake of indigo-blue. The bronze bell swung beneath him. He knelt cautiously upon one knee, preparatory to whipping out his electric torch, and even as he did so, heard the sound of other footsteps stealing round from the *other* side and coming toward him with the soft tread of a cat.

Instantly he stopped short — stock-still, as though made out of marble, and leaned back against the parapet while those sliding, soft, creeping, cat-like footsteps came steadily on. He became conscious of a black shape, slim as a woman's, against the midnight sky, that moved with panther-like precision across the face of the parapet. He could actually hear that other person's laboured breaths, and as the Thing steadily approached felt it fan against his cheek.

If Cleek had been in a less precarious position the soul of the man would have relieved itself by laughing outright. For the situation seemed almost funny. But this was no time for humour. The moment he stirred and made himself known, upon that moment the creature — whoever and whatever it was — would pounce upon him, and dash them both down to sure death upon the stones below, and in full sight of the Superintendent's

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watching eyes. But what to do if he stayed where he was? Detection was certain in any case. There remained only a moment of moments before it actually would come. And in that moment, to be prepared for — what?

The creature came on steadily, picking its way stealthy as a cat across the rugged stone parapet upon which Rhea stood, until it stopped a few inches away from him, face averted, one tense hand clinging to the very stone to which Cleek also clung. Then slowly it turned, knelt upon one knee, reached down a long hand toward the bar from which the great bronze bell swung, made as if to find a foothold with one slim black foot, and — Cleek's hand shot out over that other hand, and Cleek's voice whispered in its ear:

"Damn you! what are you doing here?"

Instantly all was pandemonium! For the man — for man it was — sprang round quickly, showing the lower half of a white face to Cleek's watching eyes, and then with a low-pitched exclamation of fury closed with him and fought like some mad thing, spitting out furiously and clawing and scratching with his free hand to gain hold of the other.

Cleek realized the danger even as he met it, and knew what it ultimately meant. But the thing had to be done. And in the doing he had wound one foot round a stave of iron which rose up out of the parapet to form the base of Rhea's bronze

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throne, and so steadied himself for the nonce. But it was a difficult task indeed to free himself from this clutching, scratching, biting Thing, and it took all his powers of resistance to combat him successfully.

"Stop it — damn you! — stop it!" he gave out furiously, in an angry whisper which at least reached Mr. Narkom's ears, and sent the night-owl's hoot creeping eerily out over the silence of that black night to tell Cleek that he would come to the rescue if necessary. And Cleek hooted back. He couldn't do this thing alone — it was too much for him. The space upon which they wrestled was a mere foot and a half in breadth, and at any moment one or both of them might pitch down into the darkness to certain death.

He peered into the man's fury-ridden face, trying to distinguish the features of it, but the upper half was covered with a black mask through which the eyes gleamed like slits of fire, and the strength of him seemed superhuman, to say the least of it. It was merely a matter of moments now — something would have to be done — when, of a sudden, the man leapt away from him, reached down an arm again, and — lithe as a cat — swung himself down upon the perilously narrow ledge of the great bronze bell. Here was Cleek's chance. In an instant his hand had shot out toward the man's leg and caught it in a vise, while with the other he

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steadied himself by a firm hold of the wrought-iron stave that had saved him a moment or two before.

The creature spat out his vindictiveness in a string of Italian oaths, and Cleek, paying not the slightest attention to him, merely hung on tighter to the ankle and prayed for help. Another few moments of this strain and — the fight would be lost. His arm muscles were strained to their utmost, his whole body upon the rack. He sent forth the summons of the night-owl again and again, and was rewarded by the sound beneath him of a hasty exclamation from the Superintendent, a muttered "My Gawd!" from the hoarse throat of that little bit of Cockneydom who had served him and saved him many times before, and then the whispered words, "Comin', Guv'nor — there in a tick!" came with their ring of comfort, and he exerted himself to the last ounce to retain his hold of the biting, clutching furious Thing that lay twisting itself, save for that unfortunate leg in Cleek's grasp, upon the narrow confines of the ledge of Rhea's bell.

. . . The moments seemed like hours, and Cleek had all but let go, with a strained wrist and a dislocated finger which was giving him agony, when he saw the dark shape approaching him, and knew that his rescuer had come.

"In the nick of time, lad," he breathed, as he released his hold in favour of Dollops. "God knows

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who the beggar is, but he's like a wild-cat. My hand's done in completely. Hold him and, if you can, get him back again upon this ledge. The pair of us will be too much for him, I vow! Then we'll have to hold on and ring the great bell for help. It's the only way. But we must unmuffle the clapper first. Here — your torch! Gad! *that's* what the blighter's doing, is he? Unmuffling it for himself! . . . I say, my Dago friend, keep quiet a little, will you? — or you'll find yourself in the next world in the space of another minute. This isn't a table-top, you know. And there's about two inches between yourself and eternity. And if *you're* ready to go, I'm not!"

The creature thus addressed pulled itself up uncertainly, still muttering in Italian, and as Dollops's hold slid from ankle to knee, from knee to thigh, and then — like a flash — to arm and shoulder, in proper jiu-jitsu grip, whirled round upon them, something white showing in the clenched fingers of one hand, and ground his teeth at them, as though he would eat them alive.

"Curse you! — damn you! What are you doing here, hell-hogs!" he spat out in a low, vehement voice. "My friends will be here any minute — and then your game will be up!"

"But not before yours has beaten it by a moment or two," gave back Cleek rapidly, in a low-pitched voice. "Here! — give me that thing in your hand.

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I'm anxious to see what it is that muffled the bell so successfully last night. And if you don't stand still while I'm taking it, my lad here will hurl you down into perdition. Now, then — give it up. . . . Got him, Dollops? . . . Hi! there, Mr. Narkom! I want you to take hold of that rope on the right-hand side of the gateway — and pull it for all you're worth. We've got to have help to secure this thing in man's guise we've fallen foul of, and got to have it quick!"

And so it came about that the silence of that still night was broken of a sudden by deep-throated pealing as Rhea's great bronze bell gave tongue. Once — twice — three times, until those above it were well-nigh deafened with the sound, and those below and beyond it knew, by that prearranged signal, that they were wanted — and wanted at once.

Instantly the night became hideous with shouting voices and running steps. The door-keeper hurried out of his cottage with lantern lit, and made his way toward them; constables appeared from every corner of the grounds; meanwhile, Cleek, with the crackling paperish thing that had muffled the bell in his hand, and the other lending what support to Dollops he could give in holding the man down, called out their requirements in the sharp staccato of excitement.

"A net, boys — quick! or a great-coat — any-

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thing! Only spit out your torches and hold it firm-stretched, and we're going to throw something down to you which will want a lot of holding, for it's as slippery as an eel," he gave out sharply. "Now, then — are you ready? Mr. Narkom, see that the lights are strong enough; I don't want him 'missing fire' and landing with a broken neck until we've done with him. Ready, Dollops? One — two — three —— "

Came a scratching and a fighting and a furious sound of rending material as the man wriggled to be free of those three detaining hands that held him. Then of a sudden a startled gasp, a muttered oath, and — a flying black shape came hurtling down in the darkness to that little circle of light where the upturned, expectant faces of the constables showed in Rembrandt-like light and shadow, and — the shape landed in the folds of the outstretched great-coat with a *thwack*, and was muffled up in it in a moment, kicking and clawing and scratching furiously as the thick folds went over his head.

Ten men removed him from it eventually and set him upon his feet, just as Dollops, slithering and sliding down from the dangerous height, with his heart in his mouth for his master's safety with that injured hand of his, landed with a *plomp* upon the soft ground, and gave Cleek the hand that had helped him all the way down that perilous journey, until he, too, was in safety at last.

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"Gawd's troof, Guv'nor!" he ejaculated, as he whipped out his handkerchief and bound it tightly and professionally over the finger and down on to the strained wrist. "You're 'urt proper, ain't you? That was a narrer squeak, I don't fink! . . . That's better, ain't it? I weren't a-goin' ter let yer git orf without that bit of bandages to 'elp the pain, not if we loses the blinkin' murderer 'isself! Let's 'ave a look at the chap, sir."

Cleek's good hand swung up across the boy's shoulder.

"Thank you," he said simply. "Hello! here's Mr. Narkom. Yes, let's have a look at the blighter, men, before you carry him off to the lock-up. I'm interested to know what he looks like beneath that mask of his. Just to get a line on his features, you know."

Speaking, he went up to the group of constables and, flashing out his torch, sent its spotlight upon the man's scowling face.

And it was just as he did this that Dollops let out a yell of amazement, and stared at him — mouth open, eyes wide.

"Gawblimey! and pink sossidges!" he exclaimed, whirling round upon Cleek in astonishment, "if this 'ere ain't the giddy limit! Why, that's ole Dirty Dick the Dago 'isself!"

"And this," said Cleek, as he glanced down at the crumpled bit of parchment which he still held,

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and smiled into Mr. Narkom's serious face, "is the missing will, or I'm a Dutchman! Quite a little bit of excitement for one night's entertainment, I must say! Who says anything about killing two birds with one stone? Men, I'm coming along with you to the lock-up. It's a bit late in the evening, or early in the morning, to be more literal, but I'm going to have a conversation with your prisoner which is going to elucidate many things for me. Mr. Narkom, I should advise you to go back to bed and take a rest. To-morrow is likely to be a heavy day."

Then, smiling, but still a trifle pale, Cleek swung into step with Dollops behind the little cavalcade which was wending its way slowly through the great gateway and out upon the road beyond — toward the goal of many imaginings and the proper elucidation of the riddle at last.

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CHAPTER XXVI

THE END IN SIGHT

CLEEK spent an hour in the "lock-up" with the man they had captured, and had what he scathingly called a proper heart-to-heart talk with him, coming away with the contemptuous feeling in his heart which all clean men must find there upon discovering a fellow creature who, to save his own skin if possible, is willing to split upon a pal.

He wended his way toward the Inn of the Three Fishers, with Dollops beside him, head downward, every faculty concentrated upon the proper unravelling of the riddle that confronted him. If two and two made four, then he had the answer pretty well elucidated at last. One had to fill in the gaps with a bit of imagination, but — he patted the pocket where the missing will lay, lying close against that packet of love-letters that he had found in Sir Andrews's desk. Funny how papers so often proved things where human flesh-and-blood failed. Clues — both of 'em. Strong clues. And likely to give surprise to one or two people he knew of. Lady Paula, for instance — and Ross Duggan.

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"Dollops," he said quietly, as he let himself into the little hostelry with his latchkey, just as the dawn was striking the sky with rosy fingers and rending aside the dark curtains of night, "this is going to be a heavy day for us. I don't relish the task in front of me, and yet. . . . It's no use funking the issue. Justice must be done — and if it's going to hurt some people pretty badly, it isn't my fault, is it?"

"It is not, sir," gave back Dollops emphatically. "But you come on up to yer room and let me attend to that there 'and. 'Urtin' pretty nasty, ain't it? I thought so. A bit er cold water'll 'elp some, an' I'm a dab 'and at the First Aid stunt since I took them lessons in Lunnon larst winter. We'll put yer right in a jiffy. But I carn't 'elp wishin' it was *my* paw, all the same. Miss Lorne'll be that worried when she 'ears. . . ."

"Then the best thing to do is not to tell her, you little Worry-Box," returned Cleek with a laugh. "It's luck it's my left one, so the writing won't be affected. A week or two will see it right. I wish I could cure all the heartbreak and unhappiness in this old Castle-keep as effectively in such a short time. . . . Thanks very much. That'll do nicely, I think. And it's a good deal easier. Now, be off to bed, boy, and try to make up for the loss of that beauty-sleep which you've missed. To-morrow, or rather, to-day, is going to keep us all fairly busy, I imagine. I shall want you to come up to the Castle

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with me in the morning, you know — and I mustn't be later than ten o'clock."

And so it came about that in the morning Cleek, looking rather pale, with one hand in a roughly contrived sling, and with Dollops in close alliance with him, and Mr. Narkom bringing up the rear, made his way to the great door of Aygon Castle, rang the bell coolly, and nodded pleasantly to the door-keeper who admitted him as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened in the night that had just passed. As he passed through the gates with his companions and heard them clang to behind him, he laid a hand upon the gate-keeper's arm and spoke in a low voice.

"Heard nothing at all after we left, Burns? Saw no one, I suppose, this morning?"

"Not a soul, sair. Aiverybody seems to have overslept themsailves and never a word has even come to me over the telephone in my lodge."

"Good! Excellent! Well, keep your mouth tight-closed and know nothing if you are questioned. Not even to the master of the Castle himself. To *nobody*. Simply nothing untoward happened at all last night that you know of. Follow me?"

"Absolutely, sair."

"Very well, then. Come, Mr. Narkom, we'll make our way up to the Castle now. Fine place, isn't it? Wonderful bit of stone-work in that bal-

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ustrade round the tessellated tower. Never noticed it so plainly before. Perhaps it's the fine day."

Speaking, he led the way up the drive, followed by a wide-eyed Dollops and a panting Superintendent who had not long finished his breakfast of bacon and eggs, and had missed his usual ten minutes' perusal of the newspaper after it.

Jarvis opened the door to them, bowing low over Cleek's cap as the latter proffered it, and giving Dollops a friendly wink behind his master's back as he led them into the little ante-room and went to summon his mistress.

As they sat waiting, Cleek saw Tavish, clad in riding-boots and trousers, and making a fine figure of a man, swing past the half-open door. Cleek nodded to him as he glanced in.

"Good morning. I say — come in a moment, won't you? I've got a perfectly astonishing piece of news!"

Then, as Tavish, with a nod and a smile, came into the tiny room, seeming, in his enormous stature, to fill up every nook and corner of it, and shook Cleek firmly by the hand, that gentleman leaned a little forward and whispered something in his ear.

Mr. Narkom saw the flare of eye and the slackening of jaw which betoken amazement as Tavish opened his mouth to speak. But Cleek held up a silencing hand.

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"Hush! I don't want the thing made public yet, y' know, my dear chap. Only I thought perhaps you'd like to have a look in and see the final round-up of the villains. Take a back seat, you know. There's no harm in that. And I've the most amazing bit of evidence by me which I've traced it all to. Stolen will among other things. Bring it home to *her* as smart as you please. Ought to be worth watching when you see her face."

"Gad! — yes." Tavish struck one hand into the open palm of the other, and his nice face went grim. "The woman's a devil from the first letter to the last. And if you knew the things she's done to my future wife — Johanna McCall — well, it fair makes a man's blood boil. I'd tighten the noose round *her* neck, I can promise you, and with my own hands, too. The earth is well rid of *her* kind."

"In which I profoundly agree. And — hello! here's Miss Duggan. At half-past ten, then. I'll make arrangements for you to slip in unnoticed. It's going to be as sensational as a first-rate London melodrama. And — not a word, old chap?"

"Not one of 'em."

"Thanks very much. I'll rely on you, then. And we might even want you to lend a hand. What's that, Miss Duggan? Lend a hand for what? Oh, simply in capturing a somewhat wild mare that has got loose in this part of the country and has been kicking up a pretty shindy all over the place.

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Mr. Tavish's strength and knowledge of horse-flesh ought to be a real help, eh, my friend?"

Here he winked broadly at the vanishing Tavish, and brought up a chair for Maud Duggan after she had greeted Mr. Narkom and given Dollops a little forlorn smile as Cleek introduced him to her notice.

"And have you followed up any of the clues which you discovered yesterday, Mr. Deland, to the utter desolation of all my hopes and fears?" she asked him wearily, sitting down with her hands lying loosely in her lap, a very picture of despondent womanhood.

He bowed his head.

"I'm afraid I have. Several of them. And yet — I don't know. Anyhow, I want you all to come along to the library again this morning — and for the last time. After to-day you ought not to be put to any further worry and inconvenience, my dear young lady. But what I want *you* to do is to assemble all the members of the immediate household together for me, and tell them I've discovered a perfectly new clue altogether — and from a perfectly new person — someone who, so far as you or I know, has never even entered the house at all, at any time. So you see, that's not such bad news, is it?"

At these words her head came up upon the slim column of her neck, and she looked into his face with suddenly bright eyes.

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"You mean to say that — you mean to say that you can prove that neither Ross nor — Captain Macdonald is guilty of that terrible crime?" she gave out in a shrill voice, shutting her hands together in her emotion, and breathing hard. "Oh, Mr. Deland, if you have only found out *that* ——"

"Not quite so fast, please," he responded a trifle sternly. "I'm afraid I can't give you any of the facts yet. Only I want you to know that — in one direction, at any rate — you may have some cause to hope. That is, of course, if my deductions are correct. It all depends. Even a policeman can make a mistake — isn't that so, Mr. Narkom? — and find himself led away upon a false scent. It depends a lot upon the wiliness of the fox he's in pursuit of. And in this case, when there's a — animal's a female, one has the disadvantage of the woman's intuitive faculties and natural gifts of deceit. 'The female of the species' — you know what Kipling said, of course? That sounds rude, doesn't it? But it's amazingly true, all the same — yourself, I'm sure, always excepted."

She made no answer to the little sally other than to pass a pale hand across a paler forehead, and pat a piece of dark hair into place, with that little gesture of forlornness which went straight to Cleek's heart.

"Then you have nothing more to tell me, Mr. Deland? Nothing for me to build my hopes on

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save that a new element has entered the case ——"

"Together with an old element — yes," responded Cleek softly, with a stab at his heart for her pathetic appearance. "Just that. No more. I can tell nothing until I have you all there before me, and then — well, perhaps I shall be able to unravel the mystery for you, and put an end to your sufferings in *that* direction, at any rate. Would you be good enough, as you're passing, to ask the constable on duty outside the library door to come to me a moment? Mr. Narkom and I want to question him about one or two things. There's another one *inside* the room, so there's no chance of any one getting in and falsifying clues while he's away. Thanks very much."

She passed out, pale-faced, utterly forlorn, and the sagging droop of her shoulders sent another stab of pity through Cleek's heart, while Mr. Narkom — tender-hearted as a chicken, as he himself often put it — blew his nose loudly and passed the handkerchief surreptitiously across his eyes, and turned a sad face to his famous ally's.

"Poor girl, Cl — Deland, poor, poor, unhappy girl! It goes to my heart to see any woman so desolate as that. And a good-looking woman, too! She feels the whole wretched affair keenly. And if you'd only explained to me some of those wonderful theories of yours and given me some inkling of what you're going to say to 'em, I might have been

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a bit of help to her, you know. Human sympathy's a comforting thing —— "

"But not always so comforting when it emanates from the police, who will probably wring her heart dry," returned Cleek with a twisted smile. "No, no, my friend. Bless your tender heart for the kind thought, but in this case it's up to me to tread warily. And the least suspicious glance cast at a guilty party, the least flutter of eyelid or brow in expression of one's knowledge — and the cat would be out of the bag, and all our trouble taken for nothing. I'm going to play 'possum to-day and lay low. And you've just got to forgive me beforehand and put up with it. I've no doubt your own theories coincide with mine but —— Here's P. C. Mackay. Good morning, Constable. Mr. Narkom and I just wanted to have a few words with you, with reference to what arrangements you made for me last night. You followed out my instructions?"

P. C. Mackay, who was a slight, wiry, light-footed chap, and so chosen by Cleek for the very work he had been given to do, nodded his head, and his hand came to the salute.

"I did that, sir."

"Good. No names mentioned, Constable . . . but you found some clues there, I take it?"

"Yessir. *This.*" He looked from side to side of the room, as though uncertain how to produce the clue in case of discovery. But the door was shut,

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and only they four were within the confines of the small place. Then he put his hand into his breast-pocket and drew forth a little bit of crimson-covered flexible electric wire.

Cleek's face fell a little.

"That all?"

"Yessir — except for a photograph of a young wummun. It was hidden in a carved wood box on the dressin' table. I brought it along in case you might find some use for it. Here it is."

Speaking, he drew the bit of pasteboard from his pocket and handed it across to Cleek, who bent his eyes upon it, gave a little start at something which was written across it in bold capitals and underscored three times, gazed a moment at the pictured face, and then promptly opened his pocket-book and placed it within.

"Very good, Constable. Mr. Narkom, you will do me a personal favour if you arrange for P. C. Mackay's promotion. He did good work last night, and it must not be forgotten. You may go, Constable."

"Thank you, sir."

The man saluted smartly, grinned all over his ruddy Scotch face at the word "promotion," and went back to his position outside the library door, his head in the clouds and his heart longing for the time when he could impart this wonderful knowledge to his Maggie, and see her blue eyes brighten.

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Meanwhile Cleek, the door shut once more, dived down into his pocket and produced the little bit of red electric wire which he had picked up in the library that first day before the tragedy had taken place, when Maud Duggan was showing him over the house. He fingered it idly, and then showed Mr. Narkom the two pieces spread upon his open palm.

"Not much in that, I'm afraid. Just the ordinary kind of wire which everyone uses, and with nothing to show any peculiarities," he said, speaking half to himself and half to the Superintendent. "Both cut with a sharp knife, obviously. Now, if they mated evenly — and gad! they *do* mate!" He brought them together and dovetailed the two frayed ends one against the other until the edges met in a perfectly even line. "That's a funny thing! A deuced funny thing! But they belong to each other as much as two twin souls belong. They're one and the same piece. Gad! and with the photograph of the estimable young woman — it proves it without a doubt!"

"Proves what, my dear chap?"

Mr. Narkom's voice was a trifle testy. The whole affair of that morning had got upon his nerves. In the first place, he had had to get up too early after a broken night, and in the second, Cleek hadn't given him time to digest his meal, and then the whole higgledy-piggledy of Cleek's words, from

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which he could make neither head nor tail, served to irritate him still further.

Cleek laid a hand upon the Superintendent's arm, and spoke in his most coaxing voice.

"Have patience with me, dear friend, as you have done before, and as you will have to do again," he said softly. "It isn't that I don't trust you — haven't I trusted you with life itself before now, and never found you wanting? — but it is that at present my theories are in somewhat of a muddle, and it's only keeping my own counsel that's going to help me to disentangle them."

"I know, I know, old chap," returned the Superintendent, casting aside his rancour at this apology from the man who was his best friend, with his usual heartiness. "I'm a slow-thinking old beggar, and somehow your lightning sketches get the better of my patience. But I'll back you to unravel the knot every time. Think you've come to the end, then?"

"I fancy so. With a little bit of bold guesswork thrown in to make equal measure. That must always be reckoned in the bargain, you know. But if I haven't found the person or persons who have murdered Sir Andrew in that cold-blooded and diabolically clever manner, then my name's not — Arthur Deland. And I know as much about the methods of sleuth-hounds as my old boot!"

So saying, he fell to examining the photograph

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again, and tossing the two pieces of flexible wire up and down in the palm of one hand, and muttering to himself like a lunatic, while Dollops and Mr. Narkom, in silence, could do nothing more but wonder and look on.

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CHAPTER XXVII

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE LIBRARY

IT WAS exactly eleven o'clock, and the various clocks in the house were chiming the hour out from every nook and corner of the Castle when Cleek, followed by Dollops and Mr. Narkom, made his way to the library, and found assembled there all the members of that ill-fated family — as well as those others who had perforce been obliged to stay there over-night at his orders — and with a polite "good morning" and a stiff little bow, took his place in the midst of them and glanced around.

They were a wan, white-faced lot. Lady Paula's black eyes were ringed with violet, Maud Duggan's face was pinched and old-looking in the morning light, as though the night had seen no sleep for *her* (which was true), Johanna McCall's little peaked face was pale as ivory, and her eyes looked heavy-lidded, as though she had cried overmuch in the still watches (which was true also), while Cynthia Debenham and Catherine Dowd sat with set faces and angry eyes, watching him as though deadly afraid of what he might say or do next. Ross Duggan's countenance was as lined as an old man's;

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Captain Macdonald showed by the flare of nostrils and flash of eye that his temper was still as hot as his tongue, and not improved for the keeping; and little Cyril — who slipped in a moment or two late, with Tavish bringing up the rear — had the look of a boy who was scared half out of his wits.

And scared badly he was, too. Trembling hands showed it; trembling lips showed it still more. Cleek's eyes narrowed down as he glanced at the boy's set face, and he found it hard to give him even so much as a welcoming smile. Like mother like son — that boy. As wily as you make 'em. And untrustworthy, too. He was not so fond of Master Cyril, now that he knew more of him, as he had been at first meeting.

When they were all seated, with P. C. Mackay keeping watch over the door and another constable on the outside of it, Cleek turned to them and let the queer little one-sided smile so indicative of the man travel up his face.

"Well, my friends," said he in his smooth, low-pitched voice, "I promised you something when I saw you again, and I'm here to fulfil that promise. The riddle of Sir Andrew's death is a riddle no longer. If you will have patience for a short time I shall explain a few things to you, and then ——"

"You know who killed my husband, then? You know? — you know?" bleated out Lady Paula, starting to her feet with white face and hands

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clasped close against her breast. "You have found out the secret of his murder, Mr. Deland?"

"Yes — and I know who his murderer was, too, Lady Paula," returned Cleek sharply. "Sit down, Mr. Duggan, I beg of you. The door is guarded, as you can see — both outside and in — and perhaps it might be as well if I added caution to care and turned the key in the door — so." Speaking, he crossed the room in rapid strides, locked the door, and dropped the key into his pocket. "Prevention is better than cure, you know. Yes, Lady Paula, I know who murdered Sir Andrew, and I know how it was done. A dastardly deed at best — an abominable crime upon humanity in return for a family wrong. The old question of a vendetta — though of so recent a date as to be a mere matter of seventeen years back. You have been married that long, have you not? You are surprised, I see. Well, I confess it, so was I. And when you mix up such other unpleasant ingredients as a woman's ill-timed ambition, a blackmailer, and the green-eyed god jealousy, you find a very unpleasant mess of pottage indeed."

He spoke in his own way, unravelling the riddle in that leisurely fashion for which he was famous; but to those over-charged minds and hearts that surrounded him he seemed much like a cat playing with a mouse — and enjoying its fruitless efforts at escape.

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"But the murderer — who? — who?" gave out Maud Duggan in a suddenly shrill voice, as a little silence held for a moment in that still room. "Tell us that, Mr. Deland, I implore you ——"

"In good time, Miss Duggan. First of all, the ways and means. Look! — see that spinning wheel. There stands your guilty party in that innocent guise. The hand that guided that wheel killed Sir Andrew as surely as I am standing here. And how? An air-pistol. And who owns an air-pistol in this place but Mr. Ross Duggan?"

"It's a lie — a damned lie! And I'll have you to law for it, too!" Ross Duggan started to his feet, face crimson, hands knotted, eyes flashing at this plain implication of himself. "Damn you, whoever you are! — it's a lie! I did not kill my father! I swear it upon the sacred book itself! I did not kill him!"

Cleek held up a detaining hand.

"And who, may I ask, said you did, my fiery young friend?" he returned suavely. "If you will give me a little time to tell my story in my own way, I shall be extremely obliged. You stand self-confessed as the owner of an air-pistol. That we have proof of. The rest will follow in due course. But here is the instrument of death — this simple little spinning wheel, which, wired by electricity as it is, and with the pistol hidden inside that wheel with diabolical ingenuity, caused the death of your father. And

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who among you, may I ask, has such a perfect knowledge of electricity as to equip the thing like that?"

Again there was silence; meanwhile each looked at the other and the same name framed itself unconsciously upon every lip . . . Ross Duggan. It was not spoken aloud, but Cleek could read it as he looked about him. Then Lady Paula spoke.

"Then — it was Ross? It was that unfilial and cruel son of an unknowing and innocent old man, just as I knew it to be?" she shrilled excitedly, jumping to her feet and turning to Ross and seizing him by the shoulder as though she would tear him limb from limb. "Oh, *sacremento!* I knew it! I knew it! Wicked, cruel creature that you are! Ungrateful — beast —— "

Cleek caught her sharply by the arm and spun her around as though she had been made of paper. His face was grim.

"One moment," he cried in a sharp staccato. "This lady is going to give trouble. Well, then, the moment can be delayed no longer. Constable — bring in your prisoner."

He gave a shrill whistle, strode across the room, fitted the key into the lock, and in an instant there was pandemonium.

For of a sudden there was a stifled scream from somewhere in the room — a hurried breath and a woman's voice shrilled out, "Oh, I cannot bear it

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any longer — I cannot! I cannot!" Then the door flashed open to admit of two policemen, who had slung between them the stooping figure of a man, closely handcuffed, and with a dark scrub of beard showing upon his unshaven chin. Came another scream; a boy's shrill voice lifted excitedly, "Uncle Antoni!" followed by a scuffling of a man's footsteps. Cleek took a quick step forward in the midst of all the confusion, caught at someone's sleeve and held it in a grip like a vise, rapped out in a sharp voice, "Catch him, Dollops! Catch the beggar before he slips out through the open door and gives us the 'go-by' — the beastly blighter!" Then, all in a moment, he was fighting and twisting and doubling to regain his hold upon the man who was trying to escape; there was a muttered curse, and a flying foot came out and caught the leg of a delicate table, sending it toppling over with a crash in the midst of them; the grating of a key in a lock, and — the end had come!

Brushing a piece of dust from his sleeve as P. C. Mackay snapped the bracelets upon still another prisoner, Cleek turned and surveyed the room with flushed cheek and flashing eye.

"Friends," he said blandly, "your man — your murderer. Caught as red-handed as one could wish — and as innocently as a babe, too!"

And pointed toward the manacled, fighting figure of James Tavish!

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CHAPTER XXVIII

THE SECRET OF THE SINGING WHEEL

THE scene that followed this startling announcement can well be imagined rather than described. For even as the man stood glowering at them, his mouth muttering the curses that his heart held, came a new diversion from another quarter. For Catherine Dowd had called out sharply, "Quick! quick! some smelling-salts here — and brandy!" and as the women of the party endeavoured to produce one item, while the men more successfully produced the other, it was seen that Johanna McCall was the object of this aid, for she half-lay, half-sprawled upon the floor, mouth open, face twitching, eyes already glazing over, and the white froth forming about her pale lips.

Cleek leaned down and lifted her head in his uninjured arm; and looked down into her upthrown ghastly face.

"Gad!" he said under his breath, "and now the other one — self-confessed! Who'd have thought it? — who, indeed? And for what reason, I wonder?"

"For him — for Ross — for the man I love," the pale lips framed the words brokenly as the strength

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of the girl sagged and ebbed slowly away. "He would have disinherited him — disinherited Ross, turned him out — penniless! Cruel — wicked — I stabbed him with — the stiletto — the light went out — caught it off the table — wiped it on *her* dress — must have been mad — mad — but you can't get me. It's poison — arsenic. I had it ready. And I needn't have done it — after all!"

Then she sighed a little, opened her eyes suddenly and closed them again, and then slumped forward in Cleek's arms — dead.

Cleek caught at a cushion, pushed it under the sagging head, slipped his own arm out from under it, and got slowly to his feet. His face was pale, his lips set.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said quietly, pointing a hand at the still figure, so pitifully small and childlike, huddled together upon the floor, "the other — murderer. Poor, misguided little creature! Of such folly can Love only be held to blame. A hopeless passion, a breaking heart, a suddenly maddening resolution made and carried out in a red-hot moment, and — another soul gone to meet its Maker with the red blot of death upon it. Tragic, is it not? . . . Lady Paula, take a seat. There is so much more to tell, and this has slightly precipitated matters. Tavish, my friend, you will do better not to glower and struggle like that. The Law has you, and *the Law will make you pay* — in

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spite of all your efforts to fix the blame upon someone else. I think, my friends, if we might adjourn to the drawing-room, the rest of the riddle would make easier and better telling. It is hardly fitting — here and now."

"You're right, Mr. Deland, perfectly right," threw in Ross at this juncture, jumping to his feet and catching his fiancée by the arm. "Come, all of you. Out of this room and into the next. I want to hear the end of the tangle, Mr. Deland, and find exactly how you implicated *me*."

Cleek looked up suddenly with a slight smile.

"Not Deland, my friend, just Cleek — Cleek of Scotland Yard, at your service," he made reply smoothly, smiling at the amazed faces which greeted this statement. "So you see, Tavish, you had greater odds against you than you knew. We'll have your other prisoner, please, Constable. The worthy Antoni Matei shall tell us something before the day is out. Of that I am certain. And I have promised him a good price for his loose tongue. Tavish, never trust a lying comrade. This is the friend who saw you through — and then split afterward upon you. Choose birds of another colour next time you practise such tricks — only, I'm afraid it is a trifle late to start new methods — *now*."

Speaking, he passed out of that tragic room, waving his hand with a gesture which was almost theatrical to the others to follow him, and when they

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were all assembled around him in the drawing-room, went on with his amazing story.

"You want to hear the whole story from start to finish? Well, it will make long telling, I'm afraid," he said, as Maud Duggan put the question, glancing a trifle anxiously at the slumped figure of the Italian which stood manacled between two burly constables, waiting his turn to speak up and tell what he knew. "To begin with, I must confess I was a little mistaken in my calculations. *To begin with.* Circumstantial evidence does not always prove guilt, Miss Duggan, although it's generally a good pointer in a broad way. And your brother had many pieces of evidence against him. That bit of red flexible electric wire, you know, that I picked up in the library that first day you showed me around. I admit I thought it belonged to him, particularly when young Cyril here told such an excellent story of how Sir Ross (I must give you your proper title, you know!) wired the room temporarily, just to show James Tavish how it could be done. But it didn't, you see. That fragment was found in Tavish's own bedroom. Then, when I went down into the dungeons, I discovered — something else."

His hand dived into his pocket and brought forth a crumpled handkerchief, slightly bloodstained, and handed it to her. "Can you identify that?"

She looked up, startled.

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"Of course. It's yours, Ross, isn't it? See, here are your initials. And yet you found it down there — with something else, Mr. — Cleek?"

"I certainly did, my dear young lady. With a syphon of soda, a tumbler and a bottle that smelt of very good raw whisky. Rather strong for *my* liking, but still — we'll let that pass for the present. I'll have something to say about that later which may interest you, Mr. Narkom. I found it there — and, as you say, I found something else, too. And when I saw the initials I naturally thought of your brother — which just goes to prove that human nature is apt to make mistakes, even when it thinks itself pretty expert upon certain subjects. As a matter of fact, Miss McCall had borrowed that handkerchief — she supervises the laundering, you told me, Miss Duggan — for James Tavish when he cut his finger, and he had never given it back, obviously. When I discovered that, that was the first pointer in his direction. The others followed fairly rapidly. . . . Then the air-pistol, you know. You yourself told me your brother had one — and then regretted the telling afterward, like every loving and foolish woman who wants to preserve her kin from possible blame, even in the face of her own suspicions. That was Number Two against him. Number Three came from this young lady here — Miss Dowd — who brought me the stiletto that had been used to stab your poor father, and admit-

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ted, strictly against all her scruples, that, as far as she knew, it had been last used by Sir Ross to cut the edges of a book upon Poisons which he had been reading. I don't much admire your taste in literature, Sir Ross, but that is hardly to do with me. A man can choose his own companions and his own library, thank God, although Life itself chooses almost everything else for him. But I must confess that the spinning wheel got me guessing, as our American cousins say. I've Mr. Narkom to thank for that discovery. And he made it in rather a remarkable way. Leaned against the wheel and experienced a slight shock. After that, the thing was as easy as A. B. C. We simply traced the wiring to the window-sill, where we discovered a switch hidden in the ivy, turned it on, and — there you were! I nearly got potted by the devilish contrivance myself, only some sixth sense told me to get out of the way in time. But the aim was amazingly accurate. The second bullet fell a matter of half an inch below the first. A perfect marvel of ingenuity, contrived by a man who had obviously made electricity his study for years — in spite of his confessed ignorance of it. Worked out to a nicety. The failing lights were his idea also, and quite simple to manage, really. The drumming dynamo made a very good imitation of the 'singing of the wheel,' in accordance with the old story. And a less enlightened household than yours, Sir Ross,

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might have put all sorts of constructions upon that — except, of course, the right one. . . . That, my friends, was how the diabolical thing was done."

For a moment a silence held, fraught with mute astonishment; then exclamations of amazement fell from every one of that little company, and Ross Duggan was just about to speak when Lady Paula broke hurriedly in.

"And my brother? — my poor unfortunate brother?" cried she in a wrung voice. "He had no share in the crime, I'll swear it, Mr. Cleek. Even your magic cannot prove that."

"Not in the crime actually, Lady Paula, but in — other things," he replied a trifle grimly, glancing again at the flushed face of the prisoner. "For as a blackmailer I fancy he is something of an artist. That fact you already know — to your cost, I fancy. And I think I'm not wrong in saying that it was he who suggested to you the stealing of the will and ——"

"I begged him not to, Mr. Cleek! I implored. I did — I swear it. And I never stole the will, that I can promise!" she broke in distractedly, beating her hands together. "Antoni suggested — yes — he wished to destroy it, so that my share of the estate might be greater as widow than that which had been apportioned to me, and of course he would have a portion of that, too. But I implored him

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not — that is true, is it not, Antoni? You can answer to that? I begged you, and you promised! And he threatened me even with exposure if I did not agree to the preposterous idea! I complied, only upon the promise that it should not be destroyed. But who took it I do not know."

"But I think I can pretty well guess," responded Cleek serenely, with a quick look at Cyril's suddenly flushed face. "Your son, Lady Paula, has much of his uncle's blood in his veins. And he acted, no doubt, upon *forceful* advice, and carried the thing through quite successfully. Perhaps he will tell us just when he decided to steal his own father's will — at the instigation of an unscrupulous relation."

Came a slight pause in the telling, meanwhile a startled exclamation broke from Ross Duggan's lips, while every eye in that little assembly fastened upon the unfortunate boy. He broke into quiet sobbing, darting his eyes here and there for possible sympathy.

"Yes, I took it, sir — when Uncle Antoni told me," he broke out between sobs. "It was — just after it had happened. I heard Mother's scream, and then she ran into my room and told me of — the dreadful thing that had happened! About half an hour afterward Uncle Antoni appeared at the balcony which opens out from my bedroom window, and told me I must steal the will for him. I was terrified —

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oh, I was! — but he threatened me with — with a pistol —— "

"That's a lie!" gave out the prisoner with a maledictory eye upon his unfilial nephew.

"It isn't — it isn't! You told me to get it — just how to get it. That it was lying upon the table-top; and so I slipped down in my stockinged feet, and waited in the passage until I saw Ross slip out of the room after everyone else had gone back to bed, and — and *you* had come out, Mr. Cleek, and were talking to Maud in the ante-room. So I crept into the room — oh, it was dreadful, with Father lying there — like that — snatched it up and fled back to my bedroom in terror. Uncle Antoni was still waiting on the balcony, and when he got it he climbed down the balustrade again and — and — that is all I know. Oh, I wish — I wish I'd never had anything to do with it!"

Cleek nodded.

"I'm sure you do," he said quietly. "So it was really not your fault, Cyril. You acted under considerable pressure. That I'll admit. But it might have been better if you had confided in — someone else after the deed was done. It would have helped clear up the mystery sooner, at any rate. But that cannot be helped now. To proceed with the story. Here, by the way, is the missing will, Lady Paula. I found it muffling the clapper of Rhea's bell — a very ingenious hiding-place — and in the finding

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discovered your — er — worthy brother at the same time. That was how I happened to get hold of him. He gave me a few tips of quite useful information afterward, upon promise of a light sentence, and helped to lead me finally to the true murderer. So we will hold that in his favour, at any rate. Sir Ross, I'd prefer you to keep that document until it can be placed in the hands of your family lawyer. We don't want any more disappearing tricks for the present, do we?"

"Hardly. Gad! it's amazing, positively extraordinary how you've found all this out!" threw in that gentleman with deep emphasis. "Please accept my apologies *now* for those unforgivable things I said to you, Mr. Cleek. But when a chap's just been practically accused of killing his own father ——"

"You must expect a little heat. That's all right, my friend. Don't bother about it further. Only, I was obliged to throw the scent upon someone other than the real man — or we'd have lost him. You understand that, of course?"

"Certainly. Only tell us how you traced the murder to its proper source, and *why* James Tavish should have done such a thing."

"That I will, and in the shortest way possible. But you must let me tell my story in my own particular manner," replied Cleek, with a slight smile and a warmth of feeling toward this very impetuous

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and generous-hearted young man. "There's still a good deal to be cleared up before you can understand, and I'm afraid some of it won't make particularly good hearing. But that I cannot help. Men are frail things, Sir Ross, where temptation is concerned. And when there is a pretty woman in the question . . . it's all right, Lady Paula; it all happened long before *you* entered your husband's life, so that there is nothing for *you* to forgive — but, as I say, when a pretty woman enters at one door, a man's discretion very often flies out at another.

"I found, among other things yesterday, when I was looking for the will in your father's desk, after having appropriated his keys first, a bundle of old love-letters, written upon paper which I ascertained had been bought in the village, and bearing a postmark which was local, and signed with the name 'Jeannette.' I confess I did not know just where these entered into the case at all, but something told me that they were a big factor. My intuition — policeman's sixth sense — call it what you will . . . I looked into the matter, and then discovered, after some probing through my man Dollops (who, by the way, Mr. Narkom, deserves high commendation in this case), that they were actually written by James Tavish's sister, Jeannette, and that — to put it baldly, for which I trust you will forgive me — that your father had been carrying on a secret liaison with this girl for some years, upon promise of

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marriage, and had, in fact, got her into very unfortunate trouble."

"But he never married her — he married *me* — I am his legal wife, I swear that!" struck in Lady Paula, in a high-pitched, terrified voice. "I knew nothing of this woman at all — everything in our marriage was in order ——"

"Of that there is not the smallest doubt, Lady Paula," returned Cleek gravely. "I said only 'under *promise* of marriage.' That is where man is unfortunately so unfaithful. He merely left her to bear her trouble alone — after, of course, providing for her and the possible issue of their unhappy union — and, being a faithful woman, it broke her heart, and both she and her child died as a consequence of this neglect. When the wish to live is gone, there is little else to bind one to this earth at such times, my friends, and so she and her unwanted little one passed out to a happier realm. Much of this I have gleaned from those same letters; much I have deduced in the natural course of events. The final clue was discovered in James Tavish's own room, where this photograph, bearing the date of her death and that of her child, and having one word written across the face of it, was discovered in a box on his dressing-table."

He handed the piece of pictured pasteboard across to each of them in turn, watching their faces to see the effect of it upon them individually. Mute aston-

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ishment, dull grief showed in Ross and Maud Duggan's eyes as they looked upon it. It was as though they had discovered suddenly that their idol had feet of clay. For across the front of the pictured face was written one word in heavy black scrawl, and the word was *"Avenged!"*

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CHAPTER XXIX

"AS A TALE THAT WAS TOLD"

"MY GOD!" It was Ross Duggan who spoke. "Just to think of it! Just to think! That *my* father ——"

"Don't forget he's dead, Ross, and beyond all chance of your remonstrating with him, and that the dead cannot speak up for themselves!" cried Maud Duggan, in a wrung voice. "Don't say anything you will be sorry for, I beg of you! Mr. Cleek, this has come as something in the nature of a shock to my brother and me, and — and it's going to take some time to let this part of your story sink in. It seems dreadful that one's own father . . ."

"And yet there are many who have done worse — far worse," threw in Cleek, with uplifted hand, as she paused and looked at him out of anguished eyes. "Youth must learn to forgive, Miss Duggan. That is a lesson which both you and your brother have got to learn, and don't forget, will you, in the learning, that this thing took place more than seventeen years ago — before your father was married to his present wife. Raking up dead ashes is a poor sort of game, and an unprofitable one. I would never have spoken only

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that therein lay the motive of James Tavish's crime, and for seventeen long years he has worked for it. The unutterable patience of the man! the appalling sense of revenge! For at the end of that time his bitterness to the man who had wronged his sister was even greater than when the thing itself took place. How long has he been in your father's employ?"

"Twelve years."

"And I take it he was well known locally before that?"

"The family was certainly an old local one, Mr. Cleek, and, in fact, I have heard the story go that they were descendants of the original Peasant Girl on her mother's side."

"Oho! Well, that may or may not be. Vendettas are not only carried out in southern climes, Miss Duggan. I've learned that lesson to my cost many times since I took up this profession. And the Scotch temperament is a dour one, and not forgiving. A grudge is a grudge, even if it lasts through several centuries — and who knows but that this belief lent colour to his hatred of your father? At any rate, whether it is true or not, James Tavish killed Sir Andrew because he was the betrayer of his sister — and took seventeen years to bring his vengeance to full maturity. Gad! what a character to bear! It makes one's blood run cold! . . . Constables, I think you may remove your prisoner now

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to the nearest lock-up. We've done with him for the present, thanks."

So saying, he waved his hand toward the door, opened it, and waited until the little cavalcade had taken its dismissal; meanwhile those within the room of that house of discord sat silent as dead people, thinking back over the doings of seventeen years ago, and of a dead man who had betrayed an innocent woman. It was an unpleasant thought at best. They were glad when Cleek came back into the room, closed the door, and took his seat among them again. His pleasant voice dispelled the repellent weavings of their own brains.

"And now," said he, "to continue with our story. It is nearly done, but there are points which I know each one of you would like to have cleared up before I take my leave. What's that, Lady Paula? How did I come to suspect your brother in the first place? Ah, that involves a long story with which I will not bore you, for you have had enough already of this distressing affair, I'm sure. Only this: That I happened to go up into your boudoir yesterday, when you were making your way up the Great Free Road" — he paused a moment as she coloured, and gave a significant smile. "You see, I know more than I tell, eh? Well, I discovered a note screwed up on the floor, and signed 'A. M.' Antoni Matei, we now know it was. Once I suspected Captain Macdonald — simply because the footprints outside of

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the window of the library were made by his hunting-boots — discovered afterward by my man, mud-caked and hidden in some shrubs near Tavish's cottage. Which leads me, Miss Duggan, to that very particular point of the size of the gentleman's boots. You remember? I won't call that incident to your mind further. Only — you were a little mistaken, that's all. But let that pass. Every woman acts upon the dictates of her own heart, and if those dictates are a trifle mistaken — yes, that was how I found out, Lady Paula. After seeing Captain Macdonald's handwriting I knew that he had *not* written that note. A further investigation upon the part of my lad Dollops and myself last night led to the elucidation of who it was who *had* written it. Your brother himself disclosed his relation to you last night, after we had our talk in the village lock-up. After that, the thing was as easy as A B C.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Duggan? And where exactly did Captain Macdonald come in! Why, when one meets a man running agitatedly away from the particular part of the Castle where the crime had taken place — and just *after* it — one is inclined to be a little suspicious of that man. It is only natural. Though, thank Heaven, my suspicions were soon quieted, after I discovered that your gallant Captain had really come into the grounds — with your having left the gate ajar for him so that

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Rhea's bell would not sound — to meet *you* clandestinely, as he had been forbidden the house. Love will always find a way, you know. Only, it was unfortunate at the time that he should have chosen that night of all others to have come to meet you. You knew of the crime, then, Captain? Or what was it that sent you pelting away so hard from the house that held your affianced bride?"

"Simply because I had heard a woman's scream, had seen the lights all over the Castle switch up, and did not want my meeting with Maud to be discovered — lest a more certain means should be taken to keep us apart ever afterward," returned the Captain, a trifle heatedly. "And I must confess that I was a bit nonplussed and — and angered when you mistook *me* for a murderer and held me under suspicion."

"For which you might readily give your apology, as a better mannered man has already done," apostrophized Cleek inwardly. "Still, we can't help a man's nature, and he seems a likely enough chap, as men go. *And* she loves him. And it's no affair of mine as to how he behaves himself — so long as he was not the guilty party." Then, aloud, "I see. Well, Miss Duggan will explain to you how your hunting-boots came to be here, and to lead to your being suspected along with the other. Just ask her afterward — eh, Miss Duggan? And love her still more for her womanly sentiment, if I may be permitted to tender any advice. . . .

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"I think that is really all. Only, I should like just a word with Sir Ross and Cyril alone, if I may be granted the favour? And then I must be going. Mr. Narkom and I have other affairs to attend to in this neighbourhood which are very pressing and will want a lot of careful handling to bring home to their proper destination. . . . Thanks very much."

He got to his feet instantly as the women arose, followed by Captain Macdonald, and quietly left the room. Only Sir Ross, Cyril, and Mr. Narkom remained. As the door closed behind them, Ross Duggan spoke up.

"What is it that you wish to say, Mr. Cleek?" he said quietly. "I'll be glad if you will go easy with Cyril. He's not a bad boy, you know. Only a trifle misguided, and I shall make it my duty in future to keep a sharper eye upon him. The boy has had no other companions but his books of adventure and his own imagination."

"And a very unfortunate mess those two things have made of him," returned Cleek quietly, crossing over and laying a hand along Cyril's shoulder. "School, and boarding-school, is the best place for *him*, my friend, and good healthy companionship with others of his own age. It's just the devil of that reading which made him act as he did. I found him out, late last night in company with his uncle, doing some very nefarious work on the hillside below here."

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"What?"

"Gently, gently, my friend. Don't forget, will you, that Cyril has not been given the same chances as other boys. And his is an active brain. The work in question was illicit whisky-stills — in fact, the very thing for which I originally came down here, Mr. Narkom. James Tavish and Antoni Matei and Cyril have all had a hand in it. And the still itself, you will find, if you go down to your own dungeon, Sir Ross, to where the Peasant Girl is supposed to have her haunts o' nights."

"Cinnamon! Cleek!"

"Yes — and, by James! Mr. Narkom. And that's the actual truth, too. I discovered it first of all. A little looking on the part of Dollops and me brought the thing to light, through a susceptible maid-servant at present in your employ, Sir Ross. She fell for my Cockney lad's 'ginger 'air.' And he made use of his opportunity. And it was then — even as late as last night — that my suspicions were finally pinned upon James Tavish as the murderer of your father. For I saw him, in company with the Dago, wearing your tweed coat, which I noted hanging on a hook in the passage earlier in the day, and had even seen you wearing during the morning, before you changed into that dark suit yesterday afternoon — and if it hadn't been for *me* that same tweed coat might have led you into some rather unfortunate feminine revelations from one of the

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ladies who are at present in your house. But let that pass. . . . Mr. Narkom, we must go. There's a gang to be rounded up, and unfortunately, through a foolish woman, some inkling of our presence here has become known, and it will take us all our time to trace the rest of the participants in this pleasant affair before they have had time to show nothing more than a very clean pair of heels for our benefit. We must be making tracks. Sir Ross, take an older fellow's advice and fight for that boy's rights to go to a decent English school. I've no doubt that the house will be divided now, since these revelations have been made. One could hardly go on living with a woman for a stepmother who — who had even contemplated such things, although she did it for the benefit of her own boy. But — fight for him. And get him away from — unfortunate influence if you can. Or you'll be losing for the Empire an otherwise good little citizen. There's no doubt about the presence of the uncle now — with that whisky-still business on hand, and that's what brought the two men together, no doubt. But get this boy clear of it all. Try a public school where his *moral* outlook will be as well cared for as his physical, and — get him there *quick*.

"Good-bye, Cyril — shake hands, won't you? And you might write a line to me now and then, to let me know how you're getting on. I'd have had a boy of your age myself, no doubt, if — if I hadn't

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made a fool of myself earlier in life, and I've got to make up for it now. But it makes me rather soft for youngsters. Good-bye, Sir Ross, and good luck. Clear out of this ill-fated inheritance for a time, until things blow over. You'll find there'll be a different aspect of affairs when you come back with your vision cleared. Mr. Narkom, come along. At least we've beaten the Coroner at his own business, and that's always a feather in a policeman's cap, eh, old friend?"

And, so speaking, he passed out of that house of discord, which, however, he was to visit later, many times, as friend and confidant of the new owner of it, out into the clear sunshine of an early noon, and the paths that lay ahead.

THE END

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It Pays to Smile. By Nina Wilcox Putnam.
I've Married Marjorie. By Margaret Widdemer.

Jean of the Lazy A. By B. M. Bower.
Jeanne of the Marshes. By E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Jennie Gerhardt. By Theodore Dreiser.
Johnny Nelson. By Clarence E. Mulford.
Judgment House, The. By Gilbert Parker.

Keeper of the Door, The. By Ethel M. Dell.
Keith of the Border. By Randall Parrish.
Kent Knowles: Quahaug. By Joseph C. Lincoln.
Kingdom of the Blind, The. By E. Phillips Oppenheim.
King Spruce. By Holman Day.
Knave of Diamonds, The. By Ethel M. Dell.

La Chance Mine Mystery, The. By S. Carleton.
Lady Doc, The. By Caroline Lockhart.
Land-Girl's Love Story, A. By Berta Ruck.
Land of Strong Men, The. By A. M. Chisholm.
Last Straw, The. By Harold Titus.
Last Trail, The. By Zane Grey.
Laughing Bill Hyde. By Rex Beach.
Laughing Girl, The. By Robert W. Chambers.
Law Breakers, The. By Ridgwell Cullum.
Law of the Gun, The. By Ridgwell Cullum.

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