









THE RIDDLE OF THE  
AMBER SHIP



OTHER CLEEK BOOKS



*Cleek of Scotland Yard*

*Cleek, the Man of Forty Faces*

*Cleek, the Master Detective*

*Cleek's Government Cases*

*The Riddle of the Amber Ship*

*The Riddle of the Frozen Flame*

*The Riddle of the Mysterious Light*

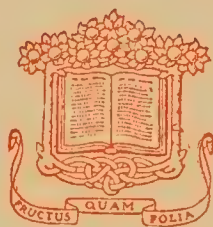
*The Riddle of the Night*

*The Riddle of the Purple Emperor*

*The Riddle of the Spinning Wheel*

# THE RIDDLE OF THE AMBER SHIP

*Hanshew* By  
Mary E. and Thomas W. Hanshew



GARDEN CITY                      NEW YORK  
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY  
1924

*Copy 2*

PZ 3  
H 1989  
R  
copy

COPYRIGHT, 1924, BY  
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

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

*First Edition*

APR 28 '24

© Cl A 792150



# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE HISTORY OF THE AMBER SHIP . . . . .	1
II. A CHINESE GENTLEMAN . . . . .	9
III. THE BEGINNING OF THE DRAMA . . . . .	17
IV. THE MAN WITH THE NAVVY'S HANDS . . . . .	27
V. A SECOND INTRUSION . . . . .	34
VI. THE VANISHING TRICK . . . . .	44
VII. FAILURE . . . . .	52
VIII. WHAT HAPPENED AT THE BOOKSHOP . . . . .	59
IX. BRIEF, BUT OF MUCH IMPORTANCE . . . . .	69
X. A GRUESOME DISCOVERY . . . . .	74
XI. THE "BALANKHA-DAHS" . . . . .	82
XII. THE SIGN OF KALI . . . . .	89
XIII. "SLEEPING DOGS . . . . ."	100
XIV. ENTER THE APACHES . . . . .	110
XV. THE MAN OF THE FORTY FACES . . . . .	118
XVI. A PAIR OF HONEYMOONERS . . . . .	123
XVII. SUSPICIONS . . . . .	133
XVIII. A PAIR OF MUDDY SHOES . . . . .	146

CHAPTER		PAGE
XIX.	FOUR LETTERS . . . . .	154
XX.	THE UNSEEN WATCHER . . . . .	167
XXI.	HER LADYSHIP'S NEW MAID . . . . .	175
XXII.	FIKO, THE FINDER . . . . .	183
XXIII.	A VISIT TO THE DOCTOR'S . . . . .	193
XXIV.	ENTER LADY BRENTWOOD . . . . .	203
XXV.	THE SECRET OF THE BOOKSHOP . . . . .	210
XXVI.	ON THE TRAIL OF THE BALANKHA- DAHS . . . . .	220
XXVII.	AN UNWELCOME DISCOVERY . . . . .	225
XXVIII.	PURSUIT . . . . .	236
XXIX.	NEWS AT THE MANOR . . . . .	243
XXX.	WHAT THE TRUNK HELD . . . . .	253
XXXI.	THE INQUEST . . . . .	262
XXXII.	CLEEK INTERVENES . . . . .	275
XXXIII.	THE TELLING OF THE TALE . . . . .	284
XXXIV.	"JOURNEY'S END——" . . . . .	300

THE RIDDLE OF THE  
AMBER SHIP





# The Riddle of the Amber Ship

## CHAPTER I

### THE HISTORY OF THE AMBER SHIP

**I**T WAS a day of spring sunshine, blue sky, singing birds, and all the flowers of Kensington Gardens gave forth their glorious promise.

Cleek, wandering at large down the curving paths cigarette in lip, hands in pockets, and restless blood stirred by that something which called soundlessly all about him, looked up at the sky, then down at the bursting flower-buds, and came to the conclusion that the world was indeed a very fine place to live in.

There were, of course, children everywhere, for these are the spirit of Kensington Gardens embodied in that statue to the immortal Peter Pan who is their own particular god.

A hurrying figure in the distance ahead of him was the only sign of restless humanity to disturb his serenity of outlook. Cleek sighed and shrugged his shoulders, and deliberately turned down an adjacent pathway.

“I’m not encountering any speed this fine spring morning,” was the mental register of his mind, “so I’ll avoid it in the way of all flesh, and take another direction.”

But the sound of the hurrying footsteps grew near and nearer, and an innate something made him turn his head and look back down the avenue of trees that shrouded the blue bowl of the sky. Every faculty came to attention at once. He hurried toward the speeding figure, and called a sharp, “What’s up?”

The figure stopped, pounded its chest with the flat of one hand, and said breathlessly, “You’re wanted! Superintendent on the line. Come at once, sir. It’s the Yard, sir! And urgent!”

“Oh, confound the Yard and all concerning it!” responded Cleek. “When is a man to get a little peace, I’d like to know—with the blessed Yard reaching out its tentacles for him in every direction! All right, Dollops, I’m coming. What made you choose Kensington Gardens, though?”

Dollops gave a respectful, if sly, wink.

“Got yer checked cap on, sir, and a soft collar,” he returned; “an’ when them garmings are donned, I’m fer knowin’ that Kensington Gardings is ’avin’ its innings, and the kids’ll be keepin’ you busy.”

“Well, you’re a detective and no mistake!” Cleek’s laugh rang out. “We’d better be getting straight back. Mr. Narkom’s worried, you say? Give any notion of the trouble?”



“None, sir. Only arsked me ter find yer and fetch yer to ’im at once. Call a taxi, shall I?”

“Yes, Dollops. And be sure it’s an open one.”

Dollops was off like a shot, and Cleek, all the inertia of the spring morning gone, was not so far behind him, so that as the taxi drew up at the curb and the door flew open under Dollops’s fingers, Cleek was inside in the winking of an eye, and off and away to the Yard’s call and the Yard’s business, which, after all, was principally his business, too.

He found the superintendent—a little stouter in figure from the increasing girth which the years were adding to him—seated, as was his wont, at his office desk, coat off, head in hands, and an expression of worried anxiety upon his kindly countenance. He looked up as Cleek entered, tossing his cap on a chair, and waved his hand to a seat near by.

“Dollops caught you, then? Well, we’re in it up to the neck, old boy! Want your help badly.”

“Well, it’s something to know that you’re wanted somewhere,” responded Cleek with a smile. “What’s worrying you this fine spring morning? Gad, Mr. Narkom! the tulips are a sight in the Gardens. Glorious tints.”

“Oh, tints be damned!” the superintendent, usually so conservative, broke forth indignantly. “I’ve no time for flowers, my friend! There’s the dickens of a case on hand, and——”

“Chinese, eh?”

“What? Now how the dickens did you know?”

Cleek laughed and tapped a map on the desk with his finger.

“Used my eyes, old friend. Map of China, and an envelope with a Chinese stamp on it, and you looking like a fat old idol yourself! But let’s hear it, Mr. Narkom, and see where we stand.”

“All right. Here it is. You know we’ve been worried over this trafficking in opium that’s been going on right under our very noses, so to speak, and the inscrutable Chink looking as innocent as last year’s hat? Well, we’ve had added police surveillance at every port in the country, and even that doesn’t stop the beggars! Comes in just the same. Chief and I had been discussing a special appeal to the Chinese Government itself, and then on the top of this comes a letter from the governor of Kwang-Tin—one of the big provinces, you know—saying he’s sending his son, Tsi-Kling, over here for tutoring in English and for medical attention (growing too quickly, so he says), and he wants our special supervision for the boy, seeing that there have been several attempts upon his own life.”

“Why?”

“Oh, the usual Oriental notions, you know—utterly un-understandable to the Western mind. Don’t like his politics, I expect.”

Cleek stirred in his chair with a slight sign of disinterest. “Well, there’s nothing in that, so far,

my friend, to cause all this energetic anxiety," he said, with a touch of tartness in his tone. "And to take me away from the tulips on a morning like this!"

"Oh, blow your tulips, and listen!" retorted the superintendent angrily. "I don't mean to lose my temper, Cleek, but when a man with a brain like yours starts going potty over flowers, it puts me all on edge. Ever heard of the Amber Ship?"

Cleek paused abruptly in the act of lighting a cigarette. His eyes narrowed in alert interest. "Righto!" he cried with some vehemence. "I suppose, at the bottom, then, it's the Amber Ship that's causing all your perturbation, eh?"

"What do *you* know about the Amber Ship?"

"Just as much as any man who calls himself an expert on the world's historical jewels. Don't forget that past of mine, you know. There were times when the Amber Ship tempted *my* insatiable appetite for sensations. Belonged to Confucius—or so the the story goes."

Mr. Narkom whistled.

"Gad, if you're not the most amazing beggar! Ever seen it?"

There was a sparkle of reminiscence in Cleek's eye. He gave a short, sharp laugh. "Once. And nearly held it in my hands, too—only I set a higher valuation on my useless life than what might be got for it after a Chink's knife had done its work. Yes, I've seen it. A huge lump of clear amber, cut and



carved and most intricately wrought into the shape of a ship—a Chinese junk, and with a mosaic pattern on ship and sails of rubies, diamonds, and emeralds, and the waves of the water at the prow realistically carried out in one huge cut sapphire. Yes, I've seen it! Every jewel thief the world over has seen it—or heard of it—but none of them has set finger upon it to my knowledge.”

“Then you know the governor and all about him?”

“Hardly that, but I know of his very honourable and ancient family. The Amber Ship belonged originally to Kwei-Fung-Li, and it is, by the way, the insignia of a very powerful Chinese secret society, vesting its owner with unlimited powers in all matters Chinese. Kwei-Fung-Li ruled in the 16th century—a very august, and devilish, and glorious mandarin. Then his son, Ching-Fung-Li, got it, and held it in spite of a petty revolution that sent him into hasty exile. After that, history doesn't record its progress until it springs up in the end of the 17th century, when the line once more returned to its original power. And now it has fallen into the present governor's hands, eh? What sort of a man is he, do you know?”

Mr. Narkom shook his head. All through Cleek's brief history of the province he had sat restless and uninterested, and anxious to get on to what were to him more momentous matters.

“No, I don't. Only that the son has the jewel;

he is keen on jewels, I believe, and has made a hobby of them. Jewel-encrusted books, and even old manuscripts—all sorts of odd things the boy collects. Because of his taste in this direction, his father has handed over to him the trust of the Amber Ship; and he's bringing it over here along with the rest of his collection."

"Whew!" Cleek sprang to his feet and took a pace up and down the long room, to the window and back. "Now I know the reason of all the commotion! Every jewel thief in Europe will be ready for the lad and his booty. When does he arrive?"

"To-day."

"*To-day!* At what hour and where?"

Mr. Narkom drew out his watch. The lines of anxiety upon his face deepened. He passed a weary hand over his brow.

"At exactly twelve fifty-eight at Waterloo Station," he returned, with a dejected mien, "where he is to be met by the Yard's men and conducted to Upminster and the care of his new tutor—Octavius Spender, who lives in the House on the Hill."

Cleek struck his hands together.

"Upminster? Now, why the dickens should they send him to a hole-in-the-corner place like that? Well, here is 'the Yard's men' who are going to meet him!" he said with a bow. "I've just about time to make it nicely, and snoop about a bit beforehand. I'd go a pretty good distance to get a



glimpse of the Amber Ship, Mr. Narkom, and the Chinese gentleman is a person for whom I have both the profoundest admiration and respect. Who's this chap, Spender, who is to have charge of the prince?"

"You're one of the best, Cleek. That was exactly what I wanted of you, and now my mind's at rest. Spender, you say? Oh, he's an old recluse chap who used to be one of the best-known dons at Oxford. I don't remember his college for the moment, but he's an authority on all matters Chinese. Has the care of Chinese boys who are sent over for education in England. Used to 'em all his life. Lived out there for some years, I fancy, which accounts for the governor's choice."

"And how old is the lad?"

"Sixteen. Seventeen in October, I believe."

"H'm. Rather young to be entrusted with the care of so precious a possession as the Amber Ship," put in Cleek thoughtfully. "And yet, with Chinese boys you never know. They have the wisdom of the ages at fourteen. But sixteen—and the Amber Ship! We've a busy time ahead, Mr. Narkom, I can promise you!"

But how busy that time was to be even Cleek—used as he was to these adventurous exploits that were to him the very breath of life itself—even he never for one moment conceived.

## CHAPTER II

### A CHINESE GENTLEMAN

**I**T WAS a mere matter of twenty minutes later when a knock upon the door of Mr. Narkom's office at Scotland Yard elicited a sharp, "Come in." The door opened slowly, and the superintendent glanced up with a suspicion of sharpness. Then he sprang to his feet at the sight of a Chinese countenance, inscrutable as a mask, and topped with one of the round hats worn by men of this nationality, peeping at him with something of furtiveness.

"What the dickens——! Who admitted you, I'd like to know? And—come in!" he ejaculated, whisking over to the door and throwing it wide open. "What is your business, please? And why, may I ask in all politeness, didn't you acquaint the constable in charge of the gates with it? I can't think how you got through unaccompanied; slackness again, I suppose! Sit down, sit down."

The Chinese gentleman, with a courtly bow, entered the room, hands muffled in sleeves, and sat down opposite a puzzled superintendent who watched him with frowning brows.

“If you would be as brief as you can——”

“I will be brief, exceedingly so,” responded the Chinese gentleman in perfect English, and with a little laugh which rang familiar to the superintendent’s ears.

“Gad! What the——! Not Cleek, surely?”

“Yes. Cleek, surely. Took you in well, didn’t I? And your eyes have been peeled enough to my disguises, haven’t they, old friend? Well, then, the case is proved. I can face the members of the young prince’s suite without further anxiety. I admit I think the make-up quite good. But the Chinese are penetrating. Lately I’ve been making a study of them out Limehouse way. I’ve used this disguise successfully many times. But education lends sharpness of vision. It wouldn’t do for me to fail this time, now, would it? Honestly, old fellow, you think I’ll pass?”

Mr. Narkom gave out a gasp of astonishment. “Pass? Cinnamon! Cleek, Hammond was in for the very dickens of a row for letting you through without an escort! I’ll swear you took me clean in. A perfect Chink! How you do it I don’t know. And what’s your plan?”

“To ingratiate myself with the prince’s suite, and get myself in some way connected with them, if possible. And, by the way, old friend, I’ll make myself responsible for the boy’s safety from now on. You might acquaint the chief with that knowl-



edge, will you? It may set his mind at ease, I flatter myself. Now I'm off. And wish me the best of luck."

Then he rose, muffled his arms once more in the wide sleeves, and, bowing low, shuffled across the floor and out of the door.

But Mr. Narkom ran after him. "Here, I say!" he called in a breathless voice. "Not so fast, my man. I'm coming with you! This other dashed business can wait, but I'd give my breakfast to have a glimpse of you making up to the other Chinks! I'll fetch the car, and then—— Now, who in the name of fortune is *this?*"

"This" was a darting, running figure which doubled round a turn in the stairway and arrived in Mr. Narkom's room in a breathless condition and with an anxious face.

"Mr. Narkom, sir!" gasped out Dollops excitedly—for it was he. "Seen the Gov'nor, sir? I expected of 'im back these larst ten minutes or so, and never a sight nor a sign of 'im 'ave I seen! And I'm that worried, wot with all them Maurevanian and Apache troubles 'e's 'ad to face, I'm keepin' a sharp look-out on 'im, I am! And now 'e's gorn, *gorn!*"

"Not far," put in Cleek softly, turning upon the lad, who gasped at him in wonderment. "Just as far as the make-up room here at the Yard, my boy, and no farther. But you'd better come along with

us now. We're off to Waterloo to meet a Chinese princeling, and I may be requiring your services."

"Guv'nor, Mr. Cleek! Well, if you ain't the very dickens of a gen'leman! An' me scared clean orf me bit er lunch, too! 'Course I'll come. Fetch Lennard for you, sir, shall I?" turning to Mr. Narkom.

"Well, you might give him his orders to be round with the car in three minutes," responded the superintendent. "But you won't find Lennard. He's off duty for a couple of days. Hampden is taking his place. Just wait a minute, Cleek, while I fetch my hat, and I'll join you."

Five minutes later they were all three packed in the closed car—Cleek and Mr. Narkom inside, and Dollops up beside Hampden, and Waterloo station was a matter of only a brief time more, during which period Cleek kept his eyes upon the window, noting, as they neared the station, the number of Chinese faces that mingled with the English ones in the crowds approaching it. As the car came to a standstill outside, Cleek turned to his companion.

"That's the twentieth Chinese I've counted in this ride, and all heading toward Waterloo," he said quietly. "Our task is increasing in magnitude. The Amber Ship is the 'draw.' Well, I'll make one more. I'll slip out behind you, and when the train arrives it'll be up to you to present your credentials and take our young charge in tow."

"Right."



Mr. Narkom opened the door of the limousine and stepped out. The Chinese gentleman followed, bowing lowly to his English confrère, and the two made their way through the crowds and on to the platform.

The train came in almost immediately. There were the usual bustle of noise and commotion, the usual calling for porters, banging of doors, clatter of luggage. Then the door of a first-class carriage opened, emitting three Chinese gentlemen on to the platform, who lined up either side of it, and as Mr. Narkom approached (Cleck dropping back into the crowd unobtrusively), the young princeling stepped out.

He was a slim lad, but with a something in his bearing which bore mute witness to the line of distinguished ancestors who had given him birth. He did not wear the European costume, which was singular, in that most Chinese gentlemen, unless upon state occasions, don it when travelling in a European country. His coat, however, was of dark-blue satin, heavily embroidered in black with a touch of silver. His hat, the round pill-box shape, set straight over arched brows, but bearing a red button a-top instead of the customary black one, and round his neck one glimpsed what might be a steel chain of exquisite workmanship and strength. At the end of it something had been tucked into the fastenings of his coat.

The three members of his suite bowed low. Mr.

Narkom approached one of them. Cleek could see them in quiet conversation, then there was an exchange of papers, and Mr. Narkom was waved toward the still figure of the young princeling. He saw the superintendent, bowing in his awkward fashion, extend his hand.

Another brief conclave ensued. Cleek noted that the lad looked pale, even for one of his race, and his eyes travelled over the platform with something of boyish anxiety. Then the entourage moved forward, the superintendent and the boy side by side, and one of the members of the suite close upon his heels. The others had vanished, presumably to attend to such minor matters as luggage and porters. But as they passed down the platform toward the gates, several other Chinese, among whom Cleek had stationed himself, pressed forward in the crowd outside. At sight of the steel chain about the lad's neck they dropped back as he passed through the barrier, and made deep and reverential obeisance.

That was Cleek's cue to do the vanishing trick once more. He caught the sound of Mr. Narkom's voice politely suggesting black coffee in the waiting room before proceeding with the journey (all of which had been arranged by Cleek in the drive to the station) and slipped away to the limousine, there to change quickly. While Hampden drove round a back street at an easy pace, he donned his tweed suit once more, and then was back to the station, out

of the car, and into the waiting room as speedily and expeditiously as possible.

But he did not reach that same waiting room quite as rapidly as he had expected. For, passing through the crowded outer platform, Cleek's quick eyes caught sight of the Chinese servant, who had remained behind his young master, talking to an old stoop-shouldered gentleman at the left-hand side of the waiting-room door, and out of sight of the occupants within. The conversation was obviously an earnest one, and the impassive Chinese nodded several times, and bowed even more.

"Oho!" thought Cleek, making a mental register of the old man's appearance for future reference. "What does all this mean, I'd like to know? And why do they keep so carefully out of sight of the young princeling and my old friend? I'd give a dollar to know the gist of *their* conversation."

But if that same conversation were to go down to posterity, Cleek's ears were not those destined to receive it. For even as he moved quietly forward, the Chinese laid a quick hand upon the old gentleman's arm, bowed his farewell, and slipped back to the waiting room and his charge once more.

"Not going to let that old blighter give us the slip!" thought Cleek as he eyed the little groups of travelers standing about for a sight of his henchman. "Ah! there's Dollops!" He gave a low whistle, and the youth turned in his tracks, looking quickly about



him, and, seeing his master, came instantly in his direction.

“Keep that old johnny in sight, don’t lose touch with him, and report to me to-night!” ordered his master sharply. Then, as Dollops made off in his quarry’s direction, Cleek turned toward the waiting room, where he was to take over the charge of the young princeling and permit Mr. Narkom to return to his duties at Scotland Yard.

## CHAPTER III

### THE BEGINNING OF THE DRAMA

CLEEK found them seated at a table in the far corner of the room, and being served by a waitress whose sharp eyes were all agog with the peculiarity of at least one of her charges. Cleek noted this fact with a slight frown. The boy would be naturally uncomfortable under her pert gaze; but, on sight of the young prince, he decided that the boy was *not*.

For the princeling looked decidedly drowsy, in spite of the cup of black coffee, extra strong, ordered by the superintendent a short while back. His attendant, obviously a Chinese body-servant, watched him with inscrutable and somewhat anxious eyes.

“H’m!” thought Cleek, mentally taking stock of the little group as he approached the table. “Looks as though the boy had been drugged. Probably been smoking opium, or something of the sort. Can hardly keep his eyes open, poor little beggar! Well, I’ll see that no fingers are laid upon him outside my knowledge, anyway.”

With that he approached Mr. Narkom, bowed all

round and, seating himself, ordered a pot of tea, Mr. Narkom presenting him to the drowsy boy.

“This gentleman is to have charge of you during your journey to Upminster, Your Highness,” he said with some show of pomposity, rather pleased with himself at being in such obviously illustrious company.

The boy nodded. “Thank you. I see.”

Then he lapsed once more into silence, narrow eyes half-shut, whole body slackened and loose in the straight chair he sat in. Cleek turned to the servant.

“Been smoking ‘a pipe’, I take it?” he said, with a significant nod in the lad’s direction. The man turned his head this way and that, lifting his impassive brows as though he were not quite sure of what this “illustrious master” was saying.

“Me no speakee the Eengleesh,” he said at last in pidgin English. “Young master he sleepy, yes? Velly drowsy allee journee. Glad get to ancient master’s house. Velly tired.”

“H’m! Yes, he seems so,” responded Cleek with a quick look at the man who, although he did not speak English, yet understood it enough to follow his meaning and reply. “Well, when we’re all finished we’d best be off. This tea isn’t worth waiting for, anyhow. One cup’s enough. How about you, Mr. Narkom?”

“My dear Cl—— my dear chap, I’m ready when you are,” responded the superintendent with alacrity,



getting to his feet and reaching for his coat and hat, which hung on a peg not far behind him. "I've work to do at the Yard, and none too much time to do it in, either. Just see you all into the car, and then I'll make tracks. That suit you?"

"Admirably." Cleek rose, too, took up his hat and stick, and then set them down again as he leant toward the half-sleeping boy. His eyes met Mr. Narkom's across the narrow table, with an unmistakable message. "By the way," said he a trifle off-handedly, "if any letters come to your home address for me, you might send them on to my digs, will you? And don't make the same mistake over the initial as you did before, that's a good fellow!"

"Eh—initial?" Amazement sounded in Mr. Narkom's voice. A look from Cleek silenced him.

"Yes. Last time I got a bundle in an envelope which your wife addressed as 'C. V. Carstairs,' instead of 'C. H. Carstairs.' I'm rather touchy, you know. Cecil Herbert Carstairs, that's my name. Try to remember it, there's a good chap."

Mr. Narkom nodded, and winked.

"All right, I'll try. Cecil Herbert Carstairs. *Herbert* Carstairs. Fancy her making that mistake! I'll send 'em on if any come. But since your last visit I entered the name with the post office at once. Well, we'd better be trotting. Now, Your Highness, if you'll just make an effort—I know you're tired and all that, but it's only as far as the taxi, and you can

sleep there as long as you like. Come along, I beg of you."

The young prince, thus admonished, lifted lackadaisical eyes to the superintendent's jolly red face, and then, seeing him standing there in overcoat and hat, struggled to his feet. His servant was beside him at once, proffering the long black overcoat of European design which Cleek had noted hung over his arm. A look of real devotion was in the man's face. His eyes met Cleek's with an anxious expression.

"Velly cold in thisee countly. Velly cold in taxis. Best keepee warm, Mister."

"Quite right. And I don't know your name," answered Cleek, with a smile for the man's thoughtfulness.

"Ah Sing."

"Well, Ah Sing, we'll get your young master down to his house as quickly as possible, where a good night's rest will soon put him right. He's dazed with travelling, that's what it is. Here, you take one arm, and I'll take the other. We don't want him dropping in his tracks from fatigue. Got him? That's right."

Then away they went out of the waiting room to where in the yard outside the big blue limousine awaited them, and with a hasty handshake for Mr. Narkom, Cleek bundled his charge inside, tucked his feet up on the wide seat, and then, pulling out the

smaller seats, motioned Ah Sing to one of them and himself took the other.

The Chinaman would doubtless have preferred to sit beside his young master, but Cleek was having none of that. Until the boy arrived at the house and was handed over into the hands of the man awaiting him, he, Cleek, was the only human being who should have direct and prolonged contact with the prince's person. And a journey of three hours seated beside him, with the Amber Ship strung about his slender neck, might work more than marvels—in Chinese hands.

His fingers felt for his hip pocket and reassured themselves of its contents. For a man of his calling a revolver was an everyday necessity. And in a case of this kind—one never knew.

As the car moved slowly out of the crowded station yard Cleek's thoughts harked back to those other days when he, too, might have been one of those in wait for an opportunity of seizing the precious jewel, knowing there was a safe sale for it to many of the priestcraft of that particular order to which it belonged, who would be highly incensed at its journey to England on the person of a young stripling of sixteen summers. Yes, there would be a long purse as a reward, but a devil of a lot of danger in its acquisition.

He sighed once or twice as a man who sees action and—born of a race of dare-devil soldiers—desires



it with every fibre of his being. Then he smiled to himself in the half-dusk of the moving car.

“Heigh-ho!” said he under his breath, “but there’ll be danger enough in the guarding of it, without doubt, to keep the heart young and the spirit alive! Hampden’s making good time. We should be there inside the limit. How that boy sleeps!”

And sleep he certainly did; he might have been dead for all the movement he made. In the semi-dark the scarcely perceptible lift and fall of the boyish breast under the thick jacket was practically indiscernible. Cleek leaned forward and scrutinized the pallid features. Then he turned to Ah Sing.

“Delicate, eh?” he said, with a nod toward his sleeping master. “Often ill? Sick, unwell?”

“Velly often sick, him little master,” returned Ah Sing, with a shake of the head. “Velly thlin. Him not eatee enough. Velly stlong in the head, though. Wanted come to England. Would come. Noble father no good. Illustrious mother no good. Him come. Here he is.”

The telegraphic qualities of Ah Sing’s conversation brought an involuntary smile to Cleek’s lips. Ah Sing had the Chinaman’s quick discernment and could express himself, even in such meagre language at his command, extraordinarily lucidly. He rather liked Ah Sing. Somewhere, probably, about thirty, as far as he could make out, but with the wisdom of a century shining in his narrow Oriental eyes. A

shrewd, kindly fellow, devoted to his young master. That was how Cleek categorized him as the car ate up the miles to Upminster, whirling them through crowded town and peaceful countryside with equal speed and efficiency.

Indeed, it made such good time that the three hours were barely up when they swung into a narrow country lane, tree-avenued and shady, and with no sign of habitation or living thing to be discerned.

The early twilight was gathering, shrouding the world in its veil of gray, and the interior of the motor was almost dark, so much so, in fact, that Cleek could barely discern his charge's white, immobile face in the shadows. Long ago he had ceased conversation with the Chinaman who sat beside him. One cannot keep up a one-sided talk with a deaf-mute, and so the man began to appear as time went on, so that Cleek had passed most of the moments glancing now and again at the sleeping figure of the young prince, and more often out of the window at the swiftly moving landscape that sped by. Who knew whether the car might be stopped at some given point? Who knew, in fact, anything of what the immediate future would hold?

Of a sudden, through the tree-shrouded gathering dusk, he caught a glimpse of a house half-hidden in the shadows and appearing inexpressibly drear at first sight. He felt the car swerve as Hampden



sent it rocketing through iron gates and up a curving driveway.

Cleek got up and put his head out of the window. There wasn't a light in the place anywhere! From end to end the old gray house was one with the shadows that claimed it. Not a glimmer showed through the barred windows; not a sound of life stirred.

Cleek glanced anxiously at the sleeping boy. Either he had arrived earlier than was expected, or plans had altered themselves to circumstance. But what circumstance?

He touched Ah Sing upon the arm as the car came to a standstill, and Hampden sprang out and threw open the door.

"Better get out and investigate," he told the Chinaman briefly. "I'm on orders and can't leave the prince. But something's undoubtedly wrong. Hardly what one would call a good old English welcome, eh, Hampden?"

"No, sir. Not as we knows one, sir."

The big broad-shouldered chauffeur glanced back over his shoulder and pulled a wry face. Ah Sing was out of the motor in a moment. Cleek saw his anxious face as his eyes were raised to the darkened building, and came to the conclusion that this man, at any rate, was to be trusted in his devotion to his charge. The young prince slept on. Inky darkness or eternity were all the same to him in the

land of distorted visions in which he was wandering. Cleek, sitting beside him, itched to be up and doing. The very darkness mystified and enticed him to look into things. But the young princeling was his first duty. With a sigh, Cleek relinquished himself to the task of watching, while Hampden began tinkering with the engine of the car and Ah Sing, coming back suddenly upon silent feet, poked his head into the opened window and raised frightened eyes to Cleek's face.

"Me no likee look of thlings!" he said in his telegraphic way. "Flont door no open. Better tly window, savee?"

"Certainly. If you can manage to unlock one of 'em," responded Cleek with a nod. "Hampden, give this chap a hand to climb in through that lower window there. It's high enough off the ground, at all events, and you can get him on to your shoulders. If I didn't have to sit here like an old woman——"

The two made off, and Cleek could barely discern their shapes in the gathering gloom. Straining his eyes, he saw Ah Sing mount the chauffeur's huge shoulders, heard a slight click, and then saw Hampden straighten himself as the weight vanished. He knew Ah Sing was inside the lonely house, doing his duty for the young prince he loved.

He sat back against the cushions of the car with a sigh, and turned his gaze to the sleeping boy. Drugged, undoubtedly. But why? Perhaps to give

previous access to the house before their arrival, or to waylay their car upon the road. But that hadn't been done. And there had been only one main road from London to this remote little village, and no other car had passed them on the way. How was Ah Sing getting along, he wondered? From the slight tapping sound, he knew that Hampden was back again, tinkering with his engine.

Cleek stretched himself in the narrow confines of the car, and yawned. This sitting still was getting upon his nerves, and so were the stillness, and the dark, and the sleeping princeling with his immobile Chinese features. There was something uncanny in the whole situation. And—*what was that?*

To Cleek's trained ears, sharpened to every noise, however distant, came the unmistakable sound of a muffled shot.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE MAN WITH THE NAVVY'S HANDS

**H**E WAS on his feet in an instant, every faculty alert, his revolver whisked out and cocked in readiness in one hand. He turned the handle of the door and stepped out cautiously. Hampden was still tinkering at the car. Cleek beckoned him with a quick gesture.

“Didn’t you hear that?” he rapped out. “Where are your ears, man? I’ll swear that was a shot!”

The chauffeur gave a little respectful laugh.

“Not if I knows one, sir,” he replied with a shake of the head. “Only that there sparkplug. Went orf all of a sudden like—never ’eard nothink else. I fancy that’s what it was, sir. But I see as you’re all ready with the back-chat.”

He glanced down at the little revolver held in Cleek’s right hand. That gentleman laughed, and replaced it.

“Well,” said he, glancing back into the shadows of the car at the sleeping boy, to make sure all was well with him, “I certainly thought differently on the matter! However, no doubt you’re right. I hope so. Hello! There’s a light at last. Ah Sing



has managed something, at any rate, and there's the front door open. Just nip up and see if everything's O. K.!"

But there was no necessity for this last action, for even as the big door rattled open, a stooping Chinese figure came out of the half-shadows, and shambled silently toward the car, bowing to Cleek.

"Me sollee some mistakee. Ancient mastler not home from station yet. Been meet young Excellency. Me savee light. Me sleep. No hear motor till Chinee serving-man touchee on shoulder. Me velly solly."

Cleek shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "I should think so, indeed!" he said sharply. "Keeping the prince waiting like that. And where the devil is your master, anyway? I——Hello, here's another car, Hampden. Hear her turn? She's coming up this driveway now. Taxi, too. No doubt this is your worthy, if belated, master, my Chinese friend. Well, I'll just carry the young gentleman in and put him down somewhere, and you can tell your master to hurry, please."

So saying, he reached in, caught the boy's slim figure in his arms, and walked with him through the open doorway into the lit hall, from the walls of which flashed out a wondrous collection of Chinese implements of war, the brilliant electric light picking out each blade like a point of fire.

The servant led the way, opened a door into a sort

of shabby Oriental study, and hastily withdrew. Cleek dropped his charge carefully on a long, low divan filled with soiled cushions in every variety of colour and design. The boy stirred in his sleep for a moment, and then lapsed back into unconsciousness.

“It’ll take twenty-four hours before that little chap knows where he is, I’ll swear,” mentally registered Cleek, standing before the empty grate, with his hands behind him and his fingers flapping his coat-tails. “Hum. Very Oriental in his tastes is this gentleman, I take it. No doubt the result of living so long in China. Here he comes now. I wonder what the dickens kept him so late, and why he wasn’t at the station to meet the train? Well, we shall soon know.”

He did. For just at that instant the door opened once more, and a stooping old man, with an oddly lined countenance, entered the room and came toward him with outstretched hand. Cleek remarked him at once. It was the same old gentleman whom he had seen in London talking with the Chinese servant outside the waiting-room window. Well, no doubt he was arranging something personally for the boy, else why should he turn up again like this? But he must have followed directly upon their own departure. And if so, why not have joined their party? An odd old man, certainly.

“Pleased to meet you, I’m sure,” said the old

gentleman, with a courtly bow as Cleek took his outstretched hand. "I must tender my most humble apologies for being so late. The fact of the matter is that I reached the station just as the train came in, and was detained there by one of the members of the staff of the legation here in England. You wish my credentials, of course. Here they are.

"My friend, the governor, this young man's illustrious father, was at school with me in my younger days, here in England. This is a letter from him, written to show proper credentials that I am Octavius Spender. I beg of you to read it. I always promised him, if ever his son came over to England, to take charge of the boy and be personally responsible for his safety. The governor rendered me a great service while I was in China—a matter of governmental affairs with which I will not bore you—but it has been a great pleasure to feel I can in some way repay him in the safe care and keeping of his only son."

After this lengthy speech, spoken in a low, educated voice and with the courtly manners of one of the old school, Mr. Octavius Spender crossed over to the couch and laid a shaky hand upon the sleeping boy's head.

Cleek read the letter through, saw the signature of the young prince's father and compared it with that which he had taken from Scotland Yard, as instructed by Mr. Narkom, and then turned toward



his host. Obviously everything was as it should be, after all. The explanation was perfectly plausible, yet there was a creepy sort of feeling in the back of his mind that he had not done with this affair yet.

“Well, Mr. Spender,” said he, crossing over to the old gentleman’s side, “your responsibility is great. The very possession of the sacred stone which that boy carries on his person is more than any man ought to stand under. You know of its arrival, of course?”

Mr. Spender bowed.

“Yes. In the days of my youth I saw the Amber Ship at my friend’s palace. The mere fact that he has entrusted both his boy and his most precious jewel in my care speaks of a trust which honours me, sir. I have an excellent Chinese servant, a boy whom I can thoroughly trust, and who came with me from China many, many years ago. He, together with the prince’s own body-servant, will guard him night and day. That is part of my arrangement with his father. You need have no fear for his safety, sir. I will preserve it, even with my own body.”

“Then I am satisfied to leave the boy in such safe and honourable keeping,” replied Cleek quietly, moving toward the door with a bow. Then he turned suddenly and looked back.

“I take it that the prince’s body-servant, who entered this house a trifle unconventionally by means of the window a short while back, is somewhere here in the house? I should like to see him if I may.”



“Certainly.”

Mr. Spender struck a bell at the side of the mantelshelf. Almost instantly the Chinese servant who had opened the door appeared.

“Tell the prince’s servant to come here,” he gave orders.

The boy bowed and silently withdrew. A moment or two later he reappeared, his yellow face grinning pleasantly round the corner of the door.

“Ah Sing unplacking, little Excellency’s luggage clome yesterlday. Pleparing bed for the night. Wish be excluded, but all leady for little master when big master leady to cally him upstairs,” he said in his impassive voice.

“Oh, very well, then, don’t bother,” returned Cleek with a nod. “If Ah Sing has settled down and got everything ready, please don’t disturb him. At any rate, my responsibility is finished for the present. I won’t detain you any longer, Mr. Spender, as I know you must be anxious to get your charge to bed. If, however, you should need any assistance, communicate at once with the local police. Don’t hesitate, and—don’t bother to see me out. I can find my way alone, if this excellent boy of yours can conduct me. Thanks very much.”

He shook hands with the old professor, leant over and passed his fingers across the sleeping boy’s forehead, and let them stray to his pulse, just to make sure for his own gratification that everything was as

it should be, and finding it fairly normal, followed the boy out of the room and into the passage.

The Chinaman preceded him down the hallway and reached the front door before him, but not so quickly but that Cleek had caught a glimpse for the first time of the man's hands as they emerged hastily from the hanging blue cloth sleeves to unfasten the latch. Caught a glimpse of them, and then suddenly shut his mouth hard.

For instead of the slender almond-shaped fingernails with long talon-like ends, which are the pride of every Chinaman, the hands that fumbled quickly with the latch were square and red and coarsened, with blunted finger-ends and broken black nails. And the thumb and first finger of the right hand were stained brown with cigarette smoking!

Those were white hands! Hands that had done rough work, and hit hard blows, undoubtedly! Hands of a hardened criminal type! And a "Chinese boy," eh? Well, that point would want looking into, at any rate. Only he couldn't possibly do it now. He'd have to leave for the night, and return on some pretext or other later on.

But—what the devil was a white man doing here in this guise?

## CHAPTER V

### A SECOND INTRUSION

CLEEK got into the waiting car again and gave Hampden orders to drive down through the village and then on toward the station. It would give him a little time to think over the present situation, and decide whether it was simply a coincidence that the boy who Mr. Spender had assured him was a trusted Chinaman—and who was undoubtedly a white man in disguise—was a point to worry over in this matter or not. The events of the whole evening left him hesitant as to what to do—whether to put up for the night at some local inn, and investigate further, or simply drive back to Scotland Yard, tell Mr. Narkom that he had delivered his charge safely into the right hands, recount his adventures, and leave matters to stand as they were.

But should they be allowed to stand so? Was there something here that wanted looking into? And that shot he had heard. Hampden might have accounted for it otherwise, but Cleek, every minute that he spent in thinking over it, became more and more certain that there had been a shot fired some-



where within the confines of that dark and desolate house.

Hampden was one of those cheerful, thick-headed cockneys who saw no farther than their own noses, and for such reason was found useful, under certain circumstances, for the Yard's business. Lennard was better trained for a job like this. He had been a fool to be convinced so easily by the chauffeur's simple explanation. He ought to have investigated right away.

As the car flew onward through the dark lanes, and swerved a little to the right to where a cluster of lights marked the tiny village of Upminster, Cleek's mind was suddenly made up. This thing did want investigation, and the local inspector ought to be able to elucidate matters a trifle for him. He told Hampden to drive to the police-station.

"Yessir," said Hampden cheerily, and made for a block of lights which would probably be that necessary building.

It was. As the car drew up outside the church-like doorway, Cleek hopped out, ran up the stone steps, and encountered a sleepy constable sitting on a high-legged stool and perusing a paper.

"I want to see the inspector," he told the man briefly, "as quickly as possible. I've got to return to London to-night. Business with Scotland Yard. Make tracks, Constable, please."

"Certainly, sir."



The man was on his feet in an instant. "Inspector's just leavin' fer home. P. C. Brent will be in charge for to-night. I'll try and catch him, though, sir. This way."

He led the way through the ugly little building to a door marked "Private," and tapped on it.

The inspector, a burly, thick-set man with a low forehead and a sleepy countenance, turned from struggling into his overcoat and demanded their business.

"Gentleman from Scotland Yard to see you, sir."

*Scotland Yard!* The words had a magic effect down here in this sleepy little village. The inspector swung round, one arm in his overcoat, and faced Cleek with wonderment and a little show of distaste. When a man's supper was in the offing and business was slack, it wasn't the pleasantest thing to have to postpone that meal until some time later. Things didn't happen in Upminster to upset any one's plans for a pleasant evening, and he was playing cards with one of his cronies later that night. Scotland Yard meant business, and the inspector was none too fond of the word.

"I'd like a word with you, Inspector," said Cleek, taking a chair as the constable withdrew, and settling himself down at the little office table with its orderly piles of papers. "My name is—er—Carstairs, and I'm down here on business. Been delivering a young Chinese prince over into the hands

of a Mr. Octavius Spender, an old Oxford professor who is to have charge of the boy for a year, and put him through his paces before he qualifies for the university. Know anything about this man, Spender, that you can tell me?"

Reluctantly the inspector removed one arm from his coat, hung it up on the peg, and sat down. It certainly was business.

"Why, yes," said he offhandedly. "I know the old gentleman well. A nicer old chap never lived. I've heard tell of this young prince's coming, Mr. Carstairs, but didn't give the matter much thought. Mr. Spender has had one or two little chaps to coach now and again, this past year or so, though he don't do much that way usually. Too old, I fancy, and too keen on his own hobbies."

"And what are those?"

"Oh, books, and his garden—like every other gentleman of his kind. You know the type. But always got a civil word for everyone when he meets 'em. Find everything all right up at the House on the Hill, sir, I hope?"

Cleek shook his head decidedly.

"If I had, Inspector," he replied, "I should certainly not come visiting you at this hour of the night. But I'm afraid I must ask you to come back to the House on the Hill with me—*now*—and make a few inquiries. The old gentleman, you say, knows you, and wouldn't take it ill, in consequence. But

I don't think he quite realizes the enormous responsibility he has taken on in the person of this young Chinese princeling. There were one or two things there that rather disquieted me this evening. For instance, upon arrival at the house with my charge, I found not a light in the place. Now that's a bit odd, isn't it?"

Inspector Cogwell shook his burly head.

"Not if you knows Mr. Spender as I do," he replied in his deep voice. "He's fair daft on economy, and never a light is allowed to burn in that there house unless he happens to be requiring of it, or his Chinese boy is cookin' the meals. An eccentric, that's what Mr. Spender is, a regular hermit, likin' his own company better'n any one else's."

"In which, under some circumstances, I entirely agree with him," said Cleek *sotto voce*. "But who does the work of the place, then?"

"Oh, an old village woman—a Mrs. Buggings. Been doin' fer him this past five years. Comes in a couple of days a week and puts things straight, and Ming Ho, his boy, sees to the rest. Funny little card that, but bright as a button. Sets the village larfin' often, he does, with his odd ways. But nothink wrong with 'im, I can promise you. What makes you think that somethink's up, Mr.—er—Carstairs? Nothink never is up in this little village, I can tell you. Everythink's as quiet and proper as can be, and orlways has been, to my knowledge."



“So it seems,” replied Cleek quietly. “But I fancy something is up, all the same, and I want to discover what that something is. I could have sworn I heard a shot there to-night, while I was waiting in the car for some answer to my summons. And if it wasn’t a shot—well, I’ll eat my hat.”

“A shot?” The inspector permitted himself to grin in the presence of his superior officer. “Not likely that. You was mistaken, I’m sure. Old Mr. Spender hasn’t a firearm in the place! Terrified of ’em, and always was. Won’t let no game-keepers come within miles of his grounds, and if any one so much as pots at a rabbit within miles of ’im, he nearly goes daft with terror. Weren’t no shot, I can promise you, sir. Mr. Spender’s that mild an old gent. Must have fancied that, I think, Mr. Carstairs. Found anything odd when you delivered your charge up?”

“No—nothing. All the same, I’m going to fetch you out into my car this minute, and make you look into things a bit for me,” replied Cleek, getting to his feet and picking up his hat. “I’m not satisfied, and I thought you were the best man to come to in the circumstances.”

“Well, if I must, I must.” The inspector rose also, and once more picked up his overcoat. “Orders is orders, as I thoroughly appreciate, but I’m thinking you’re straying after a sitting hen, sir, and ’ull find her comfortably at home. The sooner over the



better, and I'm as hungry as a hunter fer a bite of supper. We'll be getting along, if you're ready."

As Cleek had been ready for the last five minutes—ever since, in fact, he had entered the office—this last remark was rather an unnecessary one, just as, thought Cleek, the inspector himself was. An unnecessary, slow-thinking, shiftless bit of humanity for the post he held. If this man had been any sort of a policeman he would have known all there was to know of the advent of a Chinese prince with a priceless jewel upon his person, and not waited to learn it from the first casual stranger who dropped into his office. That was a part of his job.

"Mr. Narkom must hear about this and look into matters," thought Cleek, and made a note of it upon his cuff in the semi-darkness of the car, as Hampden sped them back again to the House on the Hill, and the inspector, little deeming the importance of this unwanted visitor of his, lounged back in the cushions, looking the surly, disinterested person that he undoubtedly was.

"This is it, I fancy," said Cleek, as the car swung suddenly and entered the big gates once more to speed up the curving driveway. "In darkness again, I see."

"As it always is at this hour of the night," put in the inspector tartly. "Mr. Spender is a real early-to-bedder. Don't waste much electricity, and al-

ways gets his beauty sleep—as 'ud be good for other people. Better get out, hadn't we, and make our inquiries? They won't be very pleased to see us, I fancy."

"We'll get out when the car is at a standstill, and not before—unless you want to break your head, my man!" retorted Cleek with a touch of asperity. "Your supper will have to go begging when the Yard's business needs conducting. That's a thing you ought to have learnt at the beginning of your career. Let's hope it isn't too late to learn now. Now, as you're in such a deuce of a hurry, you may get out of my car as soon as you like."

The inspector shot a quick glance sideways at the imperious tone of his visitor, and instinctively the personality of the man put him into his place.

"No offence meant, I hope you'll understand," he said, a trifle sheepishly.

Then he got out, followed by Cleek, made his way to the front door, and rang the bell. The echoes seemed to penetrate into every corner of the dark, desolate-looking house. The two men waited for a while in silence, until at last a light pricked out in the hallway, there was a rattle of chains, and a fumbling of fingers at the huge locks of the door. It swung open, and Mr. Spender, clad in dressing-gown and night-cap, put his head round the corner of it.

"What is it? What is it?" he said testily. "Dis-

turbing a gentleman in the midst of his slumbers! Very inconsiderate, I consider. Kindly state your business at once, and let me get back to my bed. Eh? Is it you, Inspector? What the deuce are you coming here at this hour for?"

"Just to know if everything is O. K. with you and your young charge, sir," put in the inspector feebly, and Cleek saw that the man's face was red under his tan as the light of the hall lamp fell upon it. "Gentleman here from London seemed anxious about you, and turned me out to come along and look you up. Everything all right, then, I take it?"

"Of course, of course! The young prince is asleep in bed this past hour or so. Everything is perfectly all right, and I wish the gentleman from London would take a little more interest in his own affairs and not trouble about other people's. Good-night."

Then the door slammed upon them; there was a rattle of bolts and bars, the light in the hallway disappeared, and in the darkness these two men looked at each other by the moon's pale light, each a little disgruntled at the foolishness of their quest.

Cleek led the way back to the car again. He spoke not one word.

"You see?" said the inspector testily and with ill-concealed triumph. "The whole affair was your imagination, sir, if you'll pardon my saying so. Nothing wrong whatsoever. Perhaps you'll give



me a lift back to my place on your way to the station?"

"I'd give you a lift somewhere else, and very speedily, too, if I had my way!" mentally remarked Cleek as the car started up again. But he said nothing, merely sat there—thinking.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE VANISHING TRICK

**C**AUTIOUSLY the car picked its way through the dark gates and swung out into the lane beyond. The inspector was whistling softly under his breath, well pleased with having got something on this gentleman from London with his interfering ways, and little anticipating the letter which was to reach him some time later and point out to him the error of his own. Cleek, eyes bent upon the landscape which flew past the open window, and drinking in the soft, sweet country scents of the night, leant forward in his seat, put his head round the corner of the window frame, and called to Hampden.

“Not so fast, please! You’ll take all the freshness out of this blessed summer atmosphere with your whiffs of burnt gasoline!” he sang out merrily, and as the car slowed down to a more leisurely pace, and the balm of the night air touched his brow and bared head with caressing fingers, he saw that they were in a country lane, with low hedges running either side of it, and wide spaces of what looked like pastureland stretching away into the night. Suddenly his

hand touched a little bell hidden in the window frame, and instantly the car came to a standstill in answer to this private signal.

Inspector Cogwell pitched to his feet.

“Hello! Station at last! I—— Stopping for something, eh?”

Cleek’s uplifted hand silenced him. Like a flash he was out of the car, across the lane, and through the low, broken hedge, with Cogwell puffing and blundering like a bull after him. The inspector saw him touch someone on the arm, and hurried forward as a woman’s frightened cry went up.

“Hello! I say—— Why! Miss Ellison!”

Cleek answered him. “Yes. Young lady here. Know who she is, then, Inspector? She oughtn’t to be out at this hour of the night alone, you know.” His torch shot out a circle of light. “Ah! A nurse, I see. May I ask what you are doing here?”

The girl—for she was but a girl, with frightened pale face and wide, terrified brown eyes—straightened herself under the touch of Cleek’s fingers, and spoke in a shaking, tremulous voice.

“The inspector will t-tell you who I am. And who are you? And why do you stop me here, and want to know my business? I’m a trained nurse, and I’m out on my duties, and—and——”

“Is the squire worse, then, Nurse?” put in the inspector at this juncture. “’Tisn’t often one catches a sight of you at this time o’ night. ’Tisn’t

fit for you to be out alone, you know. What on earth was you about?"

"Oh—oh—I came out for fresh air—for fresh medicine, I mean. Yes—no—the squire was taken bad again, and I had to run out. Oh, dear! I am so frightened I hardly know what I am saying. This—this gentleman terrified me so! I was walking along toward Doctor Hunter's surgery when I heard your car."

"And jumped behind this hedge, in case someone saw you, I suppose, and made off with you," threw in Cleek quietly. "Well, someone did see you, Miss Ellison. I was that someone. And I saw you dart into this hiding place and crouch down, though why a nurse should hide herself from view when out in pursuit of her duties beats me!"

"You don't know the squire, or you wouldn't say that!" she replied in a shaking voice, striking her hands together over her breast and breathing hard. "He's a terrible man, such a taskmaster! Inspector Cogwell will tell you! I so rarely can leave him. It was only this medicine of his——"

"But you oughtn't to leave him, ever, should you?" said the inspector a trifle reproachfully. "A gentleman who's touched like him in his mind oughtn't to be left at all. Why didn't you telephone, Nurse?"

"Because the line was out of order. I couldn't get a reply, so I was obliged to run out myself. The



squire was sleeping, and I set old Martha on duty. Please don't detain me, or I shall get into fearful trouble, I will, really!"

"Very well, then, hurry along and get back to your patient as quickly as you can; and many apologies for the fright I gave you," said Cleek, parting the broken hedge to let her pass through more easily. "And don't be too frightened of passers-by seeing you on your way to meet a—lover."

He bent his head as he spoke this word, and she started and flushed and laughed a little awkwardly up at him, in spite of her previous fear. Then she sped on to the highroad, and ran along it, a fleeting shadow amongst other shadows. Meanwhile, the inspector, looking more than ever mystified and disgruntled at the goings-on of this "mad London chap," made his way back to the car, and Cleek, in the darkness, stooped suddenly, picked up a little shining object, and tucked it—after a single glance—away in his pocket.

H'm! Drug-fiends, too, in this perfect village where nothing untoward ever happened. The inspector obviously had his eyes conveniently glued shut. For the little object that had shone up at Cleek as he helped the girl through the gap in the hedge, and which he carried at present in his pocket, was a hypodermic syringe.

He dropped the inspector at the station house, made a detour of the village street so that Mr. Cogwell



might imagine him speeding conveniently back to London, and then spoke softly to Hampden.

“We’re havin’ quite a busy evenin’, ain’t we, sir?” said the latter cheerily, as he sent the car heading away once more toward the House on the Hill. “I’ll soon know me way there blindfold, I’m thinkin’.”

“Well, this’ll be the last time, I hope, for to-night,” replied Cleek, “and then home again to London, and a stop on the way for a bite of that supper which the inspector was so anxious to participate in. You’ve served me well to-night, Hampden. I shan’t forget.”

“That’s all right, sir. Part of my business. A pleasure, too, if I may make so bold. Chaps don’t often have the chance to serve real gentlemen like yourself, sir—not in the Yard, meanin’ no disrespect to it, all the same.”

The car sped forward again, and went plunging through the darkness. Up through the long pitch-black lane, round to the right, and by the disused barn which Cleek had noticed on their first journey up; down the little hill, and up again past endless fields of pastureland with no sign of human habitation anywhere; then round into the long straight road which ended in those iron gates through which they had already passed twice that evening.

“Drive slowly here, Hampden, and stop just inside the gateway; I want to have a good look at the

place—all I can see of it by the moon's light, anyhow," ordered Cleek, and Hampden pulled the car to a standstill just inside the gateway. For five minutes Cleek sat absolutely silent, staring in front of him. Somewhere in the trees near by a nightingale trilled in an ecstasy of liquid melody. The soft rustle of the trees was like some whispered orchestral accompaniment of Nature's own, while over above the darkened house itself an ice-white moon floated in a cloudless indigo sky.

Then, like a knife-blade cutting through the peace of that still evening, a woman's agonized scream rent the silence in one awful, blood-curdling shriek. The nightingale's song broke in a terrified cascade of notes, and the little black body of the bird swept quickly across the sky. Cleek, stilled for a moment out of his material self, jumped up like a flash, was out of the car, and had hold of Hampden's arm in the fleeting of an eyelash, all the detective awake in him.

"Hear that, Hampden?" he cried excitedly. "Good God! There's murder taking place there! And there's a woman in it! Let's cut along and see for ourselves!" Then, throwing all caution to the winds, he whipped out his revolver, bade Hampden fetch his likewise, and the two of them went tearing up the drive.

But the driveway was longer than Cleek had realized, and entrance into the house not so easy.

He sent Hampden round one side while he himself tackled the other, trying every bolt of the window frames to find one which was unlocked. Hampden's tense whisper reached him at last somewhere close at hand.

"This one's open, sir. We'll make a start here."

And when Cleek reached him he found that a tiny window, which looked as though it might lead into an L off the main hall, was unlatched. Hampden's quick fingers threw it open, then with a spring Cleek was on the window ledge and had crawled through the narrow aperture with the chauffeur close upon his heels.

They dropped silently down into the hall—for such it indeed proved to be—and sped along the black passage, revolvers cocked in right hands, left hands groping by wall and bannister-rail for guidance. Cleek found himself at last by the front door. He lighted his flashlight but there was nothing and nobody in sight. The house was empty of sound, silent as a grave—black, except where the ray of light shone now, as the proverbial pocket.

Cleek whisked open the door of the study

"Keep guard, Hampden, and stand ready for trouble," he rapped out briskly, and then entered the room, his torch playing in front of him.

But it was empty. Not from there, then, did the scream emanate. Back he ran down the passage again, flashing his torch wherever he went, switching



on lights, opening doors, and entering rooms; and finding—nothing!

Upstairs, downstairs, into attic and cellar, basement and drawing room, these two men went, hunting for some sign of the gruesome tracks of murder. They ransacked the house from top to bottom, and found not a trace of any one! Gone was the old professor, gone Ah Sing, gone the boy with the navy's hands; gone the young prince and his little violet leather jewel case, and gone with him, naturally, the Amber Ship!

## CHAPTER VII

### FAILURE

THINGS were at an *impasse*, indeed. Both men had heard that awful scream, both men recognized where it emanated from, but the House on the Hill was as empty of human habitation as it had been full of it a mere matter of an hour before! What had happened in the meantime? What strange agency had swept over the house and stolen away all its occupants? And if murder had been done, as that woman's scream led one to suppose, where had the murderer hidden himself, and how disposed of his victim?

It certainly was a facer, from every point you looked at it.

"There's nothing to be found here, anyway, sir," remarked Hampden at last, as he and Cleek reached the front door and, opening it, looked out upon the still night. "Whatever happened, all trace of it is gone—somewhere! Talk about supernatural agencies! Fair makes your flesh creep, don't it?"

"It certainly does." Cleek's voice was mystified. "We'd better do a search of the grounds while we're about it, though, Hampden. You take the right-

hand side, and I'll take the left. If either finds anything, whistle three times, and the other will come immediately to his aid. Get that?"

"Yessir."

Hampden plunged off into the shadows, and Cleek followed the direction he had mapped out for himself. But hunting for possible murderers at eleven o'clock at night is not as easy as it probably sounds. Shadows greeted him on every side whose very denseness made his task almost impossible. True, he had his electric torch, but this made little headway in the tangle of shrubs which girt the house on either side. He tumbled into the rosebed which lay under the study window, and got scratched for his pains.

But nothing whatever was forthcoming. After an hour with no whistle from either side, the two men returned to the front of the house, puzzled beyond words at the problem they had encountered.

"Nothing for it but to return to London, tackle the superintendent himself, and look into things with a couple of the Yard's own men!" said Cleek, with a sigh of fatigue, as he led the way to the motor. "This thing's fairly done me, Hampden. How they made their getaway in so short a space of time I can't imagine, unless, of course, the house is full of hidden panels, as many of these old houses are. A newcomer, at this hour of the night, is hardly to know where to look for them, is he? We



must wait until the morning—or, rather, return tomorrow. That'll be the best way."

Hampden nodded, closed the limousine door upon Cleek, climbed into his own seat and, starting the engine, let the motor leap forward down the silent roadway and spin on into the shadows ahead. Meanwhile, Cleek, sitting back against the cushions, felt an inward sinking of the heart as he reviewed the night's doings, and realized that he would have to return to Mr. Narkom and admit failure where he had been so certain of success.

Drat that impossible inspector! If he had been half a man, and given him the help he required, this thing might never have happened. No use now, however, for recriminations. The cat was out of the bag, the Amber Ship and its young owner had both vanished, and the mischief had been done in the short span of half an evening!

And he, Cleek, had failed his friend! Failed the man who had stood by him when all else seemed set against him; failed Mr. Narkom who loved him like a brother, and whom he, too, loved with a great deal of gratitude for a new start in life, and a great deal of tender amusement for the methods in which he conducted the Yard's business.

This was only a small matter in comparison with the task Cleek had set himself to do when first he had turned back from paths of crime and darkness, led upward by the light in a woman's eyes and guided

by that strong right hand of the good superintendent himself. And the task had been to refund in full every single penny he had stolen in those past years when he had been one with the rats that crawl in the Paris sewers, and with a moral code lower even than they. Ailsa Lorne had shown him the beauty of love, and Mr. Narkom had given him the crown of friendship. It was to these two that he owed his very life, and he had failed one of them.

The average detective would perhaps review this sentimental state of affairs with something of a lurking smile. But Cleek was Cleek, and, mysterious man that he was (and Dollops could have told you a tale of kingship and courts to which he could have laid claim had he wanted), where Cleek's heart was, there was Cleek's loyalty, and he was of the kind that would sooner give his own life than fail a friend.

But there was nothing for it now but to return to London as quickly as possible, get a few hours' sleep, and confess to the superintendent exactly what had happened. Cleek's mind tracked back over the whole day's strange occurrences, trying to loop up the broken threads into some sort of tangible whole. But there was nothing, as yet, to link them. Not a clue to be caught hold of. Points to be investigated—yes. This Nurse Ellison, for instance. Lying, of course, and fairly badly frightened. And that Chinese boy's hands. And the sudden change of front on the part of Mr. Spender. And the shot.

And the scream. And the empty house, with its vanishing occupants. Plenty to think about, but not as yet one connecting link.

The three hours' journey to London was over at last, and hungry and faint with the evening's excitement and lack of bodily sustenance, Cleek fairly tumbled out of the limousine at his rooms in Clarges Street, caught Hampden by the arm, and tugged him up the stone steps of the big building with a weary grin.

"You're having sandwiches and cocoa with me, my friend!" he said, as Hampden turned surprised eyes upon him. "You've stood the racket splendidly. Dollops will see to us in a jiffy. He's a handy man in every sense is my Cockney henchman. But come as quietly as you can, for every other occupant of this block of flats is naturally sleeping their beauty sleep—or ought to be."

They crept up the stairs like mice, let themselves into the little flat which Cleek rented on the top floor, and then, at Cleek's low whistle, there was a sound of scrambling, and a sleepy-eyed, tousle-headed, and ginger-topped Dollops, in a suit of broad blue-and-white-striped pyjamas, and a dressing gown of scarlet wool, tumbled out into the tiny passage, rubbing his eyes.

"Mr. Cleek, sir! So you've come back, 'ave you? And that's 'Ampden? 'Ad some supper I 'ope, sir?"



“Never a bite, my lad,” returned Cleek merrily. “Fairly famished, the pair of us! See what you can find, there’s a good chap, and as sharp as possible.”

“Nuffink to eat! ’Ow orful!” ejaculated Dollops, clattering into the little kitchen and ringing a merry tune with pots and pans. “You’ll ’ave summink in a jiffy, I promise yer!”

“As speedily as you can,” said Cleek. “And then Hampden’s going home to that little wife of his and the kiddy. And I’m going to bed! Your report can wait until the morning. Worried will she be, eh, Hampden?”

The chauffeur fingered his cap awkwardly, and reddened. “No, sir. Used to the Yard’s work she is—’er father was in the Force before he retired. Knows it’s no use worryin’ when I’m late.”

“Heavens! what a perfect spouse! Now then, Dollops, hurry up with that supper. I’m so hungry I could chew a bottle of beer!”

“Better drink one, sir, I’ve got it ’andy,” volunteered Dollops, marching into the room, a queer figure with his uplifted tray, tousled hair, and scarlet dressing gown. “And ’ere it is! Now, tuck in as farst as you like, and if I may sit down, I’ll ’ave a bite, too. I didn’t ’ave nuffink much fer supper but a brace of sossidges, a cold chop, and a jelly wot I found in the larder. And that ain’t enuff ter keep a man alive, is it?”

“No, but with an umbrella added and a couple of

newspapers, it would keep an ostrich fairly flourishing—and that's what you are. He'll eat on his death-bed, Hampden, and start chewing the angels' wings when he goes up aloft. Now, then, man, set to and help yourself!"

## CHAPTER VIII

### WHAT HAPPENED AT THE BOOKSHOP

EARLY next morning saw Cleek on his way to Mr. Narkom's, something of the overnight's assumed merriment gone, and the thought of what he must tell his friend lying like lead against his heart.

He reached the superintendent's office just as that gentleman was divesting himself of hat and coat, ready for the business of the day. They shook hands heartily.

"Well?" said he, seating himself. "How goes it?"

"Bad," said Cleek soberly. "Deuced bad!"

"What's that? 'Tisn't often I hear you use that word, my friend. What's up? Anything gone wrong? The prince is all right, I hope?"

"The prince and the Amber Ship—are *gone!* Vanished into thin air!"

"Good God! You're mad, Cleek! Gone?" Mr. Narkom sprang to his feet and started pacing up and down the long, high room, stopping at last in front of his friend and laying a hand upon his shoulder. "Gone? What d'you mean, gone? You've not failed, Cleek, have you?"



Cleek's head was bowed for a minute.

"Yes," he said, "I have failed, Mr. Narkom. Failed miserably! It's the very devil to have to tell you that. Here are the facts of the case."

Then he seated himself on the edge of the superintendent's desk, related the last night's happenings in full, and traced with his finger, and one emphatic fist to mark emphasis, the position of the House on the Hill, where he and Hampden had made the search, and where their car stood when they heard that woman's shrill scream pierce the stillness of the night.

"And the dickens of it is, it was a woman's voice, and there were no women in the house. To my knowledge, anyway," he finished, as, the recital ended, he slid from the desk-top and started swinging up and down the room puffing at his cigarette, brows down, his whole personality awake and worried. "That's what I can't fathom. And where those people vanished to. You've got to come along at once, Mr. Narkom, and see what you can do. The thing wants immediate investigation, and if that inspector chap had been any sort of an official, none of this would have occurred. I'm not exonerating myself——"

"You've nothing to exonerate yourself from. You did your share, and left the young prince in the proper hands. Any other man but a chap with a sixth sense such as you possess would have returned to London with a settled mind," answered the super-

intendent, with an affectionate squeeze of Cleek's arm in passing. "You've nothing to blame yourself for. You did your duty just as you always do. It's that damned inspector who failed the Yard. He ought to have had someone on the lookout the instant the prince arrived, and men posted round the house for possible intruders. Why the dickens he hadn't beats me! Anyhow, the fat's in the fire with a vengeance! I'll fix up a few things, and then join you, and we'll motor down at once!"

"All right." Cleek picked up his hat and made for the door. "I'm taking Dollops along. He's got a report to make me, but he was off this morning before daybreak, to finish it, and so I never had a chance of a word with him. I set him on to that old chap in Waterloo Station, and why he didn't turn up in the trail of his quarry at Upminster beats me entirely. I'll meet you here in an hour. How will that be?"

"O. K. Good-bye, and don't worry over your share," returned the superintendent, looking, nevertheless, thoroughly worried over the whole unfortunate business. "The boy must be found, and the Amber Ship, too! I was a fool not to have arranged for further police surveillance down there."

Cleek put on his hat and went out, meeting Dollops in the street below, just returned, very dusty and tired, from his early morning's work.

"Now," said he as they walked away together,

“let’s hear your share of the business, Dollops my lad. Things have worked out badly for us. Let’s hope they show a decided improvement for you. You followed out my instructions yesterday?”

“Yessir. And follered the old gent a goodish distance, too,” returned Dollops eagerly. “Give me a fair chyse, ’e did. And not a taste of tea in the meanwhile!”

“Then how was it I didn’t see you at Upminster?”

“Upminster?” Dollops’s voice ran up a tiny scale of surprise. “Upminster, sir? ’E didn’t go nowhere near Upminster. Stayed right ’ere in Lunnon, ’e did. Took a ’bus to Euston and then went dodgin’ dahn to the Edgware Road, and came to earth at a little second-’and bookshop somewheres off it. Never sniffed the air of Upminster in that old gentleman’s wake, I kin promise yer!”

Cleek stopped in his tracks, and let out a little whistle.

“You mean to say he never went to Upminster at all!” he gave out suddenly, in an amazed voice. “Sure, Dollops? You didn’t mix your quarry up, eh? Certain of that?”

“Wish I was as certain of ’Eaving, sir,” returned Dollops fervently. “No, no Upminster for ’im! The Edgware Road was ’is lay, and that’s where I tracked ’im to, and that’s where ’e probably is at this instant! What made you think of ’is goin’ to Upminster, then?”



Excitement showed itself in Cleek's suddenly tense body, in his suddenly lowered voice. He waved one hand toward an adjacent park.

"Come inside here, and let's find a bench where no one can interrupt or overhear us, and tell me all about it," he made reply. "Now," as they seated themselves under the shade of an elm tree in the deserted park, for at that hour no one was about. "I thought of Upminster naturally, because I happened to see the gentleman and speak to him in Upminster. Either you, or I, Dollops, have taken leave of our senses this fine morning."

"Mr. Cl——! You spoke to 'im! Excuse me, sir, but you couldn't! 'E never left my sight until upwards of ten o'clock, and then I left 'im a-sittin' in 'is back-parlour, smokin' a pipe and readin' a book which 'e took from 'is own shelves. I tell you sir, you ain't never saw 'im."

"Then I saw his double!"

"Well, 'is double it must have been. But the old gent you told me ter shadder, I shadded, and I'll swear 'e never went near Upminster, nor thought of goin' there the whole evenin'."

"Whew!" Cleek whistled again, and sat a minute in thought, puffing away at his cigarette. Meanwhile Dollops watched his master's face with incredulous eyes, not quite certain whether he was beginning to wander in his mind or what had happened to him.

"There's more in this than meets the eye, Dol-

lops,” said Cleek suddenly, getting to his feet and moving quickly onward. “And what class of bookshop was this you say you saw him at?”

“A ramshackle little place in a shabby side street, sir,” returned Dollops, beginning to scent excitement. “Little tumble-down place, with rows and rows of bookshelves inside, and stalls outside littered wiv tuppenny-ha’penny magazines and books ’arf tumblin’ on ter the street. Any slick-fingered chap could ’a’ made away with them, easy! And the old gen’leman knowin’ nuffink abaht it! ’E’d be a pauper inside of a year, wiv them methods of business, I kin tell yer!”

“And a learned Oxford scholar—an old don, too! It’s amazing!” broke in Cleek quickly, barely following the thread of what Dollops was saying in his own field of thought. “Now, how the dickens can one account for it? I swear I saw him, or someone made up to impersonate him, at the House on the Hill last night. And yet, here he is, turning up in a second-hand bookshop off the Edgware Road. Nice neighbourhood for a man of his calling, too! Something exceedingly fishy here, from what I can make of it! Anything else to report?”

“Only that a couple er Chinks turned up at ’is plyce abaht twenty minutes arfter ’e’d got ’ome, and ’e let ’em in by a side door.”

“Chinks! That’s queer! And then——?”

“Then he took ’em into a little back kitching,

where there weren't no chance of me a-hearin' nuffin' in my 'idin' plyce outside, and they st'yed wiv 'im nigh on to an hour. I waited until I sees 'em get away before I comes 'ome again."

"And how did they leave?"

"By the front of the shop, shakin' 'ands wiv the ole gentleman real friendly like, and wiv a book under each arm. 'E didn't seem so friendly, though, I must say. Looked worried and 'ardly waited ter say good-bye. Then the Chinks made orf. I kep' a-watchin' till I see 'im settle dahn in his little room onct more, and pick up a book from one of them shelves, and then, when nuffink else 'appened, I ups and come 'ome to report to you. That's all, sir."

"Well, not a bad 'all,' taken on points, Dollops," returned Cleek gravely. "The Octopus has swung one of its tentacles as far as the Edgware Road, has it? From China to Upminster, and across London! This case is going to keep us pretty busy! Well, it's time we returned to Mr. Narkom. We're off to Upminster at once, Dollops, and you're coming with us."

They found Mr. Narkom ready and waiting, and the old limousine, with Lennard at the wheel. When they were fairly started upon their journey, Cleek told the superintendent all he had gleaned from Dollops. Mr. Narkom looked amazed and upset, as was only too natural.

"Then that wasn't the real man we handed him



to, after all?" he ejaculated, shaking his head at the disastrous prospect.

"Yes, he held full letters of authority, and he was in the House on the Hill very obviously as its rightful master when I saw him," returned Cleek. "Perhaps the other old chap wasn't the right one. Perhaps, for some reason or other, he was made up simply to look like him, and had designs on spiriting the young prince away at the station—only we got the better of him first. There're a dozen different theories that occur to you, are there not? And Dollops said he simply went quietly home and, after the Chinamen had left him, settled down in his own room with a book. And if he had been an impostor, he wouldn't have done that!"

"No, he certainly wouldn't. More likely be off on some nefarious errand connected with his make-up in the part," added Mr. Narkom with decision. "If he's got a double, and the double is mixed up with Chinks, then we must keep a line on both parties as near as we can, and see if the two ends won't meet to form the circle. What do you suggest we do first, Cleek?"

"Make straight for the local police station, when I hope you will give that delightful inspector in charge just ten minutes of your time and your tongue, and then bring him back to me, and we'll pump all the information relative to the village out of him."

"Right. He'll get the piece of my mind, for sure.

And get put down for neglect of duty, also—if not a total discharge from the Force altogether.” Mr. Narkom spoke heatedly. “This is a devil of a long journey, Cleek. How far are we now?”

“Going through Muddenford—about twenty-five miles away from Upminster,” returned Cleek, and then settled himself back in his seat, lit a cigarette, and subsided into silence.

They reached Upminster just after three o’clock, having partaken of the sandwiches and fruit which the superintendent had thoughtfully had put up for the journey so that no time need be wasted in lunching, and Cleek told Lennard to make straight for the police station. Like an avenging Nemesis Mr. Narkom strode up the stone steps, hailed the constable who sat upon his stool reading the news from a yesterday’s paper, and brought him quickly to his feet with a mention of his name.

“I wish to see the inspector at once!” Mr. Narkom was bristling with outraged officialdom. He could barely wait to encounter his victim, and as the scared constable fairly ran to his chief’s office, and opened the door, in his haste, without knocking, the superintendent received a full blast of the inspector’s quality in the language which he gave out to his inferior for his forgetfulness.

“You damned fool!” he was just finishing, as he got to his feet from the comfortable office chair he was sitting in, a cigar between his lips and his coat

unbuttoned. "Where'd you learn yer manners, I'd like to know!" Then he faltered in his flow of eloquence, met the cold eyes of the Superintendent of Scotland Yard, and let the rest of his sentence go by default as he brought himself smartly to the salute.

Cleek, standing a little distance behind Mr. Narkom, had seen and heard it all, and permitted himself a little smile as he saw the biter bit. His eyes met the inspector's, and the hot blood flooded that gentleman's ruddy face.

Then Mr. Narkom walked in firmly.

"Now, Inspector," he said in his short, sharp tones. And closed the door.



## CHAPTER IX

### BRIEF, BUT OF MUCH IMPORTANCE

**I**T WAS twenty minutes later when that door opened again, and Cleek, at the respectful suggestion of the worthy constable, had taken a seat in the little ante-room and was quietly smoking and thinking things over, when Mr. Narkom, followed by a very cowed and contrite inspector, came into the room.

The superintendent's face was red, but the inspector's was redder, and just a little white about the gills, too, from the dressing-down he had just received.

"The inspector is ready to apologize to you for his summary treatment of you yesterday, my dear Cl—— Carstairs," said Mr. Narkom, waving a hand toward his victim.

"C-certainly, sir. Anythink I said or did I'm exceedin'ly sorry if I offended," put in the inspector feebly, and Cleek dismissed the subject with a shrug of his shoulders.

"All right. All right. That's past and done with, and a lesson learnt never hurts any one. Now let's get down to brass tacks. We want all the knowl-

edge you can give us of this village and its inhabitants. First and foremost, what can you tell us about this Mr. Spender? Mr. Narkom has no doubt told you of my discovery last night?"

"Yes, sir." The inspector was all attention instantly. "Horrible, ain't it? This Mr. Spender has always been a very nice gentleman, sir, most pleasant-spoken to them that comes in contact with him, and living the life of a real hermit otherwise. Been a Master at Oxford University, sir, and always noted for his knowledge of the East, so I've been told."

"Yes, I know all that. Has he got any relatives living near?"

"Never heard tell of any in my time. Only people connected with him are that Chinese boy who lives with 'im and the old woman, Mrs. Buggins, who does the charrin' two days a week. No one else ever seems to come near 'im. And he never entertains."

"And where does this Mrs. Buggins live?"

"Number Seven, The Cottages, down past the butcher's on the right-'and side of the High Street."

Cleek pencilled the name upon his cuff.

"Thanks. We'll see her later. Now, who else lives here? Residents, I mean. Who was that Nurse Ellison we encountered, and where does she live?"

"Up at the Manor. She's the squire's nurse.

Squire's been ailin' these past three years, and Miss Ellison takes care of him. Somethin' the matter up 'ere." The Inspector tapped his head significantly.

"And what's the squire's name?"

"Sir George Brentwood."

"Married?"

"Yes. And with one son, Mr. Frank, who, between you and me, gentlemen, is a fair bit of a waster. Squire loses his temper something orful with that young gentleman. Can't keep any work he sets him to. Fond of the 'orses, I think, that's what the trouble is. Then squire's gout makes 'im orful-tempered, too. Lady Brentwood don't have much of a time in that 'ouse, I fancy."

"And what is she like?"

"A sweet, gentle, kind lady, if ever there was one. Does no end of good in the village, among the poor, sir. But that scared of her husband! And with Mr. Frank's recent trouble——"

Cleek flicked up an enquiring eyebrow.

"What's that? Recent trouble? What trouble did he get into, may I ask?"

"Oh, had a dreadful quarrel with his father about horses, I hear, and then the old gentleman ordered him out of the house, and he hasn't been there since! Got a job with a jeweller's firm, the last I 'eard of him, somewheres in London."

"Oho!" said Cleek in two different tones, looking significantly at Mr. Narkom. Jeweller's firm, eh?



And the Amber Ship coming to the country! One certainly never knew, and this was a point to go on. "And who else lives in this peaceful little village, Inspector?"

"Doctor Hunter, him as 'as taken old Doctor Beddingfold's practice while he's gone to some sanitarium or other to patch up his lungs," went on the inspector, obviously anxious to make up for past delinquencies, and using his brain as best he was able. "The Basings, mother, daughter, and son, as has the place out beyond Porch Pool, which lies half a mile out of the village, sir; Mr. Amers, a gentleman-farmer, who's taken Ponders, the farm beyond the Manor, since the last four years back; and a leddy whose name I don't know, but who has leased the End House—called that because it's the end of the village, just a step past the Doctor's surgery. She's a widow, so I hears tell, and 'as come here with an invalid daughter. Oh, and Miss Omritt—nearly forgot Miss Prudence, as the villagers call her. She's the old parson's daughter, sir, a lady of middle years, with a 'eart as big as herself is little. She lives in Rose Cottage, just two doors down from here, on the right-'and side of the street."

"And that's the lot, then?"

"Yes, sir." The inspector scratched his head a moment, as an outward show of his immense concentration. "All the gentry, that is. 'Course, there's the villagers. But they've lived and died in

their cottages, and never moves, as you know, sir. The rectory ain't occupied at the moment. Mr. Sawyer over at Little Chington serves the two churches of a Sunday, until the new living is arranged here, and Miss Prudence does the sick-visiting."

"H'm. Thank you, Inspector. A very lucid and clear report." Cleek turned to Mr. Narkom. "Now, old friend, our best move is to make for the House on the Hill straight away. I think the inspector and one of his men might come with us. It's as well to be prepared, even in the daylight."

"Certainly, my dear Cl—— Carstairs, certainly," returned Mr. Narkom, jumping up at once and making for the entrance. Then they got into the car, where Dollops, sitting beside Lennard, was awaiting them, took the inspector inside with them, and were off and away upon that road which Cleek had already learnt to know so well, to the mysterious House on the Hill.

## CHAPTER X

### A GRUESOME DISCOVERY

**A**S THEY reached the driveway and wound slowly up through it, toward the old gray house, with its odd, sinister air and tall gables jutting up out of the trees, Mr. Narkom gave forth an involuntary exclamation.

“Cinnamon, what an odd-looking place!”

And in the daylight Cleek certainly was inclined to agree with him. It was odd-looking, odd-looking and peculiarly sinister, though why, it would be difficult to guess. Ruin stamped it with its ineradicable mark; here and there the old gray stone had crumbled away, and, lacking repair, had made a place for crows to roost in. The wood facings were cracked and rotten, the window frames had long ago lost all signs of paint, and held their sagging mullioned panes like a thousand ugly and very dirty eyes. To the left of it, and joined to the house by a little passageway of stone, there rose a queer tower-shaped structure, circular in shape, above which the pointed, conical roof rose over it like a dunce's cap. Long arrow slits gave it a still weirder appearance, being, as it



was, entirely out of keeping with the architecture of the rest of the place.

“What the dickens is that part, Inspector?” queried Cleek, pointing to this portion, but the inspector was not quite sure.

“Dunno, sir. I fancy the old gentleman used that as a sort of spare study, and stored his old books there, though I only got that from hearsay,” was the reply. “But it was built on, I believe, by the last tenant of the place, an old gentleman, who were fair daft on mediæval history. Before our time, of course, but they calls it the ‘ghost tower,’ and none o’ the servants who were here ever went into it. Mrs. Buggins ain’t never entered the place that I knows of. ’Tisn’t used, I fancy.”

“H’m. I see. Well, we’ll enter it to-day, at any rate, and break open its secret ghostliness. You’ve a man coming along, haven’t you?”

“Yes, sir. On the way now. There’s his bicycle up against the side of the house.”

“Good. Draw up here, Lennard,” addressing the chauffeur. “We’re going to get out. That window we entered last night should serve us to force an entry.”

The three men descended from the car. Dollops hopped off the box-seat and was beside his master in a twinkling, and together they walked up to the little hall window.

But it was locked this time!

“Drat!” ejaculated Dollops fervently, squashing a thumbnail in his endeavours. “What’ll we do, sir?”

“Break a pane, of course, and slip your hand in,” replied Cleek. “But that’s deuced odd. Someone must have been inside, then—even when we went in.”

He broke a pane, slipped in his hand, and unfastened the latch. The casement flew wide with a rusty, jarring noise.

“Now, then, Dollops, in you go, and you, too, my man, and then run round to the front and unfasten the door for Mr. Narkom to come in. Here, I’ll follow you! If there’s anything doing in this house of silence, I’m going to be in it.”

He vaulted on to the shelving sill of the window, and jumped down inside the room, followed by Dollops and the constable, whom his superior officer adressed as “Jake” and whose surname Cleek had discovered was Jeffries.

They found themselves in the little study to which Cleek had first been shown. There was the couch upon which he had placed the unconscious princeling, there the table heaped with its untidy pile of books. And over all, with the ineradicable mark of neglect, there was a thin sifting of fine dust.

“Not much of a housekeeper, I must say!” ejaculated Cleek as he hastened through the room, giving it a cursory glance, the two men following him. Everything was just as it had been upon the preceding night, but in the brilliance of the morning sun-

light Cleek noted one or two things which he had not seen before. For instance: the rumpled rugs in the study and, on the plain linoleum which covered the floor of the passage, the marks of many boot heels and a host of scratches, as though someone had had a scuffle here, and fought—but how unavailingly he did not know—for freedom.

No time, as yet, to note more. He unfastened the barred front door, and threw it open. The superintendent and Cogwell fairly fell across the threshold in their haste to enter.

“Now,” said Cleek, “the game’s begun,” and they started their search.

Dollops was apportioned to try the left wing of the house, Cleek kept for himself and Mr. Narkom the right, which included the “ghost tower” that had attracted his curiosity and interest. Jeffries tackled the kitchens. The inspector got busy with a general survey of the garden.

“Watch every inch of the place, men. Don’t let anything, however small, escape you, and report everything to us here,” were Mr. Narkom’s orders. Then he and Cleek, revolvers ready to hand in case of trouble, started upon their search.

“We’ll tackle the tower first. I’ve a fancy we shall find some clue there,” said Cleek, leading the way into a big room off the hall, which proved to be the dining room and was furnished in that heavy hideousness which goes by the name of Victorian furniture.



This room held a large dining table covered with a red cloth, six chairs with horsehair seats, and a shabby horsehair sofa, and a monstrosity of mahogany which did duty as a sideboard and took up the right side of the ugly, bare room. It held a lot of cupboards, all of which they ransacked for clues.

But the dining room held nothing.

“Let’s tackle the tower now, old friend,” was Cleek’s verdict after this unfruitful search. But how to find the opening? Obviously the tower led off from this room, or somewhere very near it, for on looking out of the window one found it directly at one’s left. The stone passageway which joined it to the house led to somewhere—but where? Not a sign of a door or entry presented itself. Cleek went outside and looked round, then rejoined the waiting superintendent.

“The place must connect with this room somewhere!” he said, in a sharp tone of excitement. “But the point is—where? I’m dashed if I can see. There’s not an inch of room to enter by those deuced arrow slits. Hello, I say! Look at the floor here! Sideboard’s been moved recently, I fancy—in spite of the condition of the rest of the house. A late spring-cleaning, perhaps. Or else a hidden panel in the wall. Lend us your weight, Mr. Nar-kom, and we’ll shift it away on this side where the marks are; it might tell us something.”

A good deal of muscle went to the shifting, but—it did tell them something of utmost importance.

Cleek's fingers, sensitive to the slightest touch, passed over the hideous wall-paper at the back of the sideboard, and came to rest upon a seam which caught the tip of his finger.

"Something here!" he ejaculated, and pressed lightly upon the edge of the seam.

A panel slid back into the wall, revealing an aperture about three and a half feet high and a couple of feet wide, which led apparently into complete darkness.

"By James! Cleek——"

"Carstairs, I beg of you, Mr. Narkom! Who knows who might be here to listen to your indiscretions!" returned Cleek with a touch of asperity. "And the name's a by-word which would make it unpleasant to encounter an enemy with. Maurevanians and Apaches are all after the man who bears that name, and I'm not ready to finish my career yet! Best keep to the pseudonym for the time being. I'm not trusting that inspector chap any further than I can see him!"

"Cl—— Carstairs! You don't think——? You don't imagine——" began Mr. Narkom in a sibilant whisper, stopping on his hands and knees to examine the aperture and gazing up into Cleek's face with wide eyes.

"I don't know anything, but I imagine a good deal! And this is no place to discuss it. Come, my friend. Let us enter the lion's den."

On hands and knees they crept into the aperture, and found themselves for a space of two feet in complete and cramped darkness. But on the other side of the wall there was a gloom of mouldered things, and they straightened themselves with some relief and looked about them.

They were in a sort of walled corridor, roughly plastered, which had once been painted a dark green, but from which the plaster had fallen in huge pieces littering the flooring with its decay.

“What an eerie spot!” ejaculated Mr. Narkom, with an obvious shiver. “Eh? What’s that?”

For somewhere in front of him a mocking voice had shrilled “ee-rie s-p-p-o-t!” in long-drawn, high-pitched accents.

Cleek put back his head and laughed heartily for a moment.

“Hello! An echo tower, is it? That, my friend, was the mocking echo of your own inimitable voice. Sounded rather odd, didn’t it? I’ve never encountered one of these places in England before. They’re very fond of ’em on the continent. Just a matter of acoustic properties, you know, but doubtless the reason why it has been dubbed the ‘ghost tower.’”

And “g-h-o-o-s-t tow-wer” echoed the mocking voice once more, with an uncanny realism.

Mr. Narkom dropped his voice to a whisper.

“Well, I don’t like echo towers, then!” he returned with a slight tremor. “Gives a chap the



very creeps. Come along, let's get out of it as quickly as we can."

They pushed forward in the semi-gloom of the passage until they came to a door. Cleek whisked out his revolver and held it ready in his right hand. With his left he cautiously turned the rusty handle. It gave grudgingly and swung open, revealing a lumber room piled high with books, tumbled here and there in utmost confusion.

To the right a narrow shaft of sunlight pointed like a dagger through the arrow slits which took the place of windows, and there was a smell of death in the air. Involuntarily Cleek stopped in his paces, the excited superintendent peering round over his shoulder.

"My God!" he ejaculated. "Over there, Mr. Narkom, in that corner—look!"

The superintendent's eyes fell upon a fearsome sight.

For there, lying half doubled up on his side, with ghastly face turned upward, a look of utmost horror stamped upon it, and the sightless eyes staring at them, while the red blood half-congealed made an ugly puddle on the floor beside him, lay Octavius Spender, stabbed to death, and with a sign traced roughly in blood upon his forehead!

## CHAPTER XI

### THE "BALANKHA-DAHS"

**G**OOD God in Heaven!" It was Mr. Narkom who spoke, as they crept near to the still figure and stood a moment looking down at it. "Who's done this dastardly thing? Murdered, poor devil!"

"And with an Indian kris, too, if I know anything," returned Cleek in a hushed voice. "And with the sign of Kali upon his forehead! There's something devilish queer here, Mr. Narkom."

"The sign of Kali! What's that, then?"

"A Hindoo sign. But what the dickens have Hindoos to do with the Amber Ship? Kali is the Slayer of Men, my friend, and if this is what I think it is, we have still another Eastern element entering into the case. It'll take us the very dickens of a time to unravel now. The 'Balankha-Dahs,' or I'm a Dutchman!"

"The Balankha-Dahs? What in the name of Heaven?"

"Not now, not now, my friend. I'll tell you some other time. Let us look into the matter in hand and see what's doing. So the old man met his death

last night, then, did he? And it was his scream, and not a woman's, that Hampden and I heard! And yet I could have sworn——!"

Then he looked meditatively down at the gruesome figure. Mr. Narkom saw a sudden tightening of the lips, a sudden upward twitch of the head, and marvelled, as Cleek stooped swiftly and began wiping the dead face with his handkerchief. He held it out covered with smears of brownish-red grease-paint.

"Cleek, my dear chap! I don't understand!" said the superintendent in a very fluster of troubled incredulity.

But Cleek was at work again. Bending his fingers to the black waistcoat, he began to unbutton it, tore away the shirt, and then, to Mr. Narkom's astonished eyes, revealed the secret that he had so suddenly guessed.

"See," he said softly. "My ear was not mistaken, Mr. Narkom. It's a woman!"

And a woman it was. A woman of some sixty years, with the hard, firm features of a man, and with the gray hair cut like a man's and tousled about the ears. A woman—an old woman and a plain one—but a woman all the same.

"Great Scotland Yard!" ejaculated Mr. Narkom appropriately. "You're right, Cleek! And what devil's business can this be? Why was she masquerading in man's clothing?"



“And why had the Chinese boy English hands? That’s another riddle for you to solve,” threw in Cleek, with a despairing shrug. “The thing’s gone deeper than we thought. This woman has been dastardly murdered, and her murderer is at present at large. Our task is to find him and bring him to justice. And to discover the young prince’s whereabouts. Mr. Narkom, run back, like a good friend, and whistle for Dollops and Inspector Cogwell to come here immediately. I’ll stay by the body until you return.”

Mr. Narkom went with alacrity, and meanwhile Cleek knelt there beside what had once been a woman, and tried to piece together the fragments of evidence. But nothing dove-tailed. A Chinese prince, a sacred jewel—and the sign of Kali the Slayer! A Hindoo emblem upon an Englishwoman, who should have been a man, in charge of a Chinese prince! What did the puzzle mean? He bent down and scrutinized the dead lips, then sat back on his heels, pursing up his mouth to a faint whistle.

“I’ll get Dollops to try and identify the likeness, for a start, and see what the inspector’s got to say about it, too,” he thought, and then got up, carefully shifted the lifeless head toward the left, so that the patch of rubbed-off grease-paint should not show, buttoned up the waistcoat again to hide the bare breast, and then went searching round the room for further evidence.

But nothing whatever was forthcoming, and by the time he had finished his investigation there came the shuffle of approaching footsteps, and Mr. Narkom, followed by Dollops and Inspector Cogwell, entered the chamber.

Cleek beckoned the boy to him with one finger; then pointed down at the murdered woman.

Dollops gave a gasp and went white as chalk.

"Gawdamussy!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "That there's the ole gentleman wot I shaddered larst night, sir! Leastwise it looks jis' like 'im. And dead as a doornail, too!"

Cleek laid a hand upon the lad's shoulder, shaking his head meanwhile.

"No, Dollops," said he, "that isn't Mr. Octavius Spender; that's a woman!"

"A wumman? Gov'nor you're gone darft, you 'ave, meanin' no disrespec'! That ain't no wumman, sir! That there's the gen'leman I was a-follerin' larst night, I'll swear it!"

Cleek beckoned to the inspector. "You know who that is?" he said, as the man stood forward.

"My God! yes, sir. That's Mr. Spender himself. And foully murdered! 'Oo could have done it? And as nice an old gentleman as ever lived. That ain't no woman, sir, I'll swear. That's 'im what's lived and worked among us here this past twenty year."

"And that's just exactly where you're wrong

again, Inspector," returned Cleek serenely, stooping and turning the head round, so as to show the patch of pale skin, where the paint had been rubbed off. "Made up, you see. Even these lines about the mouth and eyes."

"Call the doctor, Dollops," he said. "Or, no. Jeffries had better be sent. This thing must proceed in the ordinary fashion. The doctor shall make his usual examination, and give his report. Then we can get to business. Any of the rest of you discover anything? Dollops"—as the inspector, supplying his "No" in a shaken voice, turned upon his heel and made off in the direction of Jeffries to give his orders—"what luck did you have?"

"None, sir."

"Well, we've enough here to occupy us. No doubt the murderer of this poor woman has made off with the prince and the Amber Ship as well. I wonder how long that chap'll be fetching the doctor?"

He was not long, fortunately, for, as it happened, the doctor was close at hand, on his way to a case, as he explained later, and Jeffries returned with him almost at once. He came into the room with that light, buoyant, almost soundless step that one associates with the medical profession. He was small and slight, narrow-hipped, and with long, delicate hands with the spatulate fingertips of the true surgeon. His face was finely chiselled, with dark,



liquid brown eyes set under narrow black brows; a small dark moustache covered his upper lip, and when his lips moved one caught a glimpse of perfect ivory-white teeth.

"Handsome devil!" thought Cleek as he shook hands with him. Then he turned to his unpleasant task.

"Doctor," said he, "we've a murder here, and we need your assistance. You can identify the victim?"

The doctor moved quietly into the center of the group, and stood by Cleek, looking down at the crumpled body before him. It was not a pleasant sight, and even a doctor may be forgiven some slight signs of agitation. For his thin face paled, and a hint of emotion showed itself in his clear voice.

"Why," said he, "that was my dear old friend, Mr. Spender, Mr. Octavius Spender, who lived in this house! Many's the evening we've spent together here—but never in this room. Poor chap! I'm sorry—desperately sorry. What place is this?"

Cleek's eyes roved round the room.

"An echo chamber," he returned. "What the servants called the ghost tower. Mr. Spender never took you in here, then, may I ask?"

The doctor shook his head.

"Never. He always told me it was simply used as a storehouse for his books. And when I saw just now that one entered by the back of the sideboard——! Really, one had no idea of such a thing.

Poor old chap! Who could have done this dastardly deed?"

"That's what we're trying to find out," put in Mr. Narkom excitedly. "You identify the—er—gentleman, Doctor, as Mr. Spender, who lived here for some twenty years?"

"I do."

"But you ain't lived here as long as that yourself, sir," quietly put in the inspector at this juncture, and Cleek gave him a nod of approval.

"No, that I haven't. I've only taken old Doctor Beddingfold's practice while he's getting strong," he explained for Cleek's and Mr. Narkom's information. "But during the seven months of my stay in this village old Mr. Spender and myself have become most friendly, most intimate. And now—— Good God! it's terrible! Almost unbelievable, if one had not the evidence of one's own eyes!"

"But there's something even more unbelievable than the crime itself, Doctor," put in Cleek quietly as he stooped and turned the face round again. "Just look here. What do you make of that?"

The doctor stooped, too, gave out a gasp, gave one horrified look at the bared breast, and then gazed at the faces of the onlookers like a man startled out of his wits.

"Good Heaven above—a woman!"

## CHAPTER XII

### THE SIGN OF KALI

**E**XACTLY.”

“Then, all the time—you can’t mean that Mr. Spender was—wasn’t a man, after all—surely? That’s an impossible suggestion.”

“And one which we are in no position to corroborate, not knowing the supposed gentleman as you did,” replied Cleek, with a shake of the head. “That is where Mr. Narkom and I are entirely in the dark; where, in fact, we must rely upon yours and the inspector’s evidence. Do you feel sure, Doctor, that this is the same unfortunate person with whom you came so much in contact?”

“I—I hardly dare to think. To all intents and purposes, yes. But to a doctor’s knowledge of him—no!”

“Ah! that should prove conclusive. He consulted you, then, upon some occasion?”

“Never professionally. But knowing him—talking with him—— It’s a puzzle, every way you look at it!” replied the doctor, biting his lip and frowning down at the huddled figure, so appallingly still in the midst of all this life and movement.



“I couldn’t swear to it, of course; and yet one’s instinct—— But, good God! who could have done this thing? And for what reason?”

Cleek looked at Mr. Narkom’s puzzled countenance, and then back into the dark eyes of the professional man.

“Then you never heard of the arrival of the Amber Ship?”

“Amber Ship?” The doctor’s voice ran up a tiny scale of amazement. “What’s that? I heard of a young Chinese prince he was going to look after; son of a friend of his in China, I believe, or so he told me. But he wasn’t due here in England for another month or so.”

“He arrived yesterday, bearing upon his person the Amber Ship, the sacred jewel of a very famous order,” returned Cleek, in his grave, quiet voice.

“Yesterday? Then where is he now?”

“Gone! And the Amber Ship, too! And the Chinese servant he brought with him, and the Chinese boy who served Mr. Spender for so many years. They are all gone! Spirited away in some mysterious fashion by some mysterious agency. And how, I haven’t the very ghost of a notion.”

“Great heavens above!” Cleek noticed the doctor’s very genuine amazement. He was either a good actor or completely ignorant of the whole affair. But in a case of this kind it was necessary to keep awake to every shade of inflection in voice or gesture

made by any one who had come in contact with the unfortunate victim. The doctor's grief in his friend's untimely death seemed sincere. Then a thunderbolt dropped upon them in his next words.

"The Amber Ship is a rare jewel, then, and naturally all the jewel-thieves in the kingdom would be on the watch for it," said the doctor in a suddenly scared voice. "And that, perhaps, was why—— But it's unthinkable, impossible! I won't even make the suggestion."

"What suggestion?"

"That young Brentwood, the squire's son, could be in any way implicated in the affair. And yet, yesterday morning, when I was motoring by here, I saw him standing in the drive by the gate, talking to Mr. Spender, and distinctly heard his voice raised in protest, saying to the old man, 'Just a glimpse, sir! I simply must, and it will do no harm to any one. I've promised my employer, and he wants a copy made for exhibition purposes.' And, Mr.—er—Carstairs, he is employed with a big firm of jewellers in the city. Now, how would you interpret that?"

Mr. Narkom's jolly fat face turned red with excitement.

"As a good clue, my dear sir, a very good clue!" he struck in before Cleek could get a word out of his mouth. "That's something to go on, at all events! It was the Amber Ship he spoke of, naturally. And wanted old Spender to show it to him when the prince

arrived—to lend it to him, in fact, so that his employer could see it? And then give him a chance to make off with it straightaway! Cinnamon, old chap, but there's the first clue right to our hands. You've done us an excellent turn, Doctor, in telling us that. Who knows what it may lead to?"

"Let us hope to the tracing of the rightful perpetrator of this abominable crime," returned the doctor gravely. "For my part, I would never suspect young Brentwood. And yet what could his words mean?"

"I'd like to know where the young gentleman hangs out, and have a talk with him before I answer that question." It was Cleek who spoke, as he turned to Dollops and, taking out his notebook, scribbled something on a leaf of it, tore it out, and put it into the lad's hands. "Here, Dollops, look into this as quickly as you can, and report to me. Oh, and, Doctor, do you happen to know if this Mr. Brentwood is keen on photography at all?"

The doctor looked frankly amazed.

"Really, I don't know. He has a small kodak as most young men have, and I saw him taking a photo of Miss Ellison, the squire's nurse, a day or so ago; but I've not seen the prints yet. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, I'll explain in a moment or two. But if you'll make your examination now, and give a certificate of what you think death was due to——"

"Stabbing, of course." The doctor knelt, un-



buttoned the clothing, and made a proper medical examination while Cleek, Mr. Narkom, and the puzzled inspector stood over him. He pointed to the jagged wound under the heart.

“Some weird kind of a knife made that cut,” he said, sitting back upon his heels and looking up into Cleek’s face. “I’ve never seen a wound like that before. Looks as though the blade were curved, and what’s that upon the forehead? That horrible sign in blood? Ghastly affair, altogether! It’s a good thing we doctors are strong-nerved, to stand the racket of some of the duties that fall to us!”

“It is.” Cleek knelt down and examined the marks upon the forehead as though he had never seen them before. “I’ve not the ghost of a notion what that can be. Some sacred symbol, probably. See, a roughly drawn curve with a line through it. Chinese, possibly, or Malayan. They do things like that in those heathenish places. Which proves the foreign element in the affair, doesn’t it? Then you make death due to stabbing, I suppose?”

“What else?” The doctor glanced up curiously.

“Just look at the lips and mouth with your magnifying glass, and tell me if you can add anything to the certificate?”

“Carstairs, my dear chap, what in the world makes you say that?” said Mr. Narkom with excitement, getting down upon his knees to the floor the better to view the procedure. “Death was due to stabbing

by persons unknown, obviously. What's wrong with the lips, eh?"

"A good deal, as the doctor will tell you. See that whitish substance, Doctor? Just there on the point of the tongue and in the corners of the mouth? What would you say that was, from a medical man's view?"

The doctor touched the dead lips with his finger. Some of the powdery substance came away upon the tip. He gazed at it with knit brows.

"Looks like salt, but of course it isn't. I'd have to analyze it before giving my verdict."

"I wouldn't. That's cyanide of potassium, and poison has been added to this mystery," returned Cleek sharply. "Making two persons implicated therein. Unless the thing was put there as a blind. The natural saliva in the mouth dissolved a goodly part of it, but a little still remains."

"You think that? Then how came it to be administered to an already dead man—or, rather, woman?"

"That's for us to find out." Cleek's voice dropped a tone or two, then he flashed a quick look into the doctor's face. "Your question of a moment ago is answered. You will realize now why I asked it. Cyanide of potassium, as you doubtless know, Doctor, is one of the components used in developing photographic films. That, Mr. Narkom, is what I would call clue number two."

“C—Carstairs! Really, you’re an amazing chap! When did you find this out?”

Cleek got to his feet with a slight smile, dusting the dirt from his trouser-knees with his handkerchief.

“While you were fetching the inspector,” he replied off handedly. “That’s what you pay me for, my dear chap, to use the wits God gave me. But,” his face became suddenly grim, “it begins to look black against this young Brentwood upon the face of it. Tell us everything you know about him, Doctor, will you? Without help, you understand, it is difficult to see in the dark.”

The doctor rose, too, took out his notebook, scribbled in it a moment, making notes of the case, and then, pocketing it, gave his attention to Cleek.

“Of course I’ll do anything in the world I can to elucidate matters,” he said politely, “but one hardly likes to give evidence against a friend, Mr. Carstairs. And young Brentwood and I have been fairly intimate ever since I’ve been here. His father, the squire of the place, Sir George, who lives up at the Manor House, is a patient of mine, and I am naturally in their house a good deal. So of course I got into touch with the son, in one way and another, and found him a shiftless but nice fellow, although a thorn in the side of his father and mother.”

“In what way?”

“Oh!” the doctor turned to Cleek, who had addressed the question, “because of his inability to



settle to any decent work. The young man is a gambler, and, true to type, willing therefore to beg, borrow, or steal, to get money enough to back his precious horses. That's been the cause of many quarrels with the old man, and I have warned Frank of the danger of enraging his father."

"What does he suffer from, then, may I ask?"

"It's a sort of hysteria, really, in which the brain cells get congested. Any great excitement will bring it on, and at these times there is no knowing just what Sir George might do. After they are over he has no recollection of them at all."

"I see. And is he usually a pleasant-tempered, kindly man?"

The doctor smiled. "Hardly. I think that is one reason why the son is always away from home. Sir George is gouty, and you know what that means. An irascible temper, an abominable digestion, and a rapier-like tongue!"

"Quite a triple alliance of abomination!" put in Cleek, with a shrug of the shoulders. "And how does Lady Brentwood take her husband's ailments?"

"Half frightened out of her wits, poor thing!" said the doctor, with a touch of compassion. "She is a highly strung, nervous woman herself, and her husband puts her into continual terror. She lives in mortal dread of him, and leans enormously upon Miss Ellison."

"And who is she?"

The inspector thought it was time he put in a word. "That there young lady we met in the lane, sir——" he began, and then tailed off into silence at Cleek's quick frown. Doctor Hunter raised surprised brows.

"Oh, you met her out, did you? When was that?"

"This morning. She was running to the post." Cleek's eyebrow flicked in the inspector's direction, commanding silence. "Inspector Cogwell here gave me her name. I had quite forgotten it. Does she live at the Manor, then?"

"Yes, as nurse to the squire. A pleasant, pretty girl, and a great help to Lady Brentwood, though I'm afraid the son forces his attentions upon her rather unpleasantly. She's spoken to me several times about it, but it's difficult, as you must know, for a doctor to take any part in—er—family affairs without engaging the rancour of some one member of its circle."

"Naturally. One of the principal virtues in a medico's make-up is tact," returned Cleek with a little smile, "and you seem to have plenty of that, Doctor. Well, is there anything more you can tell us? How came the young man to take work with a jeweller's? It seems hardly suitable for the son of the Manor of such a place as this. They are usually the most difficult in questions of trade."

"Precisely. But the squire turned Frank out of the house a fortnight ago—it was over some question

of racing debts, I believe—and told him never to darken his doors again. And he had to do something for a livelihood, I suppose. I believe, in fact, that he came across an old friend who put him on to his present job.”

“Then what is he doing down here in his home village, talking with Mr. Spender in the morning, when he ought to be at work?” put in Cleek gently. “Can you answer me that?”

“In one way only. Either he has left his job, someone has lent him some money, or he is on some unexpected holiday,” returned the doctor with a smile and a shrug. “Well, I’ve told you all I know, gentlemen, and I must be off about my work. I’ll send you a certificate round to the station, Mr. Narkom.”

“Thank you.” Mr. Narkom shook hands warmly with the handsome doctor, as Cleek escorted him off the premises. At the front door he paused a moment, and leant confidentially forward.

“Tell me one thing more, Doctor, although I admit I am encroaching upon professional secrets: Who in the Manor House uses drugs?”

The doctor gave him a quick, keen glance.

“I oughtn’t to answer that question, Mr. Carstairs,” he said quietly, “but I know the difficult problem you have to tackle. Sir George has injections now and then—administered by me. I’ve had my doubts of Frank Brentwood for a long time.



And if he adds drugs to dissipation, he'll travel downhill at a quick rate. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," returned Cleek pleasantly, and shut the door just as Jeffries came tearing up to him at a great rate, his eyes scared, his whole face fallen and pale.

"Mr. Carstairs, sir!" he gasped out, thumping his chest for breath. "My mate, wot joined me a while ago, and I 'ave been a-lookin' round the basement, and we've found somethin'!"

"What?"

Jeffries' eyes fairly goggled with excitement. "A dead Chinee, sir, with a crimson sign on his forehead which looked as though it had been done in his own blood!"

A crimson mark in blood upon his forehead! Cleek's face grew grim. For the second time that morning they had found the sinister sign of Kali the Slayer.

## CHAPTER XIII

“SLEEPING DOGS . . . ”

**L**EAD the way, Jeffries,” he rapped out sharply, “and I’ll sing out for Mr. Narkom as we pass. Hi, there!” as they came to the dining-room door before swinging off to the left and down the servants’ staircase to the basement. “Come along, Mr. Narkom! There’s another of ’em found! Lock that door, there’s a good chap, and bring along the key with you.”

“What’s that? Another! Oh, wait a minute, I’m coming!” came back the superintendent’s voice, and in a moment or two Mr. Narkom’s portly figure appeared and joined them in their descent to the basement.

“Another of them found, you say?” he ejaculated as they hastily descended. “Where, and who?”

“I haven’t the dickens of a notion who, but down in the cellars somewhere. This the place, Jeffries? It’s a Chink, you say? Not the little prince, please God! That would be failing in a trust indeed!”

It did not prove to be the prince, and the moment Cleek’s eyes were clapped upon the body he recognized it as the boy who had served Mr. Spender.

There was a bullet-wound through the temple, and the sinister sign of Kali traced roughly in blood upon the forehead.

“The chap with the navy’s hands!” He got down on one knee and scrutinized the dead man’s face carefully. But in the semi-gloom of the cellar very little was visible. “Here, lend me a torch, somebody. I left mine in my overcoat pocket in the car. Thank you, Jeffries.” The spot of light illuminated the rigid features with the cold clarity of electricity. Cleek gave out a sudden exclamation. “Just as I thought! . . . Mr. Narkom, what does that man’s face suggest to you?”

The superintendent peered down into it shortsightedly.

“Make-up, of course!” he announced. “Cleverly done, too! Here, what are you doing, my dear chap?”

“Just proving to myself the truth of my own theory.” While speaking, Cleek’s hands were busy. He lifted the inert head and flicked off the tightly fitting skull-cap and false forehead which had fitted down above the brows, and which, in the gloomy hall the night before, he had never noticed to be an imposture. Forehead and pigtail came off together, and underneath was revealed to their astonished eyes the bullet-shaped cranium of the lowest order of Anglo-Saxon criminal.

“Good God! A white man!” ejaculated Mr.



Narkom. "I know that forehead! Wipe the paint off the face, will you, and those false strappings from the corners of the eyes to hold them slantwise? We've a photo of the gentleman in the Rogues' Gallery at headquarters! Here *is* luck! Jim the Cracksman, wanted for a score of jewel thefts, and as slick a hand at disappearance as ever the Yard had wind of!"

"Whew!" Jeffries whistled with astonishment. Things were happening a little faster than could be followed in his vision. He winked an eye at his mate as if to say, "When the real 'tecs get on the job, something's done!"

"Yes, that's Jim the Cracksman, all right! And the same chap who showed me out last night, and whose hands I noticed as white—in spite of the excellent make-up otherwise. Mr. Spender's boy! Now the thing to get at is whether the old gentleman employed this man with a reason, or whether the real boy had been done away with first, his clothes pinched by Jim, and the impersonation carried through simply for the one evening, and unbeknown to his employer. As the French say, 'it gives one to think,' doesn't it? This house must have been a hive of jewel thieves, Mr. Narkom, humming the long night through with the Amber Ship as their ultimate goal. One thing we know for certain."

"And what's that?"

"Simply that Jim didn't succeed in his mission—

by this revelation here. Whether one of his mates got hold of the jewel and the prince, we don't know. But from my knowledge of Jim's methods, he always worked alone.”

“Yes, that was the dickens of tracking him, there were no others to squeal and give away his hiding places,” responded the superintendent with vigour. “He always disposed of the goods abroad, and then made off to some foreign clime until the noise had died down and surveillance was relaxed. One of the single-handers was Jim. The chief'll be glad to hear of this, anyway. There's been a loop of rope dangling for Jim ever since he shot that woman in that lone farmhouse in Essex. Searched anywhere else, Jeffries?”

“Not yet, sir. Only scoured the kitchens, but never touched upon these here cellars at all.”

Cleek got to his feet rapidly. “Well, there's several yet to account for,” he said, ticking off the number on his fingers, “quite apart from any unknowns that were in this house last night. First and foremost, there's the woman who impersonated Mr. Spender. Whether she was out for the jewel or not I can't say. Her extraordinary likeness to the old man whom Dollops tracked gives one to think that she must be some near relation. And an Oxford don isn't usually mixed up with a set of crooks—at any rate, not women crooks who are connections of his own family. It appears that he had no rela-

tives to the inspector's knowledge. Lived alone here. And we're pretty sure that he is alive somewhere up in London, off the Edgware Road. At any rate, was alive as late as after ten o'clock last night. Dollops has proved that."

"Dollops? How did he know, then?"

"Because I put him on the track of him. But how this woman got here is another question. Anyway, the real Octavius Spender is practically accounted for. Here's the chap who acted as boy for the one night, at any rate. And it's not likely that Mr. Spender would have put up with such an appalling sham as this man's make-up without some of the people here finding the thing out. Put him in the daylight, walking down a street, and even the kiddies would recognize him for the fake he was. So that point's dispensed with, I think. That leaves the original boy to be found, the young prince, and Ah Sing, his Chinese servitor, who, if I know anything of human nature, was as true to his young master as you, Mr. Narkom, to the tenets of the Yard. I'd stake my life on his sincerity and loyalty."

Mr. Narkom watched Cleek's face with interested eyes. "That's three to be accounted for, then?" he said.

"Yes. The original boy, the young prince, and the servant who travelled down in the motor with me yesterday afternoon. You men have got to get busy, Jeffries, and scour the place from top to



bottom for traces of either of these three men. Search every corner of the grounds, every bush and shrub, and bring any shred of evidence straight to Mr. Narkom or me. A piece of cotton will sometimes connect up the chain of circumstantial evidence. See that your eyes don't miss the tiny threads in looking for the bigger things. I think they can go now, Mr. Narkom, don't you? We'll see to this chap, until he can be taken away to the proper quarters.”

“Very good, sir.” The two constables saluted and withdrew, leaving Cleek and the superintendent standing there in the shadows of the dusty wine-cellar, which, from all evidences, had been used as a storeroom as well, for many trunks and boxes of ancient pattern were stacked up one upon the other along the walls, and one box, not fastened because of its overflowing condition, revealed a pile of disorderly papers and books. Over all lay the thick dust of years, and not one of the boxes had been recently disturbed: that was quickly seen.

“No need to waste time examining those, anyhow,” said Cleek, pointing to them. “The thing is to get at the real perpetrator of these two crimes, for that they were done by the same hand is obvious by the sign of Kali upon the forehead.”

“Which reminds me, my dear chap,” whispered Mr. Narkom. “Why did you not tell the doctor what that sign stood for?”

Cleek shook his head at his superior officer with a weary smile.

“My dear Mr. Narkom,” he explained, “surely your own excellent training should tell you that everyone is a suspect until he is proved innocent. And the handsome doctor had to be included in that category for safety’s sake. It’s never wise to tell everything you know, even to the veriest innocent. Our medical friend might go blazoning the thing abroad all over the neighbourhood, and any possible perpetrators of the crime who were in hiding would get a chance to decamp and cover up tracks before we’d got a line on ’em.”

Mr. Narkom nodded meditatively, looking down meanwhile at the sinister figure of the dead crook.

“Yes, perhaps you’re right. This chap’s been shot, Cleek, not killed with the same kind of knife as the woman. Yet you think it is the same hand, do you?”

“I do. By reason of the sign. If you’re a student of chirography, Mr. Narkom, you’ll realize that the person who made that hieroglyphic symbol on the one forehead made it on the other. The turns of the wrist are identical, even in anything so roughly done as this.”

“Cinnamon! old chap, what a pair of eyes you have!”

“You’d be more than short-sighted to miss that point,” returned Cleek rapidly. “Hello—look here!

What’s in the chap’s fingers?” He caught up the dead hand and slowly bent back the stiffened joints, loosening as he did so a fragment of blue embroidered material, about half an inch wide, of the kind that one finds attached to table-centres and mats of Chinese make by means of a special kind of glue that takes the place of sewing. “That’s a scrap off the young prince’s dark-blue tunic. I noticed this bordering ran round the top of his neck, each sleeve, and at the base of the coat. Comes off at the slightest pull, too. And that proves something, anyway.”

Mr. Narkom let out a gasp of amazement.

“What does it prove, then?” he demanded in tones of keenest curiosity. “Is it a clue, Cleek?”

“My name for the nonce is Carstairs, and I’d be glad if you’d remember it, old friend. And it is a clue, of sorts!” said Cleek in lowered tones, glancing hurriedly about him to see if any one had heard Mr. Narkom’s indiscretion. “And it proves a very simple but helpful point. The young prince was downstairs in this room and in the company of this man when he met his death. He had, in fact, got hold of the boy, and was shot, probably from over there in the doorway, by some unknown assailant. The prince, feeling the loosening fingers upon his person, pulled away as the man fell, and Jim’s fingers tore off a little of the narrow embroidery at the bottom of his coat.”



He paused a moment, looking down at the fragment in his hands before continuing further.

“Ever think, Mr. Narkom, why that boy was so stupefied with drugs as to be half-asleep, as he was, when we met him?” he said serenely, studying his fingernails.

The superintendent shook his head, and replied with emphasis: “I suppose an opium pipe, of course. Chinamen are much given to that sort of thing, aren’t they?”

“Yes. But I’ve my own inferences drawn upon the condition of the boy, and that isn’t one of ’em. If you ask me, he was deliberately drugged, whether on the train or beforehand I cannot tell you, but he was drugged with a purpose. And if you had been as quick-sighted as I was, you would have seen that his servant administered a further potion into his cup of black coffee.”

“His servant? My dear chap, you must have been dreaming!” Mr. Narkom’s voice rose with astonished incredulity. “Why, you yourself just made the statement that that man was loyalty personified to his young master. And to drug him deliberately!”

“Ah Sing knew more about his young master than either you or I do,” replied Cleek, “and Ah Sing did the best thing he knew to protect him.”

“To protect him? Oh, hardly that.”

“Well, have it your own way, then. We’ll agree

to disagree, and we'd better be making tracks now, or the inspector will think we've forgotten him altogether, or given him meet punishment for neglect of duty by leaving him all day with the body of a murdered woman.”

## CHAPTER XIV

### ENTER THE APACHES

**W**HEN the usual preliminaries were over, and the victims of this unfortunate affair disposed of according to police regulations, Cleek turned his attention to finding rooms in the village for Mr. Narkom and himself.

“We must get to the bottom of the thing inside of a week, old friend,” he told the superintendent, as they approached the Golden Arm—a hostelry recommended to them by the inspector.

“I can’t spare too much time, though, Cleek. The chief’ll be wanting some sort of a report on those drug-traffickers we’ve been trying to lay hands on lately.”

“We’ll perhaps kill two birds with one stone. If we follow one track to its close, it may lead us in sight of the other one. Don’t forget that the Governor of Kwang-Tin will be requiring news of his son’s safety by letter beyond the ordinary cable you sent him upon his arrival, and that letter must not be too long delayed. If the boy’s alive——”

“You don’t for one moment imagine that he isn’t, then?”



Cleek looked at his friend with something of pity in his gaze. "My dear Mr. Narkom," said he, "when a man is willing to shoot another man, and the gang of the Balankha-Dahs is on the warpath, a mere matter of taking life becomes a bagatelle. The prince's safety will lie simply in his possible knowledge of hiding the jewel. If that jewel has been discovered upon his person, then his body is best out of the way at once. I'm banking on a foolish possibility, maybe, but I've a fancy that that boy has perspicacity and wit, and will try his level best to meet the difficulties of the case somehow."

"Then you think the jewel is somewhere to be found?"

"Who knows? It might be over the German border by now; it might even be here, in this snug little village 'where nothing ever happens,' to quote our worthy friend, Cogwell. That is beyond mere man's vision. What I think is that there is more in this thing than meets the average eye, and that it will take some tracing before we get to the bottom of the affair. So this is the Golden Arm, is it? Not such a bad-looking place, after all, though I wouldn't have trusted the inspector's judgment in other things quite so readily."

They hove in sight of a little hostelry as he spoke, and saw it to be a timbered Elizabethan building with a hanging sign of a golden arm suspended from

the ornamental post over the door, and the window boxes ablaze with scarlet geraniums.

“Prosperous-looking little dug-out, I must say! If the interior is as charming as the exterior, this little trip to Upminster savours something of a country holiday, Mr. Narkom,” remarked Cleek as they walked up the pathway and entered the oak-panelled hall. “Chap who runs this is go-ahead, anyway. Telephone all handy. I’d like a glimpse of the Visitors’ Book if I can get it. Just for mere curiosity’s sake.”

“The Visitors’ Book is there, sir,” put in a voice at this juncture, and Cleek turned to find himself looking into the face of a trim barmaid with white apron and stiffly starched rosette set among her golden coils of hair, by which token she told the world at large that she was not yet one of the emancipated ones who scorned the badge of uniform in servitude.

Cleek smiled at her, and Mr. Narkom cocked an interested eye. She seemed capable of managing them both at once—a fact which amused them immensely.

“Got some interestin’ names ’ere, we ’ave,” she said, as she gave smile for smile and flickered her eyelids in a most provocative manner. “You’re thinkin’ of takin’ rooms, I suppose? Won’t do no better in the village, I can tell you. Mr. ’Arkless is a Lunnon gentleman and knows a thing or two

about managin' 'otels and such-like. Minute 'e come down here, the rooms was full up. T'other chap couldn't make it pay nohow."

"Oh, indeed! Then the present manager has only recently taken it over, I suppose?" put in Cleek with a smile which took her instantly.

"Matter of months, sir. Two, I thinks, or at best three. I was with t'other chap for a year before, and takes over along of Mr. 'Arkless. He tells me I'm smart-lookin' and bright, and treats me fair, which is all I'm arskin' of annybody. And raises me wages regular every six months, so he's promised."

"Quite a perfect employer, then?" returned Cleek, with a flicker of his eyelid in Mr. Narkom's direction. "And so you're pretty full up, are you? Now I wonder, my dear chap, if any of our own friends are staying here for a brief holiday, like we are."

"If you looks in the book you might find some of 'em," put in the maid, Betsy, quickly, with a smile for each. "There's squire's son stayin' here for a few days' hollerday, such a nice young feller 'e is, too! Sweet on that there young nurse as is up at the Manor 'Ouse, and 'er taken with 'im, too, I'd say, by the look of things."

"That'll be young Mr. Frank Brentwood, I take it?" said Cleek, interrupting the flow of confidential talk with which she seemed anxious to flood them. "And the nurse's name is Miss Ellison, I believe.



I met her yesterday. A pretty, dark girl, with big brown eyes. That the lady?"

Betsy sniffed. She was obviously a trifle jealous of Miss Ellison's personal charms.

"Yes, that's 'er. And as for pretty, well, them as likes that kind of mustard-and-water complexion kin 'ave it. Always pale is Miss Ellison, and always worried. Fair gives you the 'ump to look at 'er."

"You're from London yourself, aren't you?" said Cleek with a smile for her Cockney accent. "In spite of the country roses in your cheeks? Ah! I thought so. No mustard-and-water about your face, is there? Peaches-and-cream more in your line, eh? And who else of interest is staying here, can you tell me?"

She bridled under the compliment and tossed her shoulders with self-conscious pleasure.

"Oh, one old gentleman 'oo says he is a lawyer; a party of them there 'Mericans—orful smart and stylish the ladies is, too!—old Miss Beverley, 'oo's come a-visitin' 'er friend Miss Prudence what lives in Rose Cottage and always 'as a kind word fer everyone, bless 'er! And a young couple 'oo's on their 'oneymoon! Like a couple of turtle-doves wiv their 'Yes, darlin'' and 'No, sweet'ear' every ten seconds! Don't know uvver folk live in the world, they don't! And 'er wiv 'er bold black eyes and 'er smart 'ats and all." Betsy burst into a little giggle of merriment that was very contagious.

“’E’s fair Frenchy, ’e is, little turned-up la-di-da moustache, and a pint er brilliantine a-shinin’ like brass polish on ’is ’air! Fair makes you burst wiv larfin’ it does, and——”

“Betsy! Betsy!” shrilled a voice from below stairs, and Betsy stopped in her reminiscences. With a “You’ll find Mr. ’Arkless in his orfice, bottom of this corridor, little door marked ‘Private,’” she dashed off noisily in the direction of the unseen caller, shrilling as she went, “Com-ing, Miss Farcee! Com-ing!”

Cleek turned to Mr. Narkom and laughed heartily. “What a little packet of pure, unadulterated *joie de vivre!* One of those people who make you feel the weight of your years and your responsibilities. Dollops will fall for her, if I know anything of the young Cockney! And as easy to pump as that necessary and useful article out there in the yard.” His voice dropped a tone or two. “Brentwood is staying here, you heard, Mr. Narkom? That helps matters a good deal.”

The superintendent’s face was worried in the extreme. He looked at Cleek and shook his head, mopped his forehead with a gay silk handkerchief—a sure sign, to those who knew him, of mental distress—and then lifted worried eyes.

“I don’t care a fig for Brentwood or any of ’em!” he said in a low whisper. “What worries me is that honeymoon couple.”

“Why? My dear chap——”

“Catch their description clearly, eh? You’re such a rum beggar, Carstairs! So deuced reckless that you’ll run yourself into real trouble, one of these days, and I’ll probably not be there to help you out of it! I don’t like the sound of ’em. I don’t, really. Bold black eyes, and him with a ‘Frenchy moustache!’”

Of a sudden Cleek whirled upon him, brows drawn down, eyes alert.

“You think it might be—*she*? Good lord! I’d never thought of that!”

“No, you wouldn’t. It’s only those who care something for you who would,” retorted Mr. Narkom with savage affection. “But I did—first thing. And before you go booking any rooms for yourself here, I’m going to have a peep at that honeymoon couple and satisfy myself that she’s not in it!”

Cleek’s hand gripped his suddenly with a warmth and sincerity that brought colour pouring into his already red cheek. “Dear old fellow! I’m a lucky beggar to have such a man behind me,” said he, with a little choke in his voice that made it husky. “And——Hello! someone’s coming! Nip into this anteroom here, and let’s hope for the best. The door crack should afford us a peep of who it may be without ourselves being looked at, unless the ‘someone’ is coming into this room, too.”

Footsteps sounded along the corridor above, the



tap of heels rattled upon the linoleum-covered staircase, and a soft, deep-toned woman's voice, recalling instantly Betsy's description, sounded clearly as the owner of it, in company with someone else, descended the staircase.

"No, darling. Just along to the post office. I want some stamps."

The startled look in Mr. Narkom's face communicated itself to Cleek's. Of a sudden his countenance changed. Eyes narrowed, mouth grew grim. Every muscle in the lightly built body tautened as if on a spring. They walked still farther back behind the jamb of the door, and barely drew breath for fear of discovery.

And then the man and the woman passed the half-open door of the anteroom, and as they did so the woman looked up rapidly into the man's face with a darting smile.

The unexpected had happened, and the case had doubled in its intensity. For the feminine member of the "honeymoon couple" was plainly Margot—Margot, the Queen of the Apaches!

## CHAPTER XV

### THE MAN OF THE FORTY FACES

CLEEK sucked in his breath as they passed him and went down into the sunlit street. The perspiration fairly ran in rivulets down Mr. Narkom's reddened countenance. They looked at each other a moment in silence.

"Good God! You were right, old friend! You were right!" Cleek then ejaculated in a low-pitched voice of excitement. "And the fat's in the fire with a vengeance! If that hell-cat's upon the trail, the thing's easy! But she'll be watching out for Cleek, and if she catches wind of Scotland Yard being here——!"

"She mustn't! We must alter our plans, get away somehow and make a quick change!" replied Mr. Narkom rapidly. "Something must be done, Cleek. I'm not going to have you cornered by these swine of Apaches after these two years of freedom! Margot isn't going to claim her erstwhile consort while I'm alive to protect him! When a man has thrown aside the blackened paths of hell and has set his face toward the sun, as you have done, that woman isn't going to drag him back again, I

give you my word! We've had enough of her in the old days, and we'll have to get word to Dollops quickly, and send him back to London again. If she so much as glimpses his red head she'll know the lay, and land you, like the viper she is!"

"True, every word of it," whispered Cleek, with an affectionate squeeze of this staunch ally's arm. "Don't worry, old friend. We'll get out of it somehow. Betsy's the first one to get hold of and drop a word to that we've changed our minds and will be spending the evening with friends in the village to-night instead of here. That'll settle her! Then the inspector must be put wise by telling him that you and I have been called off the case, and a couple of other detectives sent down instead."

"You don't trust him, then?"

"I can't say. Sometimes I feel he's just a lazy fool, and sometimes that he's a shrewd and very clever crook. And yet I'm inclined to lean toward the first theory."

"Well, just as you like. And then we must send Dollops back."

Cleek smiled wisely.

"Dollops has been back ever since this afternoon's train, my dear friend," he replied, "upon orders from me. He's shadowing that other Octavius Spender whom I told you about, and who, I imagine, is the real one, and is to report to me tomorrow morning at the station here."



“Then we’ll have to bring down a disguise for him, and have it ready, when we return ourselves,” put in Mr. Narkom, with a nod. “That’s the thing to do. Gad! I wouldn’t have had this thing happen for anything! It’s the devil’s own luck *she* should have been here, Carstairs! It is indeed!”

“But as she is, she must be reckoned with, and frustrated,” replied Cleek quietly, with a short sigh. “We’d best be off now. Just nip along and speak to Betsy, there’s a good chap, while I alter my countenance a little, and then stroll off in the direction of the police station and have a word with Cogwell. You can join me there if you will. There’s just one point that strikes me in passing.”

“And what’s that?” The superintendent paused at the door, twisting his head round toward his friend.

“Why, simply this: that if Margot and her present spouse had had anything to do with last night’s happenings at the House on the Hill, they would both have cleared off by now, and not stayed hanging around here for any one to catch hold of.”

“H’m. Yes, possibly you’re right.” Mr. Narkom, however, sounded a little dubious. “But she’s a devil for allaying suspicion. Do you think she’s got the jewel, then?”

“No. If she had she’d have gone long before this. That I’ll wager. Margot’s got into this affair a little later than she thought, and things have taken a

turn she hadn't expected," whispered back Cleek, as he gave a twitch to his collar, and altered the construction of his tie until it looked like a ready-made bow instead of the neat Savile Row knot it had been before, "and she's hanging about in hopes of laying her claws upon the Amber Ship. We've that to go upon, anyway. If the jewel had been out of the village, Margot would have been out, too. Her brain's like quicksilver. Now be off, Mr. Narkom, or we'll have them returning here, and our little plans will be upset. I'll see you later."

He waved one hand at the superintendent's figure as it vanished down the corridor. Then a wonderful thing happened, and any one seeing it would have surely thought that his own eyes had proved their deception. For of a sudden his face altered, the features writhed and twisted, with that birthright of his which had won him the notice of a world-wide and not-to-be-desired popularity, and which in the old days of his shame had earned him the sobriquet of "The Man of the Forty Faces." He dived a hand into his coat pocket, drew out a very fair imitation of a brown moustache, clapped it in place upon his lip, twitched down his faultless hat brim until it looked like a tramp's, darted over to a potted palm upon an adjacent table and, seizing a handful of earth, sprinkled it upon his person and then brushed it off lightly, until it made the cloth of his coat look worn and old, let out a reef from his braces so that

the trouser ends tumbled untidily down over his already dusty shoes, and went slouching out into the sunshine, a very epitome of a tired, dusty, commercial traveller out on holiday, and the very living opposite of the man who called himself Hamilton Cleek.



## CHAPTER XVI

### A PAIR OF HONEYMOONERS

**A**S HE slouched toward the station Cleek's mind doubled back over the past events of the day, and his mouth took on a grim line. Margot here! Margot, that devil in woman's guise, whose consort he, Cleek, had been in the old, dead, bad days of the Paris sewers, when he had been wanted by the police the world over for the daring jewel thefts organized and worked entirely by him; that same Margot who had pursued him since he had "turned saint," to use her own phraseology, and the hand that had been with her was now against her, was here. She was here upon the track of the Amber Ship, and upon the, at present to her unknown, track of the man who had turned her down for another, better life with another, better woman, and whom, for these two reasons, she had sworn to catch "dead or alive." She had vowed to pay back, pound for pound, all the hurt pride of his final break-away.

Too many times already she had got her talons almost into his flesh, and he had barely escaped. But for two years now she had lain quiet, after a

supposed death upon his part, duly solemnized in a public fashion. He had begun to think that she, too, must have changed her tactics and believed him really underground, for he had heard and seen no sign from her during those twenty-four months, and the by-streets of London had been curiously free from her slouching Apache bodyguard.

But he might have known! He might have guessed that the Amber Ship would have been too great a prize for her to relinquish, without taking a sporting chance of laying hands upon it. Her "husband" was probably her newest consort, whom she changed with the same ease and rapidity as she changed her gowns, and—clever actress that she was—she had already taken in shrewd little Betsy with her honeymooning ways.

Well, it certainly put another face upon the case, from every way one looked at it.

Reaching the station, Cleek mounted the steps lazily, and then was stopped by the constable in charge, who jumped up and barred his progress.

"Can't come in here, my man, as though you were stoppin' for a drink on your way for a pleasant country walk," he snapped out sharply, as Cleek drew back and glanced up at him with dull, uninterested eyes, shambling from one foot to the other.

"Got a message." The voice was rough, uneducated.

"Well, give it to me, and get out. This is the police

station, I'll have you to know, not the railway station. Where's your message?"

Cleek inserted a finger in his pocket and drew out a card upon which was engraved "John Carstairs," and handed it across to the constable.

"Him's the gentleman that sent me. 'Got to see the inspector himself,' he said. 'Important message.'"

The constable scrutinized the card, and then scrutinized the messenger. He pursed his lips together and thought a moment.

"Inspector's not returned yet from that there 'Ouse on the 'Ill affair," he said at last. "Nasty crime took place 'ere last night. All sorts of unpleasant 'appenings. We've orders to keep a line upon everyone and our eyes open. But if Mr. Carstairs sent you, that's another matter. Better give me the message, and I'll deliver it."

The man seemed to hesitate, then shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes, I suppose I'd better. This is it. Mr. Carstairs said he and the stout gentleman—Mr. Narkom I *think* he called him—was called away to Lunnon suddenly, and he's sending along another couple of detectives to take their places. Most important business at Scotland Yard, he said, else he'd never have left. And would I be certain to see the inspector himself, give him that card as authority for sendin' me, and tell him? But I can't if he's



not back, can I? Hello! I say, bit of smart skirt that, ain't it?"

The constable, thus addressed, whirled round and followed the direction of the other's eyes. The "honeymoon couple" were just passing, the woman hanging on to her husband's arm, her eyes looking up into his face. They glanced round as they passed the station, and gave it a casual look, and involuntarily Cleek's shoulders hunched still further into his coat collar so that his chin was almost lost in it. If she but knew! Well, his number would be up with a vengeance, for she had sworn, Scotland Yard or no Scotland Yard, to get him at last, and he knew enough of her methods to appreciate their adroitness.

But they passed him by without so much as a second glance, and he metaphorically breathed again as the constable, with a knowing wink, remarked that she certainly was "something of a looker." Further remarks upon the lady's charms were stopped by the appearance of the inspector who, as he hove around the corner of the street, paused to speak to the lady and her husband. Then, with a hurried salute, he came quickly up the steps of the police station, his brows furrowed, his face set. He caught sight of Cleek and came to a quick standstill.

"Hello! who the dickens are you?" he said in some surprise. "Not seen you in the village before."

"No, I'm walkin' through to the next one—on

hollerday,” returned Cleek, secretly pleased at the complete success of his hasty disguise. “Brought a message from a gentleman named Carstairs.”

“Carstairs, eh? Chap from Scotland Yard. Very well, then, spit it out. No doubt it’s important—as important as that gentleman thinks himself, with his stylish London ways.”

Cleek’s curious one-sided smile slid up the side of his cheek before he replied. The worthy inspector was obviously not a great friend of his.

“Oh,” said he offhandedly, “gentleman said to tell you he and his friend Mr. Narkom was called off to Lunnon at a minute’s notice, but would send another couple of detectives down immediate. Narsty sort er crime has been happenin’ here, from what the constable tells me, sir. Bit of a mix-up, I should say.”

“Yes, horrible. Found a dead Chink, too, since you were up at the house, Leeson. So they’re going? Thank the Lord for that! Let’s hope we don’t get two such other nigger-drivers down here in place of ’em.”

The inspector’s voice held a note of relief at which Cleek smiled.

“Eh, but they’re slick uns in London,” he retorted as he descended the steps. “Don’t hold with no dangling, half-asleep ways. Used to be in the orfice up at Scotland Yard meself, so I knows. Well, so long to you. You’ve got the message right, eh?”

“Yes. Quite right. So long, Ugly.”

The inspector dismissed him with an airy wave of the hand, and Cleek, tipping his finger familiarly at the constable, went off down the street at an easy pace. In the distance, a good many yards in front of him, he saw the sauntering figures of the honeymoon couple, and determined to keep as near as possible, but out of their sight. So he branched off into a little lane—shaded with high hedges, but running parallel with them—and then sped with winged feet until he had about reached their position. He could hear their voices clearly in the high road. He thanked heaven for the little double row of hedges which saved him from discovery, and gave him such an opportunity to listen to their conversation. He caught the murmur of their voices speaking in French, and tiptoed along beside them, hidden by the screening hedge. No other person was to be seen anywhere. Whatever they had to say to each other, they could say it now without fear of detection, for the roadway stretched ahead of them utterly untenanted, and they had already left the village some distance behind.

“Well, it is gone, of a surety, but *where?*” he heard Margot say in her throaty, imperious contralto, and speaking in her native tongue. “If thou had not been such a fool, Albert, and drunk too much of the good wine to waken up at the proper time, the thing might have been ours now. Why I ever employed



you for the work I do not know! Thou art a dolt, a swinish glutton!"

"But led always by the bright eyes of Queen Margot to the same dizzy stupidity!" he returned, with a laugh and a shrug of the shoulders. "There is yet time, Queen. No one has left this place since yesterday—not by the railway, at any rate. Whoever did the thing must be still here, and that sign of Kali the Slayer should be a hint to follow. Thou knowest as I do——"

She raised an angry hand.

"Be still with thy lying excuses. Name of a dog, Albert, but thou growest more of the sluggard every day! When I went to the house at three this morning, no one was there. The place was empty. Had it not been for thee I should never have failed. And there are automobiles, fool, and motorcycles and other methods of swifter flight than the railway. No, we have lost the stones, and the price they offered us for them. There is nothing for it but to return to London and confess failure. And give Gunga Dal the chance of his lifetime to make a fortune! A bitter pill that." She shrugged her shoulders and gave a little snarl of anger, pushing the man from her with one furious hand. "Fool! fool!" she cried furiously. "Thy fault, thine! Well, let the sewer rats take thee, as they may when we return! I'll have no more of thy company!"

He slumped his shoulders at the rebuke and lifted

adoring eyes to her face, but she was master of him and he dared not speak. Then of a sudden she caught him to her again with a deft swing of the arm.

“Fool that thou art, thou still lovest thy Margot, and that shall help thee to be forgiven,” she said in a soft voice, and he ecstatically caught her hand and kissed it, murmuring something which Cleek could not catch. “But what think you of this Brentwood? Weak-blooded, say I. I tried to coax him to tell me something of the house and this old man who lives in it, and he was dumb as an image. Whyfor but for his own intentions? I could have sworn he had committed the thing and stolen the jewel—yet he remains at the Golden Arm just the same. And—*what’s that?*”

That was the sound of Cleek’s boot, caught against a concealed stone. He went sprawling head foremost, with a most tremendous commotion. That stone had caught him napping. But now he was up again and darting along the lane to the accompaniment of their cries and shouts. Margot’s voice came to him upon the breeze; he caught fragments of it—“Overheard—name of a dog! Get away as quickly as possible—the police-dogs; of a surety”—even as he put as big a distance as possible between them. Their faintly pursuing footsteps sounded farther and farther away; he ran like a hare, bounding over the ground, almost silent. “Holla! Holla! Who is

it?" he heard the man Albert's voice shrill out in a friendly tone. But he still ran on. Round a corner, a sharp turn to the left; through a field of young wheat which left the pattern of his ruthless footsteps. The station hove in sight, and the Yard limousine, with Lennard at the wheel, was standing outside it.

Cleek redoubled his pace, reached the car breathless, whisked open the door and fairly fell across Mr. Narkom, sitting placidly looking out of the window for sight of his ally's slim figure.

"God bless my soul!" gasped out that gentleman breathlessly. "And who the dickens? *Cleek!*"

"Drive on!" rapped out Cleek, ignoring Mr. Narkom's outburst until they had settled other and more important things. "To London, Lennard, as fast as you can make it. Margot and a man are here, and I interrupted 'em. They know someone's on the lookout now, and if they should catch a glimpse of me without this confounded moustache . . . ."

His voice trailed off into silence as the car leapt forward and went rocketing off down the country road at a speed which every constable in the district would have summonsed. And then Cleek settled back in the cushions of the cosy interior, slipped a hand through Mr. Narkom's arm, and patted his chest soundly with the other.

"Gad!" he said with a laugh. "That was a run for my money! I've not got my breath back yet."



But it's taken years off me, old friend, bringing back a little of the joyous adventuredom of youth! For two pins I'd have sung out to 'em who I was—and watched the beggars froth at the mouth. I would indeed! Brentwood, eh? And a chap called Gunga Dal! Then my first guess at the Balankha-Dahs was a good one, and we've got a line on the affair at last!"

## CHAPTER XVII

### SUSPICIONS

**L**ENNARD made good time in that swift, mad drive to London; so good, in fact, that it was barely five o'clock before they had arrived at the Yard, had tumbled out and gone plunging up the steps and into Mr. Narkom's office. Here Cleek immediately began rummaging through the big hanging cupboard in one corner, where he kept his various disguises, with a replica of every one of them in his flat in Clarges Street.

“It's George Headland for me, I think,” he said, as he threw off coat and waistcoat, unlaced his slim, neat shoes, and pushed his feet into policemen's tens, with two socks in them to help for a better fit. A rough Admiralty serge suit was donned as he talked; the mock moustache was removed, and a bushier, brown affair, with a hint of gray in it, fixed in its place; a hunch of the shoulders, a twist of the features, and, as he turned to Mr. Narkom, already himself struggling into a similar suit of blue serge of that rough, hard-wearing quality which the working man adopts for use of a Sunday, he made a theatrical bow.

“God bless my soul!” ejaculated the superintendent, as he puffed and panted into a waistcoat which appeared two sizes too small for him. “If you’re not the most amazing chap in the world! It’s great—great!”

“Thick-headed enough to take in the inspector, and put his mental processes nicely to bed?” queried Cleek with a smile.

“I should say so! Look as though all the intelligence you possessed lived in your enormous boots. What had I better call myself?”

“Oh—Venner. Inspector Venner. That’ll give you standing enough to have it over our lazy friend Cogwell when it comes to authority. Now, then, all ready? I’ve a complete outfit for Dollops here. I’ll leave the bag at the station at Upminster, with word that it be given to him the minute he arrives in the morning, to be examined immediately in the waiting room there. That’ll fix that part up well enough. Now, old friend, there’s just time for a snack at the pub around the corner, and we must be making tracks once more.”

“Well, I’m ready.”

They linked arms and went off down the stairs together, and out round the corner to where the snack was duly partaken of, and then off again to Lennard, and a car—a more unpretentious affair this, as the big blue limousine in which they had first motored down was too noticeable a car to be forgotten.



Upminster was made in record time, and leaving the car at the local garage, Cleek and Mr. Narkom made their way on foot to the Golden Arm, looking something between a pair of A. B.'s and a couple of policemen on holiday, and sauntered into the vestibule, where Betsy of the merry eyes immediately accosted them.

"Got any rooms vacant for a week's 'ollerday, miss?" said Cleek in his best thick-headed fashion, giving her a little poke in the ribs with his elbow and cocking an eye in her direction.

She seemed to understand this language instantly, by the smirk she gave him.

"Guess we kin find a shake-down for a couple of nice gen'lemen like you," she replied. "'Ad two toffs 'ere this afternoon, and booked rooms for 'em, and then they went and did a flittin', and the rooms weren't never used. You kin have 'em if you want. 'Ad any supper?"

Cleek looked at Mr. Narkom, who did a little mouth-smacking that seemed to please Betsy.

"You'd better come along and see what I kin find for yer," she said, leading the way to the now deserted dining room. "Cook'll rake up something 'ot for a couple of gents of your sort. Trust me, you can."

They trusted her to such good effect that a little later she appeared with two plates full of steaming-hot boiled beef and carrots, a dish of dumplings, and

a couple of tureens of country vegetables. She set them down in front of the two men with a beaming smile.

“That’s a bit of all right, miss,” said Cleek, with a nod as he helped himself liberally. “Ain’t it, Jim? Full up here, I suppose?”

She stood talking to them, arms on the table, with an easy familiarity.

“Oh, no. Not altogether. ’Ad an ’oneymoon couple here a while back what was fair amusin’. But a wire come for ’em just before tea, and they ’ad to leave rather suddint-like. Pity, I say. Don’t get much fun into this one-horse little village, I kin promise yer, not after good old Lunnon town.”

So the honeymoon couple had wasted no time, then! Well, that was something to go on, at any rate, and Cleek was secretly rather relieved to know that they would not be living under the same roof with him. Betsy chattered on for some time, and then, when they had finished their meal, showed them the way to the smoking room. It was a smallish room, furnished in the typical country-inn style, with French windows which opened on to a little flagged courtyard at the back of the house. Here stood a green iron table and a couple of chairs, and the warm night smell of growing things rose invitingly through the half-open door.

Cleek settled himself in a basket chair, and gave a huge sigh of comfort as he lit his pipe. The room

was empty save for the presence of a long-legged, pale-faced young gentleman who sat in one corner, a newspaper, folded back at the racing news, across his knees, a pipe in his mouth, and one nervous, restless hand jingling at the slender gold watch chain which stretched across his waistcoat.

“Nice comfortable place, this,” ejaculated Cleek, looking casually at this personable piece of manhood, and noting the pallor of cheeks and the haggard circles round the blue eyes. They told of mental stress or too much dissipation—or an overdose of both. The young man took a drink of his whisky, wiped his mouth, and met Cleek’s eyes with a slight frown.

“Not bad,” he said. “At least, for a village. Like town best myself, though.”

“Well, country’s always nice for a change,” put in Mr. Narkom with a grin. “Gives a chap a chance of settling down and taking stock of things for a bit. On holiday, I suppose, like the rest of us?”

The young man grunted. And Cleek, noting that he was not giving away any of his private business for nothing, put in a word.

“Feed you decently here, may I ask?”

“Oh, so-so. Not bad, you know, for the class of place. Get a good many visitors here during the season and all that. But in the winter we’re deuced quiet.”

“Oh. Then you’re a resident?”



“I should think so! Or rather, I was. My home’s up at the Manor—Sir George Brentwood’s place, you know.” There was a touch of conscious pride in his tone. “I’m his son.”

“Oh, I see. Fine estate, I should think, judging from what I hear,” returned Cleek. “What say to a glass of ale, Jim? Have one with me, will you?” He turned to the young man and waved an inviting hand.

“Er, thanks very much. I don’t mind if I do. Whisky, thanks. Ale always plays the dickens with me, for some reason.”

“P’raps it’s because your head ain’t so old as mine,” said Cleek with a wink and a loud guffaw, “or my pal Jim’s. Venner’s his name. Mine’s Headland. Yours, then, I take it, is Brentwood? Very glad to meet you, Mr. Brentwood. Now, then, Ethel my lass, a couple of pints of bitter and a whisky-and-soda, please.” This to Betsy, who came in answer to his ring. She tossed her head at him, giving a meaning glance at young Brentwood, which passed him by.

“My name’s not Ethel, beggin’ yer pardon,” she snapped back. “It’s Elizabeth Meats—Betsy for short.”

“I’m sure I’m sorry for the mistake. Step lively, Betsy lass; we’ve a thirst big enough to swaller the Thames.”

Betsy stepped lively to such good effect that they

were drinking their separate drinks within the next five minutes, and Cleek noted the eagerness with which Frank Brentwood swallowed his. So the bottle was one of his weaknesses, too? Well, that was pretty plain by the look of him, and the tremor of the hand that lit his cigarette. He wondered how much of this agitation, so openly expressed in the quick, nervous gestures and the twitching lips, he owed to what had taken place at the House on the Hill last night. Then he switched on to another subject.

“Wish I’d brought my camera with me, Jim. This here’s a likely spot for a few nice snaps, I should think. You a camera fiend, too, may I ask?”

Brentwood shook his head.

“No. Used to have one when I was a kid, but never went in for it much otherwise. Never had time. Racing’s more in my line. I’m keen on that. And jolly keen, too, on collecting things. Odd stones, quartz, and things of that sort; bits of old brass and copper and cloisonné. In fact, anything that has a value to it.”

Cleek gave him a quick, keen look. Now, he didn’t look like a young man who would give a straw for such things. And wasn’t, if he knew anything of human nature. But if so, why had he said that? Was he leading up to something?

“Jewellery’s more in my line. Now I do like to set me peepers upon a fine diamond, or something

that really has got a history of sorts, and wot people's lived and perhaps died for," he said in a ruminative sort of voice, as he pulled on his briar and looked up at the ceiling and then at Brentwood again, perceiving a sudden tightening of the lips in the young man's face.

"Well, so do I. That's funny. I'm in the jewellery line myself now, too."

"You, in the jewellery? You don't look like a young gentleman wot follered any trade, if you'd forgive my plain speaking."

Brentwood laughed a trifle harshly.

"Oh, when a chap's got a living to make, he's got to make it at something, and it's best to take the first thing to hand," he replied, a touch of hardness in his voice. "Got the chance, and so I took it. I'm with a man called Amos, in Cheapside. He's got an office in Hatton Garden, too. Taught me a deuce of a lot, he has. Clever chap in his own line. Must say I like the job, though it isn't quite what one would expect a squire's son to do, is it? Only I've had a row with the old man."

Cleek arched his eyebrows. He noted the empty whisky glass and touched the bell.

"Just one more on me, for new friendship's sake," he said, with a smile, as Brentwood tried to dissemble. "Had a row, did yer? Well, that's bad. I remember when I was a kid havin' a row with my pater—he was in the wholesale fish line—and he chucked me



out of the house. Bit of a teaser at first it was, but afterwards, when I found me feet, I was glad I'd had 'im to do it for me. Still, I'm always sorry to hear of a young feller falling out with his parents. How did it happen?"

The sympathy in his tone took Brentwood instantly, and the whisky had a loosening effect upon his tongue. He gave Cleek a watery smile.

"Oh, usual thing. Racing debts, and a girl I fell in love with. Pater wouldn't hear of our marriage, though. Said she wasn't well-born enough, and all that sort of nonsense, and—well, the long and short of it was, I lost my temper, and so did he, and we said things to each other that we shouldn't have said. After that, he kicked me out. And here I am!"

"Bad luck. I'm sorry for you, young man. And so's my friend Jim here. He and I have a lot of sympathy for a young chap down on his luck. And romance always gits yer heart right away, don't it? Local young leddy was she?"

Brentwood nodded.

"Yes. Matter of fact, she's the nurse who takes care of my father. Sweetest girl in the world! He's ill, you know. His brain goes to pieces occasionally. Shouldn't be excited, and all that. Maud looks after him. We've—we've been fond of each other for a long time, but daren't say anything because of the pater. And then that leaves a loop-

hole for that swine of a doctor to pay his unpleasant attentions whenever he calls! Oh, it's a deuce of a mix-up, any way you look at it!"

The second glass of whisky was undoubtedly doing its work well. Cleek wondered how many had gone before he and Mr. Narkom entered the smoking room. The task of pumping this young idiot was so easy as to make one almost ashamed. And now the doctor had entered into the lists of his obvious opponents, had he? And what was it Doctor Hunter had said about him? Paid unwanted attentions to the young nurse in charge of the squire, and pestered her? And here he was saying the same thing about the doctor! Cleek wondered which one of them he could rely on, and felt a little inclined to favour the medico for accuracy of detail. And he wasn't keen on a camera, either? H'm. That also might be a lie. A young chap of Brentwood's calibre would look upon lying as little as he would look upon drinking, and indulge in it equally as often, if he felt like it.

"It do seem a mix-up, I must confess," Cleek replied, with a shake of the head. "I'm downright sorry for you. By the way, funny thing happened last night. I was phonin' for rooms from town and couldn't get on. Girl at the office said the line was out of order. D'you know anything about it at all? Very inconvenient for people wot wants to do urgent business with the city, I should say."

Brentwood fell into the trap at once, and more headlong than Cleek had ever dared to hope for. For, thinking of Miss Ellison, he had remembered the words she had used to him the night before about the phone being out of order as an excuse for her leaving her patient at that hour of the night. Here was just a vague chance of ascertaining whether she had spoken the truth or not. Brentwood settled it once and for all.

“No, I don’t think there was anything wrong, so far as I know,” he said, with some show of surprise. “Fact is, I phoned to London myself, and got through all right, and Miss Ellison phoned me here at the house from the Manor. What time did you ring up?”

“About half-past nine,” replied Cleek offhandedly, taking a chance shot.

“That’s strange. It was a quarter past nine when Maud called me, and their line wasn’t out of order, at any rate. Those telephone girls are the very dickens for making mistakes, aren’t they? You ought to make a complaint. What’s that? Yes, I’m on holiday. Got four days off while my boss is away in Scotland, seeing a customer who wants some jewels reset. Believe he didn’t trust me along with his blessed stock, that’s what the trouble was! And so he told me to make myself scarce until next Monday, and of course I came here straight away.”

“Of course.” Cleek got to his feet, stretched



himself, pulled out his watch, and then gave a hasty exclamation of surprise. "Now who'd 'a' thought it?" he ejaculated. "Here it is a quarter past eleven. Better be making tracks, Jim."

"Jim," thus spoken to, rose clumsily and rubbed his eyes. But young Brentwood jumped to his feet with a rather unsteady alacrity, and began making for the door.

"Quarter past eleven! And I've got an appointment—at least, I promised to meet a chap at twenty past. And it's a good ten minutes' walk to the meeting place!" he said, with a nod to each of them. "Many thanks for your hospitality. You must let me return it to-morrow evening. Pleased to have met you, I'm sure. We'll probably see something of each other during this week-end. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Cleek and Mr. Narkom in chorus. Then the door closed behind Brentwood and he was gone. Cleek tiptoed to the half-open French window and looked out.

"That," said he over his shoulder, "is about the easiest task I've ever undertaken. The young fool is heading straight for the devil with as long strides as I've ever seen a fellow take. And it's a pity his mother doesn't try and lend a hand to haul him back. Racing and drinking and deceit. Funny how they all three run together! And funny, too, that he should have been given that four days' holiday

when his employer was away, leaving the business unattended to. Notice that, did you, old friend? Good lie, that. I twigged it at once. There's more in his presence here than any mere love affair. I'm certain. I'm going to track him to that meeting place, and see if what I suspect about him be true."

With which words, he vanished through the French windows, and Mr. Narkom heard nor saw any more of him that night.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A PAIR OF MUDDY SHOES

**I**T DID not take Cleek long to trail Frank Brentwood, for there was a good moon that night, and he could see his tall figure moving somewhat unsteadily down the road and at last swinging off to the right, to where a big field of wheat stood ghostly in the darkness, and a spreading oak tree over against the hedge made a patch of impenetrable blackness where its shadow fell upon the twin fields it looked down on.

Cleek slipped up under shelter of the hedge, and hid himself behind a bramble-bush a few paces to the rear of the tree, and in the next field adjoining it. Here he might listen and not be seen, and if using his eyes was difficult, there was a patch of moonlight silting through the interlaced branches in one spot, to which lucky chance might lead Brentwood and his unknown gentleman friend.

But there was no one beneath the tree except Frank Brentwood himself when Cleek had safely ensconced himself in his hiding place. He saw the young man take two turns up and down, and then strike a match, look at his watch, and mumble some-



thing to himself. And just as he was wondering exactly who this gentleman friend of Brentwood's could be, and what bearings he might or might not have upon the case, the friend arrived with a flurry of skirts. It was a woman, and a young woman, too, by the swiftness of the moving feet. Then Cleek drew in his breath with a silent whistle as she moved into the patch of moonlight. Miss Ellison, eh? So that was the meaning of the clandestine meeting, then! It would be interesting to hear what they had to say to each other.

But Cleek never knew nor realized, until he had had the evidence of his own ears to tell him, just how interesting that conversation was likely to be, for her shrill voice rose suddenly above the whisper with which she had greeted her lover, and a blade of moonlight lit up her face, showing the anxiety written thereon.

"I must have it, Frank! I tell you I must, dear! You must get hold of it somehow!" she said, and then, as Brentwood's hand went quickly over her mouth and his voice spoke a soft and tender reprimand, she laughed a little nervously and obeyed him. "Darling, I can't tell you how necessary it is! Yes, yes, I promise not to talk too loudly, only I forget sometimes, and Heaven knows there is surely no one within seeing or hearing distance at this hour of the night! But, Frank dear, you must go for it tomorrow—somehow or other, no matter what risks you take! But I must have it. I must! I must!"

“But I tell you, Maud dearest, the man is dead, and the dead can’t rise and give it to you, can they?” he returned, in a slightly thick voice which made her glance quickly up at him.

“Frank! You’ve been drinking again! And after all your promises, too! Oh, everything seems to have gone wrong now, everything! If you really loved me——”

He caught her to him roughly, and smothered her upturned face with passionate kisses.

“I do, I do! You know that, Maud. There is no one but you in my life, and it is the knowledge that I must deny you, put you on one side before the world, all because the Guv’nor, with his pig-headed notions of snobbery, doesn’t think you’re socially my equal, which makes my gorge rise! And a chap must have something to drown his sorrows in, you know. You beg for forgetfulness in one way. I take it in another. What’s the odds when life’s so short? Kiss me, Maud. Do you love me?”

Cleek caught the tremor of her voice, and felt a beast for prying upon them at such a time.

“Of course. You know that, dear. Otherwise, I would never have done *that*, for you. I do love you, Frank, with all my heart and soul!”

“Do *that* for him?” Now what was “that,” to start with? And what was it that she seemed so terribly anxious for him to obtain for her? Something for which he must take any risk, no matter

how grave! Something that she couldn't do without! And they spoke of the man's being dead, and that the dead couldn't rise and give it to her? There was something here which wanted looking into; that was plain.

"Well, I've got to slip back to London to-morrow," went on Brentwood, after a tense pause, "and I'll show up at the office to Weston, so's he'll think I've been doing the rounds in town all the time, as I promised old Amos I would."

Cleek could hear her sigh.

"Oh, this lying and deceit! Why don't you tell him the truth, Frank, and let him do what he likes about it? But to take advantage of a man when he is away like this! Oh, sometimes I don't seem to see things straight any more. Life's a maze, whichever way you look at it, and you may walk and walk as straight as you please, and find yourself farther away from the goal at the end than you were at the beginning!"

"It doesn't pay to be too honest, Maud," he whispered back, with a harsh, thick laugh which made her draw away from him sharply.

"Don't talk like that, Frank! It's not worthy of you. And it makes me ashamed. Life is hard enough, as it is, with that man Hunter pestering me at every turn! I believe he's found out, and is going to hold it over me! Oh, I don't know what I believe."



“Well, I do! I believe I’ll wring his dirty neck for him if I find him pestering you any further—that’s flat!” he said passionately. “I won’t have him clawing you, Maud. You’re mine, and you know it. And for all his handsome face and handsome ways, I loathe the chap as much as I like his sister. Poor little Mrs. Verity! Now that’s a tragedy, if you like! But Hunter! Listen to me, Maud. If he starts any more monkey-shining with you, send me a wire and I’ll come down and blow his brains out!”

“Hush—hush! If any one heard! Frank, dear, do be careful what you say,” she interposed anxiously.

He gave a harsh laugh. He was obviously just drunk enough to be quarrelsome.

“And don’t you see, Frank, if you quarrel with him, he’ll—tell?” she went on.

There was a pause, and then Cleek heard him suck in his breath noisily.

“Yes, I s’pose he will. And that mustn’t happen yet awhile,” he returned in a dubious kind of voice. “’Cause if it did—— Well, it’d be the end for little Frank, I promise you.”

“And the end for Maud Ellison, too! There’s no going back now, Frank. The thing’s done, and done for ever. And you and I, if ever it is found out, must stand the racket. But get it for me somehow, darling. I simply must have it. To-morrow night, Frank. You won’t fail me, will you? And bring

it with you. Oh, I must go now, or Sir George will waken and start calling for me. Good-night, darling, and God bless you, and forgive us if we have done very, very wrong!"

Done very, very wrong? What had they done which was so wrong? Not murder, surely? And yet one never knew. Brentwood admitted he didn't care for cameras. So the cyanide hadn't been obtained for that—if he had obtained it at all. Then, again, he was in the jewellery trade now, and she wanted him to get something for her at whatever risks, but to get it! And what was it the doctor had said? That he had seen him standing in the drive of the House on the Hill, arguing with Mr. Spender and saying that he must have it—just a glimpse, etc.

Cleek had, somehow or other, been almost sure that the good doctor was lying when he gave him that little piece of evidence. But here it was, dovetailing quite excellently with what these two very-much-in-love young people were saying out here under the moon. And the doctor knew something about her which she was afraid he might tell! The whole interview gave into his hands all sorts of tangled threads to which, as yet, he could find no clue.

But stay, couldn't he? He paused a moment in thought, and then glanced away instinctively as they said their last good-bye to each other. Poor kids! Let 'em have that entirely to themselves,

anyway, no matter what other criminalities they might be mixed up in. Then he began slowly to put two and two together, and to discover that, in his intelligence, anyway, they were fairly clearly making four.

During which interesting procedure, Maud Ellison had taken her hurried departure in one direction, Frank Brentwood was taking his in another, and Cleek, feeling that age was laying its inexorable fingers upon him in the stiffening of joints held too long in the one posture, straightened himself with a sigh of relief, and started for the inn again by another route. This eventually led him some distance out of the way, and brought him at last through the garden entrance, and in by the French windows, which still remained ajar, and led into the smoking room.

He tiptoed up the first flight to his bedroom. The light was still shining in the hall above, though there seemed to be no stir of life about him. Obviously this thoughtful landlord catered for the out-laters. Cleek turned the handle of his bedroom and switched on the light. Then he glanced back along the corridor before turning in. And at that moment the door next to his opened, and a hand put out a pair of muddy, clay-caked, brown walking-shoes. Cleek swung his own door to quickly, and then, after a minute, opened it and looked out.

By some lucky chance his room was next to



Frank Brentwood's, and those shoes he was putting out were certainly not the pair he had been wearing that evening. For Cleek had noted that they were black brogues. And there had been no clay in the lane. Neither was this a clayey district. But stay, clay was good for roses! And the garden of the House on the Hill was full of them! In a twinkling he remembered the rosebed which girt the Oriental study window. And, too, another large bed which surrounded the outer side of that strange Echo Tower. Of course, there might be rosebeds up at the Manor. He couldn't tell that yet. But he was beginning to form some fairly strong theories upon the case in question. And he wasn't liking Frank Brentwood a great deal, either.

With a somewhat grim look about his mouth, Cleek silently drew in his head and shut his bedroom door.

## CHAPTER XIX

### FOUR LETTERS

CLEEK was up betimes. He fixed the grizzled moustache in place, slipped on his dressing gown, and unlocked the door to take in his shaving water. As he did so, a shaft of sunshine, from just to the left of him, fell across the hall, and as a similar shaft came from his own open door, he took it that the door next to his on the left was also open, and stopped to listen. But there was no sound from the room, so he stepped quietly out into the hall and peeped in through the crack. The room was empty. The window stood wide open, blowing the casement curtains to and fro. The bed was untidily tossed back, and drawers of chest and bureau were thrown open. Even the wardrobe door was ajar. But there was no one in the room.

So Cleek, taking things into his own hands, walked in, gave a quick survey, and walked out of it, hoping that, by a lucky chance, no chambermaid would be about as he entered the hall again.

Yes, the room had been slept in, but its occupant—and he knew that occupant to be Frank Brentwood—had gone, for no trace of clothing was to be

seen. Shaving tackle, pyjamas, everything had vanished, proving that the young man had left altogether. Back to London, possibly, to obtain the precious thing which Maud Ellison was pleading so earnestly with him to get for her. The Amber Ship? Perhaps. Perhaps not. And yet, it might easily be. But what did she want that for? It wouldn't be of any use to a girl like that, unless she wanted to hand it on to someone else in case of discovery for him. But that notion seemed rather far-fetched in face of it. Yet he had formed a theory last night.

He stepped out into the corridor again and into his own room. Then he rang the bell, and when the chambermaid came, he demanded to know the way to the bathroom.

"Just down that passage, sir, first to your right," she replied, and as he followed her a little way, he turned his head accidentally, as it were, in the direction of Brentwood's room, and remarked with a casual air that there was someone else up as early as he.

"Oh, yes, sir, and 'ad his breakfast, too, and off to catch the eight o'clock for Lunnon," she returned pleasantly, opening the bathroom door for him. "Always comin' and goin,' that young gentleman is. Son of the squire up at the Manor House, sir. Young waster, though, from all I sees, though I don't tell everythink I knows. Got yer towels, sir?"



“Yes, thanks.”

Cleek closed the bathroom door, mentally registering the fact that in spite of her remark he recognized in her the usual garrulity of her kind, and forthwith proceeded with his cold bath, from which he emerged presently to finish dressing, and then was off to Mr. Narkom's room, a few doors farther down, to hunt that worthy gentleman out of bed.

He found him sipping tea leisurely and clad in a pair of futuristic pyjamas which were a deathblow to eyesight.

“My dear chap!” expostulated Cleek on sight of them, “I don't wonder you suffer from nightmare! Well, how goes it? Getting up now, I hope? There's plenty on foot for to-day's work, I can promise you.”

Mr. Narkom nodded, stretching himself.

“All right, all right, you indefatigable ass!” he said with jocular affection born of a good eight hours' sleep on a good bed. “I'll be down in a jiffy, and join you in the breakfast room. By the way, what happened last night? Anything of interest?”

“Of great interest. I listened to a love scene, and felt odd man out, I can tell you, with Ailsa two hundred miles away from me at the moment, and no letter—naturally—awaiting me this morning. And then I heard—well, several things. Tell me what you make of 'em.”

He perched himself on the bed and told him briefly

the happenings of last night, while the superintendent smōked his first cigarette. At the end of the recital his eyes were alight.

“Gad, Cleek, you’ve fallen upon something which looks like business, I’ll swear to that!” he said explosively, bounding out of bed and starting the task of dressing. “What if it is the Amber Ship they’re after? What if he has got it in hiding, eh?”

“Maybe. But I’ve other plans than going after that line to-day, old friend. In the first place, I’m doing a little peddling up at the Manor House, to obtain an entry there, and look round as to how the land lies in that direction. So if Dollops turns up here, or joins you at the House on the Hill—I suppose you’ll be up there most of the morning investigating, and arranging about the inquest, won’t you?—just tell him to join us here for tea, and be ready for another journey Londonwards. Good-bye for the present, and don’t be too long about dressing. I’ve an appetite big enough for seven!”

It was a bare fifteen minutes later when Mr. Narkom joined him for breakfast, proving undeniably the fact that though one might take an out-size in waistcoats, one could be as nippy as a youngster of sixteen if one was so disposed, and the two of them sat down to a hearty breakfast.

As it happened, they were the only occupants of the dining room, but before they had quite finished their last slices of toast, and Mr. Narkom had just

reached for the marmalade with a sigh of satisfaction, someone else entered the room. This was a tall, thin, rather plain woman of middle age, with nothing whatever about her to attract save a pair of kind brown eyes beaming upon the world through steel spectacles, and a rather thin-lipped, firmly set mouth. Her clothes and hat, which she wore just then as if in readiness for going out immediately afterward, were of a nondescript order.

Yet Cleek, trained in the niceties of observation as he was, took stock of her immediately, and then went on with his breakfast. Who was she? Betsy, entering the room at that moment, soon told him. She bore down upon the newcomer, with her beaming smile, nodded a bright, "Good morning, Miss Beverley. Nice morning, ain't it?" to which that lady responded in a quiet voice, "Very nice indeed, Betsy. Yes, please; eggs and bacon, as usual. No letters for me, I suppose?"

"No, Miss Beverley. No letters for any one but Mr. Brentwood, and they come so late he'd gone beforehand. Back to Lunnon, you know. Always on the move, that young gentleman. Tea or coffee, miss?"

Cleek heard Miss Beverley fetch a deep sigh.

"Tea, please. I suppose I can hardly expect a letter first post, but if one should come the second post, Betsy, take very good care of it for me, and put it on one side. I shall be out with Miss Prudence this morning. We're visiting Brook Lane, and have



to call upon several sick people of the parish to-day. If I can, I'll return—the letter's very, very important. But if not, take care of it for me, like a good girl, and you shall have a shilling to save toward that new frock you told me of."

Betsy beamed delightedly as she brought back the dish of bacon and eggs.

"Thank you very much, miss. I'll see the letter comes to no harm. Will it have the Lunnon post-mark?"

"Yes." Miss Beverley cast her eyes about her before she replied. Then, "It's from Cheapside," she said softly. "And it relates to some—er—jewellery which my banker is taking care of for me. Has my morning paper come, do you know?"

Betsy went in search of the paper. Meanwhile, Cleek hailed her as she passed with it, and demanded a jug of hot water and a little more toast.

"Cinnamon, old chap! You're making a very good breakfast," said Mr. Narkom, with some show of amazement. "Something new for you, too, if I remember rightly. Now breakfast never was your strong meal." His voice trailed off into silence as Cleek administered a sharp kick to his shins under the table, and, in response to the amazed expression upon the superintendent's face, murmured blandly: "Country air doesn't harf give you an appetite, eh, Jim? That's wot comes of hollerday time. Makes a new man of you, don't it?"

During which time his hands played idly with a piece of toast, which to the ordinary onlooker meant nothing, but which to Mr. Narkom signalled plainly the words, "I'm interested. Lady behind. Listen," to which message the superintendent replied with a terse, "All right."

So the toast was brought, and the two men made much show of eating and drinking, until the lady in question had quite finished her own breakfast, and, gathering up the loose pages of her newspaper, made her way leisurely out of the room, without so much as glancing in their direction.

But it was astonishing how quickly Cleek finished his meal after that, hastening outside, only to catch a glimpse of her walking down the path rather hurriedly in the direction of the village, and saw her disappear round a bend of the hedge before he returned to the house. Mr. Narkom was waiting for him, scanning the paper with frowning brows.

"Got a line on the whole wretched affair," he said testily, pointing to a paragraph headed *Mysterious Murder in Upminster. Oxford Don Found Dead in His House*. "Those darn' reporters! There's no hiding anything from them at all! I could have sworn we'd kept the affair quiet enough, but if they get wind of the young prince's disappearance, old fellow, the fat will be in the fire with a vengeance. I've yet to answer to his father for his safety."

"Better cable the truth to him to-day, and promise

further news by each succeeding twenty-four hours, or the papers will get ahead of you," returned Cleek in a low-pitched voice, although seemingly they were the only people about the place at the moment. "When the papers get on to a thing, the whole world knows of it inside of five minutes. It'll be a big scoop for the newspaper that first gets hold of the story, and the good Governor's worthy satellites in this country will surely cable him word the instant the thing is published. And Scotland Yard will look like last year's hat in a thunderstorm. Cable this morning, that's my advice."

Mr. Narkom nodded. "I suppose I'll have to. What are you going to do, old chap?"

"Hang about here until the postman comes, and have a peep at the letters," returned Cleek serenely. "I want to know what the lady is expecting from her banker in Cheapside, among other things. And I want, if possible, to have a peep at Brentwood's correspondence, if there's a chance of getting a hand on it. I'll just enquire what time the post comes in in this benighted little spot. Betsy's the girl to tell me. Hi, Betsy!" as she passed through the little hall, a breakfast tray in her hands, "stop a minute, and tell me what time the post comes in?"

"Eleven, sharp. Seems to me everyone's expectin' letters," she said, with a little grimace at him. "Don't yer lady love let yer alone even on 'ollerday?"



“No, because for why? Because I haven’t got one,” responded George Headland in his best fashion. “Got a picture palace here, Betsy? ’Cause if you have, we’ll do a show one night. And, by the way, which way to the post office, please?”

“None of your sauce, Mr. Cheeky!” she retorted. “First to your right down the High Street. And you’re goin’ there, are yer? Well, if you’d be so kind as to pop these letters into the box for Mr. Brentwood, I’d be that grateful. He left me strict word as I wasn’t ter delay sendin’ them on, and I don’t see as I shall get a minute to run out this mornin’. Number Three’s down with a bilious attack. *I* could tell him why—only I ain’t arsked. I’ll fetch the letters this minute.”

She put down the tray on the hall settle, and darted over to the letter rack, pulling out two envelopes and bringing them to him.

“There now! I ’aven’t got a pen ’andy! And they must be re-addressed. Lor! there’s one from Miss Ellison, too. I knows the handwritin’!”

“I’ve a fountain-pen. Now tell me where to address ’em.” Cleek had whipped out his pen, and stood with it ready poised in his hand.

“Oh, let me see. ‘% Messrs. Amos & Co., Jewellers, 16c Cheapside, London.’ That’ll find him all right. You’re fair kind, you are.”

“Only too pleased.” Cleek gave her a heavy bow and then fetched a wink, and taking Mr. Nar-

kom's arm, strolled leisurely off with him into the garden. But once out of sight of the house, he stopped, put the letters into his pocket and went off down the street, in the direction Miss Beverley had taken, and, passing Rose Cottage a minute or two later, saw her in company with Miss Prudence, the old vicar's daughter, standing by the gate, in obvious readiness to go out upon their errand of mercy.

Miss Prudence was a small, angular female, narrow-shouldered and with a slight stoop. She wore unrelieved black, with just a little white cord sewn in the high collar, and a shady black lace hat upon her head, and her hands, thin and work-hardened as they were, still looked the hands of a lady as they rested upon the basket on her arm filled with packages that looked like groceries to Cleek. Her blue eyes met his as he passed, and at the expression of them he understood just why the village people loved her. For they were eyes that one would trust on sight, and never find that trust confounded.

“What a sweet-faced woman!” he said as they got out of earshot. “That's Miss Omritt, I take it—Miss Prudence Omritt, who is the Lady Bountiful of the village, from what Betsy says. She and her friend are off on an expedition of charity together. Well, good women are scarce in this bad old world. They should be cherished, every one of them.”

“Quite right, old chap. But where the dickens are you taking me?” put in Mr. Narkom, gazing

about him in some curiosity. "The post office is in the opposite direction."

"True, but we're getting back to the Golden Arm, and up to my room, where I mean to do a little steaming of letter flaps on my own. Betsy, however, has to be reckoned with. I wanted to have another peep at Rose Cottage, and also I was obliged to go out somewhere, so that she would think I had been to the post office. And now those letters will only miss one post out—which won't do them a particle of harm. It's ten to eleven now. We'll get home in time for the postman, and I needn't perjure myself by saying I'd seen Miss Beverley when I hadn't."

They entered the inn together and came across Betsy, duster in hand, hanging out of the little hall window and talking animatedly with some tradesman who was there. He left, with a sheepish grin, upon their approach, and Betsy turned round and saw them.

"Hello! You gentlemen back a'ready? Well, you'll not have to wait long for the postman now, for I see him comin' down the road, and if there's a letter for you," with a grin at Cleek, "you'll 'ave it inside of a minute. Miss Beverley's expectin' one, too, and wants me to keep it for 'er, if she don't come back to fetch it herself."

Cleek began to whistle and stroll up and down the hall, hands in pockets, while Mr. Narkom, with a



hurried word about seeing someone, excused himself and withdrew. Betsy made a grimace at his re-treating back.

“Nice lively sort er gentleman yer friend is, I must s’y!” she said, with a toss of her head. “P’raps ’e’s savin’ up all ’is words to speak ’em in his coffin. Mornin’, postman. Nothin’ fer me, I suppose?”

The village postman, a sturdy, broad-shouldered fellow, grinned at her and handed her a packet of letters.

“No, none for you, Betsy. Not this time. Plenty fer the rest of the company, though. Here y’are. Good mornin’.”

Betsy sorted the letters out and rammed them in their little groups, through the cord on the letter rack while Cleek stood idly by, watching her. There were numerous envelopes addressed to the master of the house, and a lot of assorted correspondence, amongst which stood out one for Miss Beverley, at “The Golden Arm, Upminster,” in a firm round hand. But there was nothing for him.

“Bad luck,” said he with a sigh. “I’m forgotten this time, too. Well, well, I suppose I’ll hear from my folks some other day. Saw Miss Beverley just now at Rose Cottage. If you like, seeing as you say she wants her letter, I’ll run down with it to her, on my way out. Won’t be any trouble, if it’ll be a help—to you!” with much significance. He reached up and took the letter out of the rack.

“All right,” said Betsy, beginning to flick her duster about at the sound of approaching footsteps. “That’s real kind of you. Here’s the master! I’d better be off. He don’t like me gossipin’ with the visitors.”

And so the letters fell into Cleek’s hands quite naturally, and, before delivery, underwent the delicate operation of steaming along with the three others for Frank Brentwood.

But it is not on record which of the letters was the one which caused Cleek to give a hasty exclamation of amazement, and, having made a hurried copy of it, to seal it up again, stuff it into his pocket with the others, and make off for the post office and a telegraph form as quickly as possible.

Miss Beverley was standing outside the shop as he entered it. He stopped and raised his hat, holding out the letter to her.

“Betsy asked me to give this to you, if I saw you, madam,” he said politely. “She said you were expecting a letter and was anxious to get it, and as I was passing along here, I brought it with me on chance. No trouble, I assure you. Only too pleased.”

Then he lifted his hat before her startled eyes could rest barely a minute upon his, and entered the post office. But there was an odd, set look upon his face.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE UNSEEN WATCHER

**H**AVING posted the various letters, Cleek returned to the Golden Arm to hear that there was a young gentleman enquiring for him. This gentleman turned out to be Dollops, transformed, by reason of the bag Cleek had left at the station for him, into a black-haired, black-moustached young fellow for whom, he discovered, Betsy had already had "an eye."

"Hello!" sang out Cleek on sight of him. "Fancy seeing you down here already! Fixed up your quarters, have you?"

Dollops nodded.

"Ra-ther! Betsy here has found room for me, though she says they're pretty well full up. But she can give me a shakedown for a night or two, at any rate. 'Ow are yer, matey?"

"Fine!" Cleek winked and smiled at the boy, noting the quickness of perception he showed in instantly falling in with the run of things. "Come along with me now, and 'ave a country walk. You and me 'ave got a lot of things to say to each other.



This young feller, Betsy, is a rare chum of mine in Lunnon town."

Betsy smiled sweetly before making reply.

"Well," said she at last, "'e sure don't seem sich a coffin-mate as t'other chap, anyhow. 'Im with the silent mouth, I means. Lor! I must be gettin' on; it's after twelve."

So saying, she scuttled down the passageway. Meanwhile Cleek, taking Dollops's arm, led him out into the garden, and thence through the gate to the roadway. Once here, Dollops turned upon his master with an eagerness hard to suppress.

"Guv'nor!" he whispered excitedly, "I 'aven't 'arf got a piece of news for yer! That ole johnny you tole me ter foller——"

"Yes, yes?" Cleek's voice rapped out a sharp tattoo of excitement. "What's happened to him? That's exactly what I want to find out."

Dollops glanced quickly about him, to be sure no one was looking.

"He's *dead!*"

"Dead? What do you mean, boy?"

"Dead, sir, killed. I fahnd 'im lyin' on 'is side in the back kitching of the shop this mornin' before I come dahn 'ere. Summink seemed to tell me I ought ter go back to the shop and keep my eyes peeled fer further developments. And there 'e was. I 'ad ter break inter the plyce as I couldn't get no answer to my ring, nor see anybody when I went in-

side on pretence of buyin' a few books. He was stabbed, sir, stabbed cruel wiv a funny-lookin' cut over 'is 'eart, and not a breff in 'is pore old body! Fair got me, it did!"

"Stabbed, you say? Good heavens above! Can the two things be linked up in any way? Did you make any inquiries? Set the police upon the case, or what?"

"Yes, sir. I rang up Hammond immedjut. Then I started a few questions orf me own bat, rahnd the neighbourhood. Learnt that the old chap—whose name was Spender, same's the feller up at the 'Ouse on the 'Ill, sir—was a bit of a 'ermit and loved sittin' among 'is books, seein' no one, and doin' nuffink. That 'e didn't appear to sell anythink much in the book line, and that the neighbours often wondered 'ow 'e made 'is living, wiv so few customers. And that every now and agin 'e'd set to and furbish up the place, and put out placards of things fer sale, to hurry things up a little. And after a time, everythink 'd go slack again, and the sale placards would fall down in his window and lie there until they fair mouldered away, or until sich time as he perked up again and got busy spring-cleanin' once more."

"Sort of Dr.-Jekyl-and-Mr.-Hyde business!"

Dollops made a wry grimace.

"Well, I don't know them two gen'lemen, sir, but if you says so it must be true. Not that there ain't

some black sheep in the world wot believes nuffink from nobody. And there's summink else, sir, so sit tight and 'old yer 'at on. I set me peepers on 'er!"

"Who, Dollops?"

"Not Miss Lorne, sir, which is the only her which concerns you, I knows. Not that h'angel, sir. No; the she-devil, the hell-cat wiv the dagger-whiskers. That fiend Margot, sir. And she's in it, I lay, right up to 'er wicked neck! That's why I 'urried dahn 'ere first thing I could, ter warn yer. You've got to 'op it, sir, as soon as convenient, else she'll be settin' of 'er fingernails inter yer, and won't let go till you're gone ter glory!"

Cleek laughed softly, and squeezed Dollops's arm.

"I know, lad," he said in a low-pitched voice, "for I've seen the lady down here already, and her newest consort with her. She was putting up at this very inn."

"You ain't stayin' in the same 'ouse wiv 'er, are yer, Guv'nor?"

"Hold on a minute, boy. No, because she's gone away. I happened to overhear a conversation between her and her latest partner in crime, and I gathered that they were leaving the whole affair, as he had overslept himself, or something of the kind, and didn't turn up at the House on the Hill in time to lay his hands upon the Amber Ship. And she also mentioned the Balankha-Dahs."



“The Balankha whats, sir?”

Cleek put back his head and laughed heartily at the boy's amazement.

“That was even one too many for you, wasn't it,” he returned with a quick change to seriousness once more. “The Balankha-Dahs, I said. And that is the name of a secret society that has one of its headquarters in London, and its membership consists of every fanatic in the way of a religious maniac who can write Hindoo in the space where his nationality is demanded.”

“Hindoo! But there ain't any Hindoos in this 'ere horrible business, sir; only Chinks and Englishmen,” returned Dollops with emphatic excitement.

“No, that's what gets me guessing. Only Chinese and English—the two of which make a concoction which is highly seasoned enough to be able to do without any further mingling of races. And yet—well, well, time will show. But don't worry over Margot and her crew, Dollops. She's dropped out of it, of that I am perfectly certain. You've no more reason to fear in that quarter.”

“I'm not so sure, sir. The pair of 'em were standin' in Victoria Station and quarrellin' like as though summink 'ad thoroughly upset 'em. They was jabberin' away in French so's I couldn't understand what they said, but at larst they parted, and she went towards the bookin' orfice for Upminster. 'E went outside and 'opped into a 'bus goin'

north. I saw 'er book a first-class ticket for Upminster, positive, sir; then she swings away from the bookin' orfice, and starts after 'im. And then I comes dahn 'ere straightaway. But she'll be dahn 'ere before long, I lay, and you'll 'ave ter look pretty nippy clearin' up things afore she comes."

"H'm." Cleek stopped a moment, and taking his chin between his thumb and forefinger, pinched it hard, as one who would say, "Well, what the dickens am I to do next?" Then he turned to Dollops, with a glint of adventure showing in his eyes.

"Gad!" said he, "it will be like the good old days, when I was her quarry, to be under the same roof with her once more! Always providing the lady does show up at the Golden Arm again. Honey-mooners, that's what they were pretending to be. I wonder what story she will pull about her husband, if he doesn't return with her? She's artful, is Margot. She'll crop up in the most unexpected places, and if she is coming back to Upminster, then the Amber Ship is somewhere in the vicinity, or I'll miss my guess. But where? Dollops, be a good fellow, and run back to the inn and bring me my bag which you'll find under the bed, all ready packed for this morning's task. I'm doing a little peddling stunt up at the Manor House, and I think I might manage to do the necessary changing here in these woods."

Dollops was off like a skyrocket. Meanwhile

Cleek, taking out his pipe, rubbed it ruminatively upon his sleeve, filled it, and, seating himself upon a stile, lit it and puffed away in quiet rumination. So the other old chap, who was so ridiculously like the Octavius Spender who had been murdered two nights ago in the House on the Hill, was dead—murdered, too! Strange that both those two should have met their end like this! By the hand of an unknown assassin, and within two days of each other. And the name—Spender! They were of one family, surely, that went without saying. Brother and sister, perhaps, or cousins.

He thought of the wonderful disguise under which the woman had hidden her sex, and then let his thoughts wander back to what Dollops had told him of the old man in his second-hand bookshop in the Charing Cross Road. Funny! There was some link which bound these two irrevocably together, and if he could discover what that was, no doubt the whole problem would be solved.

Then, quite suddenly, an odd sensation of being watched stole over him as he sat there, puffing at his pipe and trying to fit the pieces of this jigsaw puzzle together into some semblance of harmony. He felt, indeed, that someone's eyes were boring through his back, and he shifted uneasily in his seat. He was facing the road in his present position, with his back to the woods. And it was a glorious and peaceful morning, with no one and nothing in sight save a



chestnut horse with shaggy white fetlocks that was grazing in an adjacent field. There was a skylark somewhere in the cloudless blue above him, and a soft wind stirred the leaves of the trees, letting them whisper to each other in hushed harmony.

Yet the sensation still continued. Instinctively his hand felt his hip pocket and satisfied itself that its contents was intact. Then he slipped quietly from the stile, made a pretence of surveying the landscape, glanced over at the woods, and met the steady gaze of a pair of coal-black eyes set in a white face staring at him through the trees. Then, with a sudden swift gesture, he dropped silently down into the long grasses at the foot of the stile, just as a bullet sang through the air a foot above him, and he heard the crashing of running human footsteps in the undergrowth.

## CHAPTER XXI

### HER LADYSHIP'S NEW MAID

**F**OR some seconds Cleek lay there, not making one move, not uttering one sound, at one with the long grasses and the peaceful, silent countryside; but in his hand was the little silver-plated revolver which had served him for many years as a tried and trusted friend, and every faculty was wide awake.

The crashing through the undergrowth continued as of some person speeding away lest discovery should follow. At length the footsteps died away, all was peaceful once more, and down the road some distance ahead of him Cleek could glimpse Dollops, bag in hand, walking leisurely along and gazing up at the sky. Then he saw the boy look around quickly, drop into cover against the hedge for a moment, and then come speeding toward him.

Cleek popped his head up out of his hiding place with a little laugh.

“Nearly got me that time, eh, Dollops?” he said in a low undertone. “That devil in the undergrowth took a pot shot at me and missed. Looks, though, as if they know who and what I am!”

Dollops's face was white and scared. "Gawdamussy, sir!" he ejaculated, his jaw trembling, his eyes misted over with boyish tears. "If they 'ad got yer strite, sir! I'd never 'ave rested till I'd screwed their dirty necks right rahnd and dropped 'em in a mill pond! Then I'd been and gorn and did the 'eavenly act meself, and 'oped ter join yer with the h'angels as soon as I'd worked off me time fer mis-doin's on this 'ere earf! You're all right, sir? Certain sure?"

Cleek smiled, and got quietly to his feet, dusting himself down.

"Quite, dear lad. But who'd have thought it? Who? A bolt from the blue like that! And so unexpected! And yet—I've had my suspicions for some time. Now I'm sure!"

"Sure of what, sir?"

"Sure of a good many things that I'm not telling you at this moment. Boy, that gave me a shaking. And I don't think I'll choose these woods again for making changes in. I'll hie me to a safer cover. Come along! Back to the inn with the pair of us, and then I've more work for you. You're a tinker for ferreting things out for me, and I don't know what I'd do without you. Now, here's another set of instructions. Get on the phone for London, and, using the code, find out all you can of the murder of that old fellow up in the Edgware Road. Bring the news to me at the inn, and if I'm not back, wait there till I



return. Or, no—look here!” He bent his head and spoke steadily and hurriedly as they made their quick way back to the village, keeping his eyes always glancing about him for a possible unseen watcher, while Dollops nodded several times in succession, and kept ejaculating, “Yes, sir.” “I understand, sir.” “I’ve got it quite clear, sir,” every time Cleek paused in his rapid lowered speech.

They parted outside the inn, Dollops to go upon his errand and Cleek to run upstairs to his room, and, noting that there was no one about at this time, as all the holiday-makers were out enjoying the sunshine, and the maids at work below stairs, thanked his lucky stars, and hastened on with his toilette.

Some three quarters of an hour later, Dorothy, the kitchenmaid at the Manor House was just taking a breath of sunshine at the back door, and looking out over the kitchen garden. Her heart was in her eyes and her thoughts harking back to her sweetheart, young Joe, the blacksmith’s boy, who had just popped up a moment to have a secret kiss and a word with her, when the stooped, bent figure of an old man came hobbling up the twisting pathway that led through the gate assigned to the tradesmen at the left of the main entrance of the Manor House. He wended his way slowly toward her, his old weather-beaten face careworn and lined, and his grizzled

beard making a tattered lacework of age upon his breast.

Dorothy came back to earth immediately, and her young face hardened. She eyed his covered tray with animosity.

“Don’t want no bootlaces to-day, thank you; no, nor matches neither,” she said tartly, turning away and about to enter the kitchen again; but his shaking old hand upon her sleeve stopped her, and she swung round and met the watery blue eyes, and something in the pathetic droop of his figure called for her ready sympathy.

“Ah, don’t go, missy!” said this poor old specimen of overworked and underfed humanity. “I’ve some pretties ’ere ter tempt yer bright face. Jist take a peep under this cover! Look, laces, and jools fit fer a queen!” Speaking, the old man flicked back one corner of the greasy bit of green baize which covered his tray, and let her have a glimpse of the shining, glittering objects underneath. “’And-made laces, too, missy,” he went on in a low, coaxing voice, “and cheap for the young leddies like you. Ole Tom likes ter see a pretty face, an’ll make his price accordin’. Come, now, take only a peep, an’ you’re sure to fall!”

Dorothy, being young, and in love, knew her weakness even as she did peep into the contents of the tray where lay a marvellous collection of chains and necklaces, gleaming like real gold, and set with

wonderful gems of bright glass. Her fingers strayed over them, toying with each in turn. They stopped at an imitation turquoise brooch with diamonds sparkling round it. She looked up into his face.

"That's pretty," she said. "How much fer that, ole Tom? 'Twould make my blue cotton look fair beautiful, that it would."

"Ole Tom" surveyed her, grinning.

"That there's really two shillin', but it'll be sixpence less for you, missy," he said, and picking it up swiftly, pinned it to her frock. "That is, if you'll fetch out the others and show 'em the rest of my tray, like a little dear. I've walked five miles this mornin', an' not a touch of breakfast, either! And I don't make more'n sixpence a day, if I makes that. It do be a 'ard life, this peddlin'. Don't want no scrubbin' done, do yer? No winders cleaned, I s'pose? I'd be thankful fer a job, and I'd do it cheap. Ah, now, take the pin, sweetie! It sure becomes yer."

Dorothy hesitated no longer. "I'll take it," said she emphatically. "And I'll tell the others about yer, too, yer pore ole man. 'Ere, take a seat in the sunshine a minute. Cook'll be here soon, and that new maid wot the mistress 'as got from Lunnon. Mayhap she'll like a look at yer things, too. And Minnie the 'ousemaid is fond of trinkets. But as fer scrubbin'! You ain't got the strength of a chicken, that I'm sure. And you'd maybe fall outer the



winders. Still, I'll see. Wait a minute, Father Christmas, will yer?"

Ole Tom threw a kiss at her with his trembling old fingers, his lips murmured a shaky, "Gawd bless yer!" which went right down to the bottom of Dorothy's tender young heart. She ran into the kitchen and spoke briefly to the cook, who came out with her, bringing a cup of steaming hot tea and a piece of bread and dripping at the side of the saucer.

"Good mornin'," said she in her brisk voice, beaming down at him. "'Ere's some breakfast for ye, as Dorothy tells me ye ain't 'ad none. And rest yer bones awhile in the sunshine. 'Er leddyship orlways tells me ter give to the pore and 'ungry, though some of 'em that comes up 'ere certain don't look neither in spite of their whinin' tales. Let's 'ave a look at yer things. That's a nice bit er lace, now! 'Twould do splendid fer me new blouse, Dorothy, if it's not too expensive. Sixpence, ye say? But that's real cheap. Ye'll make no livin,' ole man, with them prices, I kin tell ye. Still, the other girls 'ud like a peep, too, I'm sartin. Dorothy, run in an' tell that new Marie—'er what's jist come from Lunnon to 'elp with her leddyship's dresses and maid 'er—to come an 'ave a look. She looks like a creatur wot likes jewellery, that she do!"

Dorothy went into the house. Meanwhile Ole Tom sat sipping his tea in the sunshine and munching his bread and dripping, while Cook bustled

about the kitchen garden, gathering a few herbs for her stew-pot, and chattering away to him, in her kindly fashion, of the doings of the town.

“Never heerd of the dreadful murder took place up at ole Perfesser Spender’s house night afore last, I suppose?” she said.

Ole Tom shook his grizzled head. “No? Well, it was fair ’orrible. I allus thought as this was the peacefullest spot this side of ’eaven, and yet ’ere we are with a real live crime takin’ place, and a Chinese prince a-comin’ with ’is fine jools, and all sorts of ’orrible things a-’appenin’ every second! Dorothy says as ’ow you c’d clean winders, but I feel a bit uncertain of that, you’re that shaky. But there’s nothin’ else of work I could give ye. And I kin see as ye need it. I’d not risk ye at the top floor, but the first and second ye might do, seein’ as there’s a balcony outside of each on ’em. On’y ye must kip out of ’er leddyship’s sight. She’s fair scairt of strangers, always. Still, you’ll not ’arm a fly, I’m thinkin’. And ’twould save me, for it’s my turn to wash ’em this week, and I’m late, fixin’ with this new arrival an’ all.”

Ole Tom put in a gentle query. “Got visitors then?”

“No, only the new maid fer ’er leddyship. Sent down from London. And a smart-lookin’ gel, too. Though I don’t much like her town ways. Still, that’s because I’m country, I daresay, and nothin’ agin’ ’er. But she’s—*Ssh!* here she comes now.”

Ole Tom looked up quickly, to see a tall, black-haired, black-eyed chit of a girl, in a dark dress with neat white collar and cuffs, and a little black alpaca apron, and with the quick, darting movements of a bright bird. She held a muddied evening skirt in her hand, at which she was brushing vigorously, and her brows were frowning.

“This ees vair’ dairty, ’ow do you say?” she said in a musical voice as she brushed vigorously at the offending stains. “And madame, she mak’ a grrait to-do that it must be clean’ at once. I wairk and I wairk, but I cannot remove it—so! Such a peety, too! Eh, this ees the ole man you spik of, Dorothy?” She dived her swift fingers down into the tray, let them trickle through all the neatly laid-out jewellery and oddments that lay there, throwing them in an untidy heap. Then she laughed—an insolent, harsh little laugh.

“*Ma foi!* What poor imitations! So common, so sheap! Not for me, *non, non!*”

She turned on her heel, retracing her steps with another little laugh and a shrug of the shoulders, as Cook ejaculated a loud, “Well, I never! Sich airs and graces!” and Dorothy gasped, and made a face at her retreating back; and Ole Tom, stung a moment out of his seeming uninterest and age, bit his lips, and put his hand up to his face to shield his eyes.

For the new lady’s maid was plainly Margot!



## CHAPTER XXII

### FIKO, THE FINDER

SO THAT was the reason Dollops saw her booking that first-class ticket to Upminster at Victoria station, then? The feminine half of the honeymoon couple had returned in another guise—and the case was growing in interest and intricacy every minute. For if Margot were on the spot, the Amber Ship could not be far away. That she was after the famous jewel Cleek knew beyond question. And Margot in England meant that her bodyguard of cut-throats were also straying the Island over, acting upon her orders and keeping her posted as to its whereabouts. H'm. Then he, too, would stay here for the present.

The disappearance of the young prince was the next thing for investigation. He was certainly not hidden in the cellars of the House on the Hill. That part of the programme, under Mr. Narkom's capable guidance, had been thoroughly carried out by Cogwell and his satellites. And the Force in London had been put on the watch, too. Something, or someone, had carried the lad away, with his precious burden, and—God knew what they had done to him!

Murdered, doubtless—a young boy like that, with all the promise of a great future in his own land before him! It seemed the only possible line to follow, there. Meantime, the whole village must be watched, every house searched, and any news that they could find of the boy, however vague, followed up immediately.

And in the meantime, here, in the Manor House itself, was Margot! If she did but know who he was! But of the safety of his present disguise Cleek was quite assured. He even indulged himself in a little smile. Meanwhile, garrulous Cook stared after the vanishing lady's maid's figure with hostility in her eye.

“Well, if that ain't the dirtiest trick!” she ejaculated, with vigorous noddings of her head. “A-tumblin' of all 'is pretties together like that! She won't be stayin' long 'ere, I fancy, if she takes on so. 'Ere, ole man, I'll take this piece of lace, and I c'd do with that little gold safety pin, too, if it's cheap. And after you've rested awhile, you kin get to work on them winders, afore her leddyship catches sight of yer.”

Ole Tom, with a deep bow, made her a present of the pin for her kindness to an old man, he said, and, after her delighted thanks, followed her into the kitchen to receive the bucket and leathers for his task. Then up by the back stairs to the first floor, where the drawing-room windows were his portion.

“Be as quick as you kin about ’em, won’t yer?” admonished Cook, ere she left him to his task. “I wouldn’t like ’er leddyship to ketch you ’ere. She’d be that cross with me—bein’ sich a nervous leddy. But you wouldn’t ’urt a flea, you wouldn’t. And after these, Mr. Frank’s ’ull want doin’, and then we’ll see what else there’s to be done. Hurry up now.”

The garrulous woman left the room, and Cleek was alone at last to pursue his investigations. He cleaned the first long window studiously, and then, glancing about him to make sure no one was on the lookout, peered here and there at the furniture, taking in every detail with photographic accuracy upon the mirror of his mind. It was a beautifully furnished place, long and L-shaped at one end. This formed a sort of little boudoir, in which, if one were sitting there and the drawing-room door opened, one could not, for the time being, be seen.

He darted over to the little mahogany bureau which was obviously her ladyship’s private secretaire, and tried the drawers. They were all unlocked except the top one, but a bunch of skeleton keys very soon did the trick, and he had it open in an instant. It contained a few papers, tied with red ribbon, little bundles of letters, and a baby’s photograph, upon which was written “Frank, aged six months”; attached to this by a band of faded blue ribbon, which had obviously once been in a baby’s frock, was a little battered red shoe with a



worn heel. Cleek put the things back with reverent fingers, feeling that he had obtruded without due consideration, when his fingers knocked against something hard, and closed round it. He drew it out. It was a little toy of a revolver with one bullet chamber empty.

Footsteps upon the stairs made him slip it hastily into his pocket, push the drawer to quickly, and dash back to his work. He was barely a second there when the door opened, and Marie, the lady's-maid, came in.

She stepped softly, as one who did not wish to be heard, and glanced cautiously about her. Then, sighting him, she gave a little exclamation of amazement, and came farther into the room.

"Oho!" said she with a little mocking laugh. "The ol' pedler, eh? And cleaning windows you are now, are you? Oh, but you are a clever one, yes! Vair' vair' clever! You tak' in the ol' cook and the young Dorothy, but you do not tak' in Marie, *non, non!* Marie, she 'ave ze sharp 'ead upon 'er shoulters! Come now, what is eet you want?"

For a moment Cleek was so taken aback that he did not know what to answer. Suppose, by some inauspicious trick of fate, she had recognized who he was! She who knew him in the old "Vanishing Cracksman" days, and knew, too, that amazing gift of his wherein he could actually change his features for that of another man in twenty seconds'

time. Suppose she had, somehow, penetrated his disguise and got wind of who he was!

Then he steeled himself and took a chance shot. Duplicity must meet duplicity, if it is to be vanquished. He whipped round upon her with finger to lips, and whispered the one word, "Balankha-Dahs!"

The chance shot went home. He saw her face change and become crafty, saw the heavy lids droop a moment over the black eyes, and the red lips tighten. Then she shrugged her shoulders, and spoke in her low, perfectly pitched tones.

"Aha! You 'ave been sent to see me, eh?" she said softly, giving him a bewitching smile. "You zink Margot ees a little slow—'ow do you say it?—too long, eh? But you do not know Margot. Tell your masters, Margot 'as given 'er word, and she will keep it at all costs. Ze priests shall 'ave their precious jewel—for a price—in good time. But eet ees not so easy, *non!* Vair' deefeecult, indeed. Margot mus' move vair' slow, but vair' sure. Tell zem, zey 'ave eet soon. Margot 'ave got 'er feengers almos' upon eet now. Vair' soon. You tell zem zat."

Cleek's eyes brightened at her words. She had got her fingers almost upon it? Then perhaps she knew where it was.

"Then," he said softly, glancing about him to make sure no one heard, "you have an idea, mademoiselle, where the jewel is hidden?"

She shrugged her shoulders and laughed a little. "I 'ave an idea, *oui*. But I tell it to you not. Who knows but that you get there fairst, and claim ze price instead of me? Ah, *non, non!* Zat ees not for Margot! Still, I 'ave ze ideas, *oui*. And I am 'ere for ze time, until I mak' sure of zem! Take your message back to your masters, as I 'ave tell you."

She was just about to leave the room when Cleek, still limping in his guise of old man, went over to her and touched her arm. His misted watery eyes met hers. The nearness of this woman who had worked so amazingly long and hard for his capture, to wreak her vengeance upon him, gave an added piquancy to the moment.

"Her ladyship, you think she knows anything of it?" he whispered.

"I 'ave been trying' to take ze mud off 'er gown, ze mud from ze 'Ouse on ze 'Ill, so I know zat she was zere zen," she whispered significantly, with a wink and a nod at the direction of the closed door. "Mak' of eet what you will. But she 'ave not ze jewel, *non*. I tink not. Ozzers. Goo'-by, *Mistaire Curious!* Ah, and what ees your name, hein?"

"They call me Fiko, my masters the priests," he replied softly. "Fiko the Finder. And they send me upon all their secret messages. I will carry back your word, *ma belle*. And I doubt not but that you will be successful in your quest. I wish you all good luck, speedy good luck. I should like indeed



to see you win. One day, when I can shed this disguise, I will call and see you, and we will better improve our acquaintance. If I may be so permitted?"

"Of a surety." She laughed at him and pouted into his face. "Thou art an old man, surely, to flirt with the young ones. But thou hast a proverb which runs that there is no fool like an old fool. And if thou wilt. *Au revoir.*"

Then she was gone as silently as she had come, and Cleek hurried back to his task, making such good progress that when Cook returned some ten minutes later she found him giving the final polish to one huge plate-glass pane, and expressed her delight at his work.

"Well, I never!" she exclaimed, with a shake of her head. "You does your work well, I must say! And fer an old 'un, too! Come along now to Mr. Frank's room; that's 'er leddyship's son, and she's that partikler about everythink belongin' ter 'im. But they ain't sich long ones as the drorin' room, and won't take sich a time to do." Then she sighed a heavy sigh, and shook her head. "Heigho!"

"And what makes you sigh like that, ma'am?" asked Cleek, as he took up his leather and started his task. She smiled at him, well pleased that he should notice her feelings.

"Ah, it do be that sad about Mr. Frank. 'E's gone away now, you know."

“Oh? And why has he gone away? On holler-day, I suppose?”

“Then you suppose wrong, old man. No, Mr. Frank’s been and gone and ’ad a dreadful fuss-up with his father, Sir George, and ’im’s turned the young man out of the ’ouse! And ’er leddyship’s that ’eart-broken. She even went so far as to go up to the ’Ouse on the ’Ill that very night when the orful murder took place—though natcherly she didn’t know it was a-comin’ orf, bless ’er tender ’eart! But she went up there that night ter see if she could see ’im.”

“Ah, then ’e was stayin’ up there, I suppose?”

Cook shook her head again. Her eyes were reminiscent. “No—but ’im and the ole gentleman were fair friends. And m’leddy knew Mr. Frank was a-goin’ up there to see ’im that night. And she was worried something shockin’. So she comes to me and she says, ‘Cook,’ says she, ‘if Sir George wants ter see me, tell ’im I’m lyin’ down with a ’eadache,’ says she. ‘Fer I’m a-goin’ up to see Mr. Frank,’ says she, ‘and find out what ’e’s plannin’ ter do.’ And I, that’s been with her ever since Mr. Frank were a mere baby in arms, says, ‘Orl right, m’lady,’ and lets ’er out of the back door.”

Cleek made a pretence of rubbing the window, although his faculties were all alert.

“And did she go then?” he said in his quavery, old man’s voice.

“She did. And she come back again, never

'avin' seen 'im. Only spoke a few words wiv the old gentleman, she said ter me, and 'eard 'im say somethin' about a young Chinese prince 'oo'd come ter stay with 'im. Then she come back again. But she ruined 'er beecootiful dress, she did—white satin with gold lace it was, too, fer it was all be-draggled with the mud. That there Marie's a-tryin' ter clean it orf now. Well, I must be goin' down, else my puddin'll burn. Come down when you've finished, ole man."

So her ladyship had been up at the House on the Hill, had she? And Margot knew that, too. Cook was an acquaintance to cultivate, with her garrulous tongue. Things were falling into his hands with a vengeance. He felt for the little revolver in his pocket, sucking in his lips and shaking his head, and pinching up his chin between a thumb and forefinger meanwhile. Now what the dickens was her ladyship doing up there on that particular night? Her story of going to see her son was a poor one, on the face of it, for young Brentwood had been staying openly, from what he said, at the Golden Arm, where she could have spoken with him any time, obviously. But it served to convince Cook, good woman, who obviously took everything her lady said as gospel truth. And that Margot had an inkling of suspicion with regard to her justified her—Margot's—appearance at the Manor House under these present circumstances.



What was the solution of the tragedy? Ah, what? He put down his leather and, tip-toeing across the room, began a rapid investigation of a big chest of drawers which stood over by the right-hand side of the chimney-piece, starting with this as, according to his rule, containing the most things which were out of sight, and therefore more often out of mind. The drawers were all unlocked, and contained an assortment of old ties, collars, worn socks, and garments which had obviously been discarded in the young gentleman's hurried packing.

Cleek's fingers ran through the drawers rapidly, finding nothing of any account. Then he came upon a packet of letters, glanced at the top one, read it through, and as he pushed the letter back into its envelope—it was signed "Maud" and was brief, though loverlike—a little flat white packet fell out upon the floor.

Cleek's hand closed upon it instantly. He opened it and sniffed at the contents. And then his face went grim, and taking out his pocketbook he put the little folded packet inside it.

Another clue this time, and an important one.

For the little packet contained cyanide of potassium, and cyanide of potassium was the poison which lay upon the lips of the dead woman up at the House on the Hill!

## CHAPTER XXIII

### A VISIT TO THE DOCTOR'S

**N**OTHING more of interest was forthcoming in the remainder of his investigation of Frank Brentwood's room, and Cleek, having finished his task with much rapidity, and after thoroughly examining a portrait, obviously of Lady Brentwood, which hung over her son's bed, made his way down to the kitchen and Cook's garrulity once more.

He stayed gossiping with her for some time, received a shilling for his trouble, and promised to come back again next week and do the remaining windows for the same money. And then, with a tip of his hat to the good woman, and another for Dorothy, who favoured him with a sunny smile in return, made his way back down the tradesmen's entrance, and out through the gate into the highway once more.

Return to the Golden Arm undetected was easily effected, for lunch was in progress of preparation. Cleek could slip up to his room, turn the key, and divest himself of his disguise quite easily, and as George Headland descend the staircase once more. Here he sought out Mr. Narkom, and had an hour's

conference with him, unravelling and discussing several knotty points.

“That packet pretty well proves that Frank Brentwood is the party, old chap,” ejaculated the superintendent, after Cleek’s recital of the morning’s happenings. “But, good God, the unknown person who shot at you! Sounds like Margot herself, doesn’t it? And the dickens of it being that you had a talk with her afterwards, in another disguise, and she never even twigged! You amazing beggar! I don’t wonder she still grieves your loss as Lord High Chieftain of her party of cut-throats.”

Cleek smiled and laid his hand a moment upon his friend’s arm. Then the queer little one-sided smile travelled up his cheek again.

“Aha! That’s as may be. The amusing part of the whole affair is that I have absolutely hoodwinked the lady and pulled the wool over her eyes completely, and she counts me, for the nonce, as her ally! Rather delicate tactics, that, eh? I think I may count that as a feather in my cap, though of what colour I am not yet quite sure.”

“Got any ideas upon the case, then, old chap?”

“H’m. A few. There are some points I can’t follow up—or rather, can’t find the end they lead to. But when those are unravelled and followed conclusively to their destination, we may be somewhat surprised at their findings. You’ve fixed the time of the inquest, then?”



“Yes. To-morrow afternoon, at 2:30. I’ve interviewed the coroner—one of those pedantic fellows who doubt everything and everybody on sight—and we’ve arranged for it to take place up at the House on the Hill, in the dining room. That seemed the largest spot I could think of. The police station couldn’t accommodate the thing at all, I discovered. Wants rebuilding badly. I’ll put a word in for that when this case is over. But does that suit you, old chap?”

“Excellently. And it gives me just one more day for the solution of the riddle. Twenty-four more active hours, unless we let ’em return a verdict of ‘murder by person or persons unknown.’ Now, what about that house-to-house search?”

Mr. Narkom drew out his little notebook, and proceeded with the details of every household and its occupants, marking each off methodically with his pencil.

“Not a trace of anything or anybody. The young prince has disappeared as though he had never been born. And if it’s foul play, it’s the most devilishly clever bit of management it’s been my misfortune to encounter. To-morrow, too, is my last day for the mail out to China this week. I cabled ’em the news briefly, but was pretty hopeful. That poor devil of a governor will be off his head with anxiety if the young prince isn’t discovered or his body unearthed, and the Yard will have the very dickens of a

time, too. Oh, Lord! it's an eternal worry, every way you look at it."

Cleek lit a cigarette and sat puffing it for a moment. "And you haven't caught a glimpse of a clue in any direction, eh?" he asked. "What about Miss Omritt's cottage? Give that a thorough overhauling?"

"Yes, although the lady was exceedingly agitated, and made a great fuss over it, too. It's an unpleasant job, conducting an official hunt over people's places. But nothing was forthcoming. We're going over the Manor House to-morrow morning, and that place out at Porch Pool—Ponders, it's called—where a chap called Amers hangs out. Not that we're expecting anything in that direction, of course, but no stone must be left unturned. Gad! I wish we could find some trace of the little prince, I do indeed! It's enough to send a fellow daft with anxiety, when he holds himself responsible to the lad's father for his personal safety, too!"

"Yes, it's the failure in a trust that hurts most of all," returned Cleek sadly, looping and unlooping his watch-chain with his thumb and forefinger as he bent his expert mind upon the case and tried to see through the fogged darkness about him something of the clarity of day. "Sometimes, old friend, I feel I'd like to give up this business—take a place up the river and grow roses, and live the life of a decent, law-respecting citizen, with the wife of one's

heart to help one. It's like Paradise, when you think of it. Only I've given my word that so many years of my life shall be set aside for the detecting of crime, to make up for those years when I was committing it, and the allotted span isn't up yet. And then, of course, there's you."

Mr. Narkom's eyes misted over suddenly. He whipped out his handkerchief and blew a trumpeting blast upon his nose, as one who would say, "There's no sickly sentiment about me; I've got a rotten cold, I have." But Cleek understood.

"Yes," said Mr. Narkom. "Of course, as you say, there's me. The day you give up the Yard's business, I'll go bust with you. If I hadn't you, dear chap, to keep the heart up in me, I'd go to blazes, absolutely. Oh, what footling nonsense we're talking, man! We've years of work together yet, if the Lord spares us, and we'll get to the bottom of more riddles than the Amber Ship. To which, by the way, we haven't found the answer yet. Now, look here; this is what I think about it."

So saying, the good superintendent broke into a long preamble of his own views upon the question, to which Cleek listened in silence, and at the end of it nodded, rose with a sigh, and picked up his hat.

"Give me these twenty-four hours clear, and I'll do the best I can for you," he announced briefly. "Let me disappear from your ken—cease, for the present, from being the acknowledged representative



of the Yard—and I'll report to you to-morrow afternoon at half-past two o'clock, at the House on the Hill. And if I'm successful——”

“You must be successful! You simply must! The Yard's reputation depends upon it,” returned Mr. Narkom with anguish in his voice. “Of course I'll give you all the time you need; postpone the inquest, if you wish, and alter all my previous arrangements. You've got *carte blanche*, as usual. You know that. Only solve the problem, Cleek, get the answer to the riddle.”

“All right, old friend; I'll do the best I can. And you needn't start altering any arrangements unless I send you word to do so at the eleventh hour. I've a theory to follow up, which may, or may not, be right. That remains to be seen. *Au revoir.*”

Cleek took his leave and sauntered out into the sunshine, his mind bent upon the problem before him. He met Dollops at the corner of the street, and, forgetting the boy's disguise for the moment, almost passed him unnoticed. But a “Hey, matey!” sounded in his ears as he walked by, and he turned in his tracks and fell into step beside him.

“Hello!” he said, with a nod of recognition; and then, in a lower tone, “Followed out all instructions?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You've got the motor-bike ready?”

“I have, sir. Right round the corner 'ere.”

“Good. Then give me fifteen minutes to get to the surgery, and when you see me appear at the window—you said there was a window which looked out upon the street, didn’t you?—and blow my nose, let her go!”

“All right, sir.”

Dollops made off, and Cleek sauntered in the direction of the doctor’s surgery—to pay a professional visit.

He found Doctor Hunter at work in the tiny place, surrounded with numerous bottles set tier upon tier above him, and wearing a white linen coat which was crisp and fresh and made him look the handsome creature he undoubtedly was. Cleek entered the surgery after knocking, and stood with his cap in his hands, fumbling from one foot to the other. The doctor looked up at him with a smile, his fingers busy with pestle and mortar with which he was mixing some prescription.

“Hello!” said the doctor cheerily, “and what’s the trouble with you, may I ask? Feeling seedy?”

George Headland nodded sheepishly.

“Yes, Doctor, deuced seedy. Come suddenly faint-like. Maybe ’tis the air ’ere. I’m a new-comer, on a walkin’ tour, for a bit of a hollerday, and taken a room up at the Golden Arm for the night. Off again to-morrer. If you could give me a mixture, just a bottle of physic, I’d be grateful.”

“Certainly, certainly. Only too pleased.” The good doctor came forward and examined his patient with keen scrutiny. “Let’s see your tongue. . . . H’m. Bilious. That’s the dickens of this place—the air’s too heavy. I’ve found it myself. Makes you frightfully liverish. I’ll give you a dose.”

There was a friendliness about this spruce little man in white linen that warmed one’s heart. Cleek could not help but smile back at him, thinking to himself how much such a man would be an asset to the village. He had the right touch, that professional interest in humanity at sight which is the true doctor’s birthright.

“Yes, I expect that’s what’s the matter with me,” he volunteered, as the doctor began scribbling something down upon a little pad on his table. “Just bilious. I’m a terrible bilious subject!” Then he walked to the window; looked out of it a moment, and blew his nose noisily.

Followed a sudden loud report, like a miniature explosion, and the doctor, looking up, heard the cry which followed the sound, and—all his professional faculties alert—gave a hurried, “Excuse me, I’ll go and see if anything’s wrong. There’s a crowd collecting,” and went out of the room.

That was Cleek’s cue for business. In an instant he was all activity, peering at the shelves of bottles, even mounting the tiny set of library steps, which were obviously kept for the purpose of reaching



those that were set too high above the medico for comfortable stretching of the arm.

The three upper shelves, with their faded labels, were lightly covered with dust. H'm. Got a bad servant in the place, obviously. Then he noticed that one of them looked a little cleaner than the rest, and read its label. It contained cyanide of potassium. Odd how that particular poison seemed to follow him in this case, wherever he looked. And it had lately been moved from its ring of dust. H'm. So someone had used it out of the doctor's surgery: that was plain. But who?

Just then the telephone rang, and he hastened to answer it, assuming the good doctor's tone so that his own mother could not have told that it was not really he.

"Hello!" he called. A woman's voice answered him. It was frightened, shrill with an unseen, unknown fear.

"Doctor, Doctor!" cried the voice, and he recognized it as belonging to Miss Ellison. "It's gone! Gone! Oh, what shall I do? Whatever shall I do?"

Cleek took a sporting chance. "Gone? You mean the cyanide?" he queried, still in the doctor's voice. The answer came swiftly, stilling his own fears of discovery.

"Yes, yes! He must have taken it with him! What does it mean? What can it mean? Oh, Doctor Hunter, I am terrified. Tell me what to do!"

“Do nothing. Only wait,” returned Cleek, and then, hearing a stilling of the commotion without, rang off, just as the doctor himself came bursting through the doorway, his face wreathed in grins from ear to ear.

“Funniest thing!” said he, wiping his hands with a cloth to free them from what looked like motor oil. “I thought someone was really hurt. But some young idiot had been playing with his motorcycle, and then lit a cigarette and dropped the live match on to the engine. And, of course, *pouf!* up it went in a fine explosion. Our young friend sustained a slight shock, but nothing more. If these boys won’t learn caution this side of the world, they’ll learn it the other, to their own cost! Now, let me see. I’m going to make you up a mixture, am I not? Bilious, I said, didn’t I? H’m, yes. If you wait one moment, I’ll give it to you at once.”

Cleek waited quietly, seemingly a dull lump of humanity, from his outward appearance. But his mind was on fire with interest. Who was the mysterious “he”? And if the cyanide had gone, where had it gone to? Then it came to him like a flash. The “he” was Frank Brentwood, and the cyanide the little packet which he had found in the drawer in Brentwood’s room. But if Maud Ellison had got it for him, had it been she who had used it on the dead woman? And how did the doctor come to give it to her in the first place?

## CHAPTER XXIV

### ENTER LADY BRENTWOOD

**F**OR a few minutes more the little doctor fussed among his bottles, mixing the draught which was to cure Mr. George Headland's attack of biliousness effectually. While he worked he talked, looking up now and again with a smile to punctuate his sentences. Pity Frank Brentwood had entered the lists at all for Maud Ellison's favour. This doctor chap would doubtless make a far better, far steadier husband for such a girl. But such is the way of life.

As the doctor talked, Cleek sat watching the quick, clever fingers of the man, so sure of their task, so accurate in measurement. At last the mixture was made up. The doctor inscribed something upon the bottle, and then, pausing a moment, looked up.

"What name shall I say?" he queried, pen in air.

"George Headland."

"Ah. Thanks very much. Here you are, my friend. And I hope it will do you a lot of good. My fee? Five shillings, please. Many thanks."

He took the coins tendered to him, and then walked with his patient toward the door of the surgery,



and threw it open. A shaft of sunshine fell athwart the floor, turning it into a golden trail. Two ladies passing by, and seeing him, nodded and smiled. And then one came forward with outstretched hand to greet him.

“Good morning, Doctor Hunter. Isn’t it a glorious day?”

“Perfect, indeed, Lady Brentwood. Squire feeling better this morning, I hope? I shall be up at the Manor by twelve, if work permits.”

Lady Brentwood, whom Cleek recognized instantly from the portrait he had seen hanging in her son’s bedroom at the Manor, was a tall, elegant-looking woman, with graying hair and the eyes of a person who suffers from insomnia. He noted, too, that her hand shook a little as she extended it, and felt a momentary stab of pity. Her companion was a little, slight woman, in the unrelieved black of the widow save for the sheer white lawn collar that girt her pretty throat and the folded cuffs of the same material about her wrists. Cleek, hanging back, as though for a last word with the doctor, shook his head as that gentleman lifted his brows at him, and muttered, “I’ll wait. Don’t bother about me. Plenty of time,” and moved a little away from the group, where he could hear everything they said and not appear too plainly to be listening.

“Yes, my husband certainly seems better this morning, thank you,” replied Lady Brentwood.

“Nurse Ellison is a marvel, Doctor! She is, indeed—in spite of all the unconscious trouble the poor girl has caused us, Frank being so stupid as to fall in love with her like that. Of course it isn’t her fault, and Sir George simply dotes upon her. Doesn’t like her out of his sight, which is rather hard on the poor girl, as you may imagine. But we are both eternally grateful for your recommendation of her, Doctor Hunter. We truly are.”

The doctor smiled, showing those perfect teeth of his, and Cleek was conscious of a prick of envy even as he looked. Handsome little chap, that!

“Well,” replied the handsome little chap, “it is certainly rather a feather in my cap, I must say. The minute I clapped eyes upon Miss Ellison, I knew she was just the girl for the post. She was working up at the hospital when I first met her, a year or two back. And I must say I was very taken with her manner in dealing with sick people. And how’s the daughter, Gurda?” He turned toward the little widow, his voice dropping into a note of affectionate friendliness which made Cleek prick up his ears.

“Oh, troublesome again, I’m afraid, Jack,” replied the little lady, with a sad shake of her head. “She keeps wanting to get up, you know, and of course that would be fatal. If it weren’t for old Mollie, I don’t know what I should do!”

“Isn’t she wonderful?” struck in Lady Brent-

wood, patting the little widow's arm affectionately. "When you realize the cross she has to bear, with that invalid daughter of hers! And I know a little what brain trouble is like, with my husband's odd ways at times. But to have one's very own child lacking in mentality, and—and——"

"And inclined to be violent, too, as she often is, isn't she, Gurda?" struck in Doctor Hunter, a serious note creeping into his voice. "Yes, I'm proud of my sister, Lady Brentwood, very proud. She always comes up smiling, whatever happens."

"Gurda Verity's a brick, and that's all one can say about it," returned her ladyship decidedly. "Now come along, my dear, because it's nearly dinner time, and I've some more shopping to do. Good-bye, Doctor Hunter. We shall see you later in the day, I expect."

The doctor saluted them, and the two ladies passed on down the street as Cleek quietly approached in answer to Doctor Hunter's beckoning finger.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting," said that gentleman genially, "but that is an old patient of mine with my sister. What was it you wanted to ask?"

"Oh, just how often I'm to take this medicine, Doctor, and whether it's before or after meals," replied Cleek.

The doctor gave him a little look, as if doubting his mental qualities. "You'll find full instructions upon the bottle, as is usual," he replied, with slight asperity;



and then, at Cleek's mumbled apology, nodded in a friendly fashion, and, entering the surgery once more, shut the door sharply behind him.

Quietly Cleek made his way back down the village street, his mind upon the conversation to which he had listened a moment or two ago. So the little widow lady with the pretty face was the doctor's sister, was she? And she must be the Mrs. Verity whom the inspector had mentioned to him, who lived in the End House with her invalid daughter. Mental case, eh? That was bad. And wonderful how the little woman kept that bright, pleasant face of hers, even as Lady Brentwood had said. And Lady Brentwood? Of a sudden, as he remembered the bared wrist as she had extended her hand to the doctor and the wide, fashionable sleeve of her blue frock had fallen back, Cleek's mouth went grim. His keen eyes had noted the tiny needle-like marks upon that white forearm, and drew his own conclusions therefrom.

He walked back to the inn, summoned Dollops, who, though a little bit shaken over his adventure with the motorcycle and the miniature explosion that had blown it to fragments, was grinning nevertheless at the joke of the thing, and took him up to his bedroom, bolting the door against possible intruders.

"Look here, boy," said Cleek in a whisper, when they were both seated, "I've found several pinholes

in the black curtain to see daylight through. And Mr. Narkom has given me twenty-four hours to solve the riddle. So we're going to London, as fast as possible."

"Crickey, Guv'nor! Twenty-four hours! Lor' lumme! that ain't much time, is it?"

"Long enough, I hope. And if not, I can postpone the inquest. But I don't want to do that, for many reasons. So nip round to the garage, and get a word with Lennard, and arrange for the car to be in readiness in twenty minutes to whisk us off to London. Better meet us out a mile from here, where the four crossroads meet. That's a lonely sort of a spot, and we can foot it to there and hop in so that no one can get a line on what we are doing. Got it?"

"Yes, sir. All right, sir. But I'll 'ave to put Betsy off for this evening. I promised to take 'er to the pictures, if you give me permission, sir. Though I didn't tell 'er that. But I'll just nip dahnstairs and blow a tale wot me muvver 'as sent fer me, and me farver's dyin' of consumption. That'll fetch 'er soft 'eart, I'll swear!"

Cleek laughed heartily. "All right, and may the lake of fire and brimstone spare you from its abominable depths for doing your duty," he returned, with a clap on the lad's shoulder. "Now trot off and make your peace with Betsy, and then nip round after Lennard. I'll meet you at the crossroads at half-past seven. Perhaps your tender-

hearted lady-love would put you up a few sandwiches for the journey, and, knowing your appetite, as she doubtless does already, will probably supply sufficient for two. We can eat them on the journey up."

"I'll see what I kin do, sir," promised Dollops, as he disappeared kitchenward.

At exactly eight o'clock they were seated inside the old blue limousine, partaking of chicken sandwiches and lettuce, washed down with a bottle of freshly made lemonade, and with hard-boiled eggs to follow. And on their speedy way Londonward toward the Edgware Road and that part of the riddle which lay in the lifeless body of second Mr. Spender. For Dollops had done his duty nobly, and Betsy was his for the asking!



## CHAPTER XXV

### THE SECRET OF THE BOOKSHOP

**T**HAT night Cleek spent in the second-hand bookshop in the Edgware Road, where one Octavius Spender had pursued the business of selling books and old periodicals to the fusty, musty, and decidedly dusty neighbours who surrounded him upon every side. For the memory of those twenty-four hours was always with him, and he did not wish to postpone the inquest unless it was absolutely necessary to do so. But the night hours are not always the best for working, and he had always to contend with the probability that he would be discovered at his task by the light of the lamp he employed to assist him.

The police knew, for they had been put wise the moment he arrived in London, but he did not want the whole neighbourhood watching on at his nocturnal adventures. It might be awkward, to say the least of it. So he and Dollops tiptoed their way through the dirty little shop, opening doors and cupboards, and examining every inch of the place, from top to bottom, for possible clues to the

solving of this portion of the riddle that had been set for them.

It was a queer little shop, Cleek found, tucked in at the corner of a dirty street, with cracked windows and worm-eaten woodwork. And yet it showed signs of dusting, a veritable spring-cleaning, in the condition of certain of the shelves which lined the left-hand side of it. They were crammed with old books, which, though many bore no covers, had recently been well dusted and set neatly in their places.

Someone had been cleaning up the shop, and had obviously been disturbed at the task, for the other half of it was dust-laden to an appalling degree. Although certain books upon its shelves looked fairly clean and in good condition, others, it was perfectly obvious upon their removal, had not been touched or dusted for years. Odd, that. Deuced odd. For the choice of the cleaner books was miscellaneous, and showed not the faintest light upon the choosing of any one particular mentality.

Cleek put his hand up and reached down an old, red-backed volume which appeared cleaner and less dusty than its fellows, and read the title upon it: "Old Recipes for the Cooking of Puddings, Pies and Pastries, and the Like." By Gustavus Block. And the year of publication, 1809. He turned it over idly in his hands, reading the title aloud. His thumb wandered over the ragged edge of the leaves,

and was just about to open them when Dollops called softly from the other corner of the shop. He set the book down upon a table, and went in search of him.

“What abaht the ole gent ’imself, sir?” said Dollops, who was standing with his hands upon the knob of a closed door. “I ’appened ter peep in and find this is ’is bedroom, and—and—I don’t much fancy this ghost business at this hour of the night, sir! The ole gent’s body is in there, where the chaps from the Yard ’as put ’im all ready fer you ter examine, and—wiv this sort er sinkin’ in the pit of me stum-mick (which I don’t know whether I’m ’ungry or simply blank scared) I doesn’t feel as though I could wait any longer ter get that part of the ugly business over. Couldn’t we look at ’im first, sir, and then lock up the room and get on wiv the other part of the business?”

Cleek smiled. “Dollops, Dollops! You’re as funky as a schoolboy,” he said although, to be sure, the task of examining a dead body at half-past one in the morning, with only the light of a pocket torch and a very poor gas-jet, does rather savour of the ghost-like. “Don’t forget there’s a policeman on duty just outside, ready to come when we need him, and the whole big structure of the Yard at our backs. There’s nothing to be afraid of, lad, really! But if you’d rather get that part of the business over——”



“I’d certainly rather, sir,” returned Dollops, in a scared whisper. “Not so farst, Mr. Cleek, sir. Just wait ’arf a minute while I ’itches up me belt a reef tighter, so that me bloomin’ stummick, if it does turn ter water, won’t run away so easy under me, and I’m comin’ wiv yer. Orl right, sir, fire away!”

Bracing himself for the eerie business, Dollops drew a deep breath and followed Cleek into the still, shabby little room, where the figure of that Spender who had had charge of this little bookshop lay in the silence of death, with the mark of the hand of his assassin struck deep into his breast. They had placed the body upon its bed, and Cleek went over to it and ran his fingers lightly over it; meanwhile Dollops, a candle held high above his head, stood behind him, jaw dropped, face white, and the trembling fingers which held the light making it rock so that it threw weird and crazy shadows upon the drab wall opposite.

Cleek took the candle out of the boy’s hand, and, bending, peered down into the ghastly white face. Then he sucked in his lips and breathed hard.

“Gad,” he said softly, “the very same! That’s the old chap I saw at the station, I’ll swear to it, talking to the Chinese just outside of the waiting-room door. That’s he, dead sure!”

“Yes, dead, orl right, Guv’nor—and sure, too,” broke in Dollops. “Gawd’s truf! If I ’ad them

false teef in me 'ead wot 'arf the world 'as ter put up wiv, I'd start eatin' of meself like a blinkin' cannibal. Carn't stop me jaw from wagglin', nohow. 'Urry up, Guv'nor, for Heaving's sake, and get it over!"

Cleek gave a quick look at him over his shoulder, and shook his head.

"Brace yourself up, lad. The job has got to be done, and I'm not liking it any more than you are. But the Yard's business is our business, and the riddle must be solved, however unpleasant the solving." He set the candle down upon a chair, took out his torch and shot a patch of light upon the still figure, sending it fleeting up and down from head to foot.

"Stabbed, eh? And the identical sort of wound that killed that poor old woman back there in the House on the Hill. What secret bond lay between them? So alike, so exactly alike! And the name—Spender. A Malay kris, or I'll eat my hat! Same wound, same everything! Only one's a man, and one's a woman. If I could only find some clues to their identity. And someone who knew them! But there's nothing, nothing!

". . . . Chest of drawers over there, Dollops; search through them, and bring any letter or paper or photograph you find to me." And so he went on, speaking his thoughts aloud, as he spoke them only in the presence of this young Cockney boy who knew him, indeed, better than any one else in the

world, all the time his busy fingers tracing their way over the body, searching pockets, and unbuttoning buttons; and all the time talking, talking in that low, monotonous way of his.

“H’m. What are those marks on the forearm? Needle-points again! How those two things pursue me in this case! Cyanide and needle-points. Poison and drugs. And both of ’em pretty well as bad as each other. First Nurse Ellison, then Lady Brentwood, and now this poor old shopkeeper in the Edgware Road! Odd how the fiendish thing holds the world over. Lady Brentwood, now, why should she? Unless it were to kill pain. And yet, not that. H’m. Might be—probably is. I never thought of that before. And this old chap. That task’s finished, thank Heaven! I’ll need to take a record of the fingerprints on the back of this chair, and here at this table’s edge. And after that— Hello! here’s an empty envelope, with a greasy thumbmark upon it! I’ll send that up, too. Any luck, Dollops?”

Dollops looked up quickly as his master’s voice raised itself from the mumbling monotone which he knew was not meant for him to answer, and brought forward his discoveries.

“Nothing much, sir. Jist an ole comb, and a brush, and a bottle of ’air-oil, and two envelopes addressed to ’im, ’ere. Nuffink else.”

“Let’s see ’em. . . . No, not a bit of good. Try the second drawer.”



The second drawer proved more useful. Dollops, rooting his fingers through the medley of clothing that it contained, pulled forth a book, and handed it across to Cleek without a word.

Cleek's fingers closed over it instantly, and he sent his spotlight flashing out upon the cover, upon which was written in a shaky, educated hand, and in ink that was faded and brown with age, the words, "Journal and Diary of Octavius L. Spender." And dated some ten years back.

"A find, Dollops!" ejaculated Cleek, as he untied the piece of soiled ribbon that was tied round it and opened its musty leaves. "Gad! The first entry is dated January 20, 1912, and the last the day before yesterday—the day the poor old chap met his death! This ought to tell us something, surely!"

It certainly looked as though it would. For the book was obviously the diary of Octavius Spender, perhaps the very self-same Octavius Spender who seemed to live this double life both here in the Edgware Road and out at Upminster, at the House on the Hill.

For ten minutes Cleek neither moved nor made any sound, simply stood there, reading, and Dollops, looking up now and again at his master's face with those adoring eyes of his, saw how the concentration stamped it, obliterating all else, and knew that Cleek had found something to go upon—at last. The writing was small and crabbed, and yet with the

fineness of copper-plate, and each entry was meticulously dated, and bore no cross-outs upon the serenity of the neat pages.

At length Cleek looked up, twitching his head in Dollops's direction. His voice was sharp with interest, his eyes alight.

"Here, fetch me that cookery book which I left lying on the table in the outer room," he rapped out in excitement. "A dollar to a ducat that I've solved one portion of the riddle at any rate, and am in a fair way to solving the rest of it, along with one other little problem of Mr. Narkom's that, by sheer, unadulterated luck, has fallen into my hands. Gad! to think of it! Just to think of it!"

Dollops was gone from that room of death like a shot, very thankful to be out of it for even that brief moment. He returned a moment later with the big red book in his hands, and handed it across to Cleek, whose rapid fingers ran through the pages like lightning, and who lifted it to his nose now and again and sniffed at it.

"Mr. Cleek, sir!" cried Dollops, stung out of his fear for the time being by his amazement at this extraordinary performance. "What are yer smellin' of it for, sir? That ain't goin' ter help, surely?"

Cleek smoothed a blank page, slipped inside between the printed ones, and then, lifting it out, held it toward the boy, with the curious one-sided smile travelling up his cheek.

“Look at it, Dollops. See anything queer about that paper?”

The boy took it, stared at it, and handed it back, shaking his head. “No, sir. Nuffink.”

“Well, if you were as old as I am in the world’s wickedness, you’d see a good deal. Why? Because, boy, that paper is impregnated with the essence of the very devil himself, and we’ve struck something absolutely new in an age-old sin. It’s cocaine, Dollops. And this is no more a second-hand bookshop than I am a bootmaker. Here, bring me a pile of those newly dusted books on the shelves quickly!”

Dollops staggered back with an odd dozen of them and set them down upon the table, mystification in every line of his countenance; watching, entranced, while Cleek ran his fingers lightly through them. Scattered through the pages of printed matter were blank sheets of supposedly white paper—endless numbers of them, which Cleek sniffed and tapped and set back again in turn. As he finished the last book, he nodded triumphantly, and, dusting his hands together, clapped Dollops upon the shoulder with a little laugh of pure delight.

“I said,” he began, “that this wasn’t a second-hand bookshop at all, didn’t I, Dollops? Well, neither is it. You told me that the two Chinese left this shop the night before last with books under their arms, and left it smiling. Quite right. Only I



hadn't realized the significance of that statement before. I know its importance now. This is no bookshop, Dollops, this hell-nest here! It's just a dope store under a different guise; and our friend Mr. Spender, who lies there dead from the assassin's knife, was a very clever and very diabolical trafficker in drugs!"

## CHAPTER XXVI

### ON THE TRAIL OF THE BALANKHA-DAHS

**G**AWDAMUSSY!" Dollops's jaw dropped under this amazing statement, and he fell back a little, hands flung up in horror. This astonishing master of his literally left him gasping. To have found that out from a mere looking at, and smelling of, a book was more than his mentality could stagger under. Cleek smiled at him, although his face was grim.

"Run out and fetch the policeman on point duty," he said rapidly, "and when he and I have had a little parley together, you can nip along to the general post office and send a wire in code to headquarters. This wasps' nest must be watched for further developments. It shouldn't be left an instant. A tin of kerosene and a box of matches would do more good than mere man could realize! And I'd stop and attend to the business myself, and take a chance at it, if I hadn't this matter of the Amber Ship to clear up first of all. But a constable must be here on duty in this place, day and night, and ready to arrest any Chinks or Englishmen who come near it on chance of stealing. I've got to have time

to examine this diary and read it through thoroughly. Either the old chap was a double-dyed scamp, or he was a tool. I can't tell yet. Now fetch the constable, like a good chap, and be quick about it."

Dollops was back in no time, the constable, a burly person, following him. Cleek gave him a quick nod of recognition and got to the business of the moment at once.

"My name's Cleek, Constable," he said. "I want an expert here to photograph these fingerprints immediately. And I want this place watched day and night, with a constable right here in the shop on continual duty. A couple, perhaps, would be better. But that can be arranged later. Can you fetch a mate back here while my lad and I stay, and make all arrangements as quickly as possible?"

"Mr. Cleek, is it, sir? I should just think I could, sir!" The constable's voice was filled with admiring awe. "If you'll just stay here a jiffy, sir, I'll get on to the phone for headquarters at once."

The constable made good time, for within the short span of half an hour he and his mate had returned with word that the expert would arrive there at the earliest possible moment. But the hands of Cleek's watch pointed to half-past three before the work in that little shop was done, and the expert had gone off with his films and his camera,



and the promise that the prints should be ready for examination by nine in the morning.

“Good business, Mr. Metters!” said Cleek approvingly, as he shook hands with him and left him outside the shop. “If all the Yard’s business were in such capable hands, we should know a little better where we stood with the criminal classes, and England would be quicker purged of the asps that lie in her peaceful bosom. I’ll be round at the Yard and into your office at nine sharp.”

“And the prints will be ready for you, Mr. Cleek. Good-bye, and good luck to you.”

“Many thanks. Now, Dollops, we must be off. A new disguise, lad, and a thrilling hour or two before the peaceful morning breaks. That’s the programme for you and me. We’d best nip round to the flat and do our changing there, and then off and away to that section of the underworld which finds the hours of darkness more useful than the hours of day. We’re off to trail the Balankha-Dahs, Dollops, and for a possible four hours will carry our lives in our hands. Some sport, eh?”

“Yes, sir. Quite so, sir. Just as you say, sir.” Dollops licked his lips with the point of a suddenly dry tongue. Then, at sight of Cleek’s face, his eyes lit. “Gawd bless yer, Guv’nor, for a first-clarss proper gen’leman,” he ejaculated. “If you’re orf adventurin’, I’m your man! Lead on, Plum Duff. And I shouldn’t be a bit surprised if we don’t ’appen

on some of them Apaches while we're abaht it. Wot's it ter be, Guv'nor? 'Ighwaymen or day-labourers? Wot's the corstoom?"

"Mechanics—anything dirty and looking like the dickens," returned Cleek, with a boyish grin at the adventure that lay in front of him. "That's the stuff, Dollops."

"Look, sir?" gasped Dollops. "Look out there. That's a blinkin' Chink a-snoopin' of 'is ugly mug rahnd the corner of that building. Makin' tracks fer the bookshop, I lay. Better 'ang up 'ere for a moment, sir, and watch."

Cleek whipped round instantly and looked in the direction of Dollops's pointing finger. That part of London is not by any means well lighted, and the solitary lamp-post which stood some fifty yards ahead of them was not of much assistance for that which lay behind. But the moving figure, slinking like a shadow amongst other shadows, brought him instantly to attention, and he drew himself up against an adjacent wall as soundlessly as a cat.

The figure slunk on. Round the corner of that little street, padding on silent feet, hands tucked into dark sleeves, yellow face grinning evilly as it made its silent progress. Dollops was certainly right. And the man was making for the bookshop at the corner. That fact, too, was perfectly plain. Cleek would have liked to follow him and have a scrap, for his adventurous blood was up, and the whole spirit of

the man alive and itching to be back once more adventuring with life.

“Gad!” he whispered, with a sigh of envy. “I’d like to follow him. But time’s getting short. And Jackson and his mate will fall for him, all right. Better be getting back to the car now, Dollops. Lennard’s just round the curve here. And there’ll be plenty of sport to follow at the lay of the Balankha-Dahs! That I can promise you.”

But even Cleek, drilled as he was in adventure and in slipping out of tight places—even Cleek did not for one instant dream of how much sport there would be. Yet that night’s adventures were to live long in his memory, and to colour luridly every mental picture of the riddle that was to be called the Amber Ship for many moons to come.



## CHAPTER XXVII

### AN UNWELCOME DISCOVERY

**L**IMEHOUSE, to the uninitiated, presents a mental picture of one corner of London's squalid slumdom peopled with Oriental and Occidental indiscriminately mixed into one great, unwashed whole. And the uninitiated are not far wrong, either. For certain parts of Limehouse, when the sun has set and the rest of the decent-living world has gone snugly to bed between clean sheets, come to life.

With the sluggish muddy river making its murky way past ugly wharf and uglier mud-flat, and its reek of tenements, peopled with the scum of a dozen or more nations who have drifted there and found it a useful spot to hide in, one does not wonder that the more ordinary citizen leaves it severely alone. For night prowlings in Limehouse are apt to lead to adventures of a more than questionable character, and the idle old Thames, losing here much of his dignity of age and elegance, merely adds to the possibilities of convenient hiding places between the flat, floating barges which lie moored upon its breast.

Cleek knew it pretty well, and as he and Dollops pursued their swift way through the mean streets and alleyways that make up its purlieus, the ordinary passer-by would have classed them as just two fragments of the flotsam and jetsam which that sinkpot of London calls its own. Filthy corduroys clad Cleek, while an unspeakable cloth of uncertain age and colour took the place of a collar; Dollops's outfit was only one degree less appalling. And with hands and faces streaked with oil and grime to give them the proper climatic tint of its denizens, there was nothing to distinguish them from the other wharf rats and loiterers who moved along its streets.

Yet Cleek, passing a couple of policemen strolling together upon their beat—for one man alone is not security enough in some parts for the law's fulfilling—touched the sleeve of the outer one, stopped a moment, and whispered some magic word into the surprised countenance turned toward him. After a hurried exchange of courtesies, he continued on his way, knowing that, if need be, there would be the useful blue-coat on hand when required.

“Which way?” breathed Dollops, as they came to a crossing, and paused a moment, loitering, hands in pockets, to survey the lay of the land. Cleek glanced hastily to right and left, then nodded his head at a narrow, stinking alley hidden in the murk of the darkness. “Lor! what a blinkin’ ’ell-spot!”

A Chinaman shambled by them, padding silently

with little mincing steps, with a white woman shuffling along beside him. She staggered a little as she walked.

“Opium den just along on the left,” whispered Cleek shortly. “And beyond that, the second house up, our quarry. There’s a brick passage along here somewhere which leads out on to the wharf, and if we’re careful we ought to find a hiding place somewhere out there from which we can catch a glimpse of things. Ah, here it is. Single-file here, boy, and follow close behind me. We’ll be there in a jiffy. ’Ere, I s’y! Oh, beg pardin, mate! I didn’t see yer!” This to a skulking form that pushed past him unceremoniously, sending startled brown eyes up into his face.

“All right. No offence. So long,” returned this person, and went on rapidly in the opposite direction, while Dollops, waiting until he was safely out of earshot, leaned toward Cleek and touched him on the arm.

“See ’im, sir? That’s a bloomin’ blacky, that is. Nice lot of mixed chocolates up ’ere, ain’t there?”

“Hindoo,” said Cleek briefly. “We’ll probably fall foul of a good many more, though I’m not anxious to. This place we’re after is where they hang out. All the flotsam and jetsam from overseas—black and white and chocolate-tinted—meet here o’ nights to discuss their mad schemes. Fanatics, most of ’em,



in the pay of their blessed priestcraft. Step lively, Dollops. We'll be out of it in a minute and on to the wharf, where we'll try and find a front-row seat, and have a squint at what they're up to. That boy's got to be found, or his body traced somewhere, and I've a theory this evening's work will help."

Five more minutes in that dark, evil-smelling passageway between the two houses led them at length upon the open wharf, where a dozen or so barges rose and fell upon the river's gentle tide, washing against each other with grind of chain and bump of woodwork which made a sort of steady undertone to the peaceful serenity of the night. Not a soul was to be seen anywhere at this moment, but as Cleek looked round, hiding under the shadow of the archway that terminated the passage, his keen eye spotted a little, slim-hipped Lascar, sitting cross-legged upon a broken spar of wood some distance to the right of them. His red cap was pushed back upon his black hair, and a clay pipe hung between his lips.

"That's awkward!" Cleek's whispered words barely reached Dollops's listening ears. "Got to get rid of him somehow. He's on the watch. Good old chloroform here, lad! You step softly to the right of him, and I'll charge on the left. If we make a sound, or let him raise any outcry, there'll be the dickens to pay. Now, then!"

He stopped a moment and drew a piece of soiled

rag and a corked bottle from his pocket. Dollops, tiptoeing upon rubber-soled feet, lifted glowing eyes to his master's face. With Cleek in the offing, the possibility of a scrap appealed mightily. He began to grin.

"Stinkin' stuff, Guv'nor," he whispered back, as Cleek drew the cork from the bottle and saturated the cloth with its contents. "Gawd! Don't it strangle yer! Orl ready?"

"Yes. *Now!*"

Silently they swept up to the unknowing man and seized him from behind, pinioning his arms tightly. Before he could so much as utter a sound, Cleek had clapped the chloroformed rag across his mouth, tied it securely behind, and the thing was done with barely a struggle.

"Now, quick with him into that barge there, Dollops! And the path's clear. That's it. Tuck the beauty in safely, and leave him. It'll be some time before he comes round again with that mouthful! Quick as you can! Now for the house!"

They lifted the inanimate Lascar into the barge, covered him with a handy tarpaulin, and returned to the wharf again, both equally thrilled with the beginning of their adventure.

"This is the life, sir," remarked Dollops, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand and grinning up at Cleek as he stood still a moment looking for the likeliest spot to begin operations on. But that

likely spot was difficult to find, for the tumble-down building in which he had told Dollops these men met for discussion of their plans had once obviously been a storehouse of some kind. The lower part of it was open for storage, a huge cavern as black as a pocket, and to the right of it a ladder stood, reaching to the bare tip of the sill of a window above. Through this glimmered the uncertain rays of what was probably an oil lamp, and they could see several figures silhouetted against it, as of men sitting together and talking earnestly.

“Got to get a squint into that room, anyhow,” whispered Cleek, after a moment. “And nothing for it but to mount that ladder and hope for the best.”

“But, sir, it ain’t safe, that ain’t!” Dollops’s whispered undertone was strained with anxiety. “You carnt do that, sir! It’s too blinkin’ risky! Puttin’ of yer precious ’ead inter the lions’ den like that! And all open-like, too.”

Cleek smiled. “Nothing for it, lad, but to try. See here; you stand at the bottom of the ladder, and mount guard. If any one comes while I’m up there, whistle three times, and I’ll know there’s danger. And then run for your life. Don’t worry about me. I’ll be safe, as one blast on my whistle will fetch the police. Now I’m going up.”

He made for the ladder, and felt its steadiness, but Dollops’s hand upon his sleeve restrained him for a moment.



“Don’t do it, Mr. Cleek! Don’t do it, for mercy sake!” begged the boy. “’Tain’t sense, sir. Your ’ead’s worf more’n a blinkin’ Chinee’s jools. Amber Ship or no Amber Ship, you let ’em be, sir. Or I’ll go up for yer. But not you, Mr. Cleek, not you! You’re that risky, you’ll meet yer death for certain sure.”

“Can’t help that, Dollops,” smiled back Cleek, as he patted the boy’s shoulder. “Up that ladder I’m going. I wish it weren’t quite so public, I admit. But there’s nothing for it, and time’s precious. Now hold her safe, please. I don’t want a sousing in old Father Thames to cool my ardour!”

“Well, it’s the only thing’ll cool your ’ot ’ead, if you’ll pardon my sayin’ so, sir,” returned Dollops dejectedly. “Well, if you’re goin,’ you’re goin’, but be careful—do!”

Miserably he took up his position at the foot of the ladder and watched while the being whom he loved more than life itself, and whom he would have followed to Hades if necessity demanded, mounted the crazy steps. He swung at last upon the upper ledge which lay an inch or so below the sill of the window.

After a pause of a moment or two he pulled himself softly up to the level of the window itself, and peered in at the outer corner. The room, which was merely the upper floor of a barn-like structure that had never been intended for such usage, was full of men and tobacco smoke. Through the haze of it he saw

many brown faces and the heterogeneous assortment of European and native garments which make up the western wear of the travellers from the other side of the world.

But there was not a Chinese face amongst them. Mostly Hindoos, from what he could make out, with a sprinkling of the little, thick-set Cockney type of wharf-hand who follows in the van of every bit of trouble brewing in his own country. Amongst this collection Cleek discerned two or three dark-skinned men of an obviously higher caste, upon whose faces was the stamp of education and fanaticism.

They spoke in lowered voices, and he could barely catch a sentence now and again, and always the murk of the tobacco smoke grew thicker and thicker, so that it became difficult to discern any face plainly through the fog of it.

Then from the other side of the room a door opened and another man entered, followed shortly by a companion. At sight of these two Cleek drew in his breath sharply, and dropped a moment from his observation post. French, these—French Apaches, if he knew anything of the type. And he knew a great deal. These, then, were Margot's gang, come to make terms, no doubt, or to tell the secret of the hiding place of that which they all coveted so tremendously. It behoved him to be careful here, for the Apaches' eyes were keen and curious, and always on the look-out for possible eavesdroppers.

He heard the sound of voices raised in protest and caught the drift of the conversation. He set his mouth into a suddenly grim line, drawing his brows down. So that was it, was it? And these men of Margot's——

He dared not raise his head again until the noise subsided, but crouched there, hunched up beneath the sill, all ears, until a scraping of chairs upon the floor and the clatter of many feet shuffling on bare boards tempted him once more. Then a woman's voice floated to him out there in the darkness of that still night, and he caught his breath abruptly and crept an inch or two upward until his eyes just reached to the edge of the sill.

It was a risky thing to do, but he had to do it. For the woman's voice, striking in so stridently across that hum of men's voices, told him of the new arrival, and as he took one startled glance at her he saw that it was Margot.

“Has she got the Amber Ship or hasn't she?” he asked himself quickly, as he watched her standing there in all her cruel beauty, like some poppy flaming up suddenly upon the brown earth, and shrinking a little at sight of her and her womanhood surrounded by such a crowd of unspeakable beings.

“You have it, you've got the stone?” they clamoured at her, swarming round her slim figure like rats, and clawing at her dress and hands. “Where?”

She threw her arms out to drive them away.



“No, no! Not yet. You mus’ give me time, a littl’ longer! Anozzer day or so. I ’ave ze idea of where eet ees, but eet is not safe yet to attempt to fetch it. I should be keeled, yes, and zen zere would be no Margot to do your bidding. *Nom d’un chien!* ’Ow you clamour! I am no magic-woman, me. I am but ’uman. Give me time, time!”

Some chattering native struck in at this juncture, gesticulating like a monkey with his brown hands. Another followed him; still another. Then one slim, brown-skinned man who seemed to be in command held up his hand, and they were instantly silent. He spoke to them commandingly in their own tongue, and Cleek, who had a smattering of Hindustani, caught the gist of what he said, and knew a number of things.

Then once more the door opened to admit still another member of the party. Cleek caught a name, “Gunga Dal,” and then, as this last person entered the room, was so far shaken out of his customary caution as to reach up still farther and let his whole face show against the window, in his interest forgetting for a moment all cautionary methods of facial expression. For the newcomer had brought revelation to him.

“Good God!” he ejaculated under his breath. Then, recalling caution, he tried to duck down suddenly as someone strode over to the window. He was just one brief second too late.

There was a sudden cry; the clamour of many feet hurrying toward the window, and the shrill scream of Margot's voice as she hurled her way through the little group, fighting to reach the window first.

“Name of a devil! Cleek, Cleek! The Cracksmen—not dead!” she shrilled out crazily, waving her arms above her head in a very frenzy of fury. “I saw 'is face for a moment, just over the window-sill! Oh, 'urry, 'urry! We 'ave the devil at last. And I shall pay my debt to 'eem to the bitter end!”

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### PURSUIT

**T**O SAY that Cleek hurried down that ladder in his effort to get away is to understate the fact altogether. Before you could wink an eye he was down to the waiting and terrified Dollops and had caught hold of the ladder and taken it away just as a pair of brown hands reached out to grasp its top.

“Margot, Dollops! Run like blazes!” he threw out. “Here, pitch the beastly thing into the water, and let ’em hunt for it later. And away with us as quickly as possible. If we should be caught——”

“Well, our blinkin’ number would be up,” returned Dollops, breathlessly. “Now for it, sir! If they was to catch hold of you!”

“They’re not going to,” returned Cleek, and began to run, doubling through twisted alleyways, while behind them came the mingled shouts and hoarse cries of those others whom Margot had set upon his heels. Dollops, panting, was close behind him, they were making good time, and yet the cries and shouts seemed to be growing steadily nearer and nearer. Through the bricked alley which had led



them out upon the wharf they came, out at last into the tangle of mean streets with pounding steps behind them and a possibility of capture appallingly near.

“Better give the signal for the police!” gasped out Cleek at length, as they went on racing together through the murky night, time and place forgotten in their mad rush for freedom. “Those devils are not far behind. Here! Give three blasts on this whistle. I’m done for breath. It’ll probably put the brown men off, though Margot, having scented her quarry, will take more than whistling away. Still, it’ll lessen chances. And cut up that side alley, boy. I’m trying some of the old Cracksman tricks, and going to do a lightning change before the devils arrive.”

Dollops cut up the alley, after ringing out those three shrill whistles which meant “Danger. Come immediately,” to the waiting blue-coats. And Cleek, swinging off to the left, stopped in a doorway, twitched off his coat and threw it over an adjacent wall, tore off his neck-cloth and re-tied it, put his cap on hind part before, and did something to his face which altered it completely. It became the physiognomy of another man. Then, emerging from the doorway, just as the pounding, racing, maddened procession of humanity came swinging round in his direction, led by a wild-eyed harpy with streaming hair, whom he knew as Margot, began to whistle

and saunter toward them, with his hands in his trousers' pockets, and his heart thumping.

The racing procession stopped for a moment, hesitated, and then, advancing upon him, one of the foremost caught him by the arm.

"Seen any one running away by here, matey?"

The whistling man ceased his whistle, took his hands out of his pockets, and spat with remarkable precision.

"Yus. Slim chap wiv a red 'andkerchief rahnd 'is bloomin' neck, an' runnin' as though all 'ell was after 'un?"

"That's heem, that's heem, the devil incarnate!" exclaimed Margot excitedly. "And whether alone or with that little red-haired follower of his I know not. But where did he go? Speak up, or I'll wring your lazy throat for you! Where?"

"Up that turnin' there, to the left. And round the corner of that there wall. And alone, so far as I saw, anyway," replied the casual person in a gruff voice. "And not so much of yer lip, missus, if you please! Bill Stiggins ain't one ter tyke free speech from a lydy wivout giving of it back agin, and somethin' else to go wiv it, too. No wonder yer 'usban's a bin and gorn an' done a bolt. Don't blame 'im neither."

Then, resuming his whistling, he continued idly to swing along the street, doing a little dancing step now and then, as one who is at peace with life and

the world, until the last of those brown-skinned demons and pale-faced Apaches had gone past him, and the way was clear again. For a short time, at any rate.

Then like a flash he swung round in his tracks and was off in the opposite direction in which he had told Dollops to go. The lad was hiding in a yard, and upon the sound of his master's soft, low-pitched whistle, emerged from under a tarpaulin and gazed up at him in the darkness. But it was a strange face that he looked into, and a strange man who thus was taking his master's place and calling the old hoot-owl's signal. His face went suddenly pale; he sucked in his breath and darted back under the tarpaulin, and began moving about under it comically.

"You ain't a-catchin' of me, you ain't!" he called out shrilly from under the tarpaulin's enshrouding folds. "And if yer does, it'll tyke more'n your sort ter git me master's 'idin' plyce out er me! I've got small-pox, I 'ave, and I'm infecshus. If yer touches of me, yer'll git it fer shure. Fer I'm a dangerous subject!"

Then the sound of a little low chuckle came to him, and he stuck out a tousled head. "Guv'nor, Lor' blimey, if you ain't a caution! Now, 'oo'd 'a' thought it? Why, you've been and gorn and took of me in, strite you 'ave. Come on, sir. This 'ere spot's too 'ot fer us. We'd better be nippin' orf as farst as we kin, afore them blighters return."



“Exactly what I am thinking, Dollops. So come out of it, you bundle of loyalty, and we’ll make tracks for Lennard again. We’ve another mile to go, but if we’re careful, we should make it all right, and with the blue-coats in pursuit, they ought to account for several of that pretty little gang. Pray Providence Margot will be among ’em! If I could only follow ’em and nail her myself. But time’s too short, worse luck.”

“Best luck, you mean,” whispered back Dollops, emerging somewhat more filthy than ever and shaking himself down. “Fer there’s yer sweet’cart to think of now, sir; there’s Miss Ailsa, Gawd bless ’er sweet eyes! And she’d not be wishin’ for you ter git inter any unnecessary scrapes—that she wouldn’t.”

“No, you’re right, Dollops. Now, no more talking. This thing’s more serious than we thought, and Margot has got wind that I am in London again, and it means the old, mad, bad times come back, and life in one’s hands once more. And I’m getting too old for that sort of existence now. So silence and action—that’s our motto!”

Not another word passed between them thereafter. They simply concentrated upon the task in hand, and pursued it soundlessly. Down past the river they scurried like shadows stealing out at nightfall; on along the wharf’s edge until at length they came to the little dinghy in which they had crossed, and stepped into it.

The splash of the water under their oars sounded like pistol shots to their strained ears, but they made no other sound during the voyage across the old Thames. But the task was none too easy, with barges and other floating craft for ever in their path. Once they bumped inadvertently into some low-lying barge which struck them slightly upon the bows, and were rewarded for their mistake by the sudden volley of oaths flung at them by the thoroughly roused and awakened owner of it.

Cleek swung the little craft away quickly into a patch of unoccupied water, with a muttered, "Sorry, matey! Got an appointment and must 'urry. No offence," and went on with his task. And at length the shore was reached. He shipped the oars, sprang out upon the wharveside, and drew the little cockleshell of a craft back once more into its place, fastening it securely with the length of rope with which it had originally been fastened. Then with a sudden whimsicality indicative of the man even in such moments of stress as this, he paused a second, whipped out his wallet, drew out a pound note and an old envelope from which the address had been meticulously removed, slipped the note inside, and then with his fountain pen scrawled the words, "*Many thanks for use of your boat. It is herewith returned unharmed,*" and pinned the envelope to the tarpaulin which covered it.

Dollops watched with interested, if amazed, eyes

while this was being done, then joined Cleek in the swift run to the inner street where Lennard waited patiently with the limousine.

“All ready!” rapped out Cleek to the sleepy chauffeur, and hopped inside the motor. Then they were off and away through the quiet streets toward the West End of London, even as the dawn was creeping over the sleeping city. And so to the closing in of the net which had shrouded that part of the mystery which was called the Amber Ship.



## CHAPTER XXIX

### NEWS AT THE MANOR

IT WAS a brilliant, sunshiny morning. Dorothy, the little kitchen-maid at the Manor, was standing at the back door, whistling a tune to herself, when she saw the figure of the old pedler coming slowly and painfully up the bordered kitchen path.

“Goodness!” she exclaimed, letting her mouth fall open with surprise at the sight. “You here again, so soon! What’s brought you this time, ole man? Cook fixed up next week with yer, didn’t she, ter finish them winders? She won’t be best pleased ter see yer agin; that she won’t.”

Ole Tom stopped in his tracks and shook his grizzled old head with many mutterings.

“Brought you a present, a pretty fairin’, young missy,” he said in his mournful voice. “But I didn’t expect ter ’ave sich a pore welcome! Look, see ’ow it sparkles! A ring, missy. Fit fer a queen.”

“Ow goodie me! Cook, come ’ere, and look wot Ole Tom ’as brought me.” Dorothy skipped back into the kitchen excitedly, clapping her hands. Then she came out again with Cook’s plump figure

looming up behind her. "A fine ring, it is! If it don't take all me wages fer ter buy it!"

"Gracious mercy!" exclaimed Cook, on sight of the old pedler. "You 'ere again? 'Twas only yesterday you come before. And ter bring a ring ter Dorothy, too, so she says. Now, now, old man, no use ter be makin' up to the likes of 'er!"

Cook waved a floury forefinger and smiled as she shook her head, her kind heart beaming out at Ole Tom through her kindly eyes.

"Not only young missy, ma'am," replied Ole Tom with a grin, "but fer you, too. When I went 'ome yesterday, my gran'darter she ses ter me, she ses, 'Gran'fer, 'tain't often ye meets with a good Christian like that there lady in the kitchen of the Manor,' ses she ter me, 'an' 'er givin' you the bit er work an' all, and a seat and a cup of tay fer tired bones,' ses she. ' 'Tis fer you to take 'er up this lace collar straight away, and thank 'er fer bein' so kind to a pore ole man.'"

Speaking, he opened his worn little knapsack and drew out a piece of tissue paper, from which he took a wide lace collar and handed it to Cook with a gallant bow. That good woman was taken back with pleased surprise.

"Well, well, well, if that ain't real nice of you, ole man," she said as she took it. "And ter think of you a-comin' all this way up ter bring it to me! Where's yer gran'darter, eh?"

“Out along back o’ Ponders,” replied he, with a shake of his grizzled head. “Her’s married, and give a bed to I fer a shakedown durin’ the week I’m ’ere wiv me peddlin’. ’Er ’usbin’s in the wicker trade, makin’ baskets and sich-like. An’ she give me this ter give you, and that there sparklin’ ring fer the young miss. Happen I c’d sit down a little in the sunshine, and rest, ma’am, if ye’d be so kind?”

“Certainly, certainly!” Cook bustled about at once, well pleased with her gift, and a little flattered inwardly at the old man’s attention to her. “’Ere, sit ye down on this chair, and rest awhile. This do be a glorious day. Dorothy, run in an’ see if the kettle boils. Ole man’ll like a cup of tea, I’ll be bound.”

Then, as Dorothy sped away upon her light feet, Cook, arms akimbo, stood gazing down at this poor old specimen of humanity, and ruminated upon the sad life of the aged of his kind, even as she talked away to him in her steady flow of conversation.

“Yes, fine day, indeed. There be big doin’s in the village to-day, so I ’ears. What’s that, eh? Oh, ’tis the day chosen for the inquest upon that pore old gentleman what lived up at the ’Ouse on the ’Ill, and met ’is death so suddintlike and sad. ’Tis a gruesome business, I take it, this inquest affair, though I’ve never yet been to sich in all my forty-five years.”

“Indeed, ma’am?” Ole Tom’s voice ran up a



quavering scale of amazement. "Well, 'tis not a pleasant sight, I promise ye. Not one fer a leddy to go to, from all I 'ears. Your madam'll not 'ave to be goin', of course, and none from the great 'ouse here, I suppose?"

"Well, that's where you suppose wrong." Cook's voice was full of mystery and significance. She rather liked chatting to this old man who paid such fervent attention to her views, and gave her, with his rheumy old eyes, such a full quota of respectful admiration. "For me lady 'as already been sent for, and nurse, too—Miss Ellison, that is, wot waits upon Sir George, pore thing, and finds life none too easy, I'll be bound! I wouldn't 'ave that job of 'ers fer nothink; that I wouldn't!"

Ole Tom raised surprised eyebrows. "Oh! So yer lady 'as ter go, does she?" he queried, taking out an old clay pipe and stuffing it with shag with one shaky thumb. "That be queer, don't it? But I suppose that was simply because she went up to look for 'er son, like you told me, the night the dreadful thing 'appened. Still, for a titled lady——"

Cook tossed her head with a touch of injured dignity. "'Er ladyship's not goin', I kin tell you that," she said flatly, "because she's goin' ter say she 'as a call up ter Lunnon an' can't possibly attend. So that ought to settle them officious policemen wot sent for 'er, properly. 'Er don't want to be mixed up with the business, naturally. Well, 'ere's yer tea, ole

man. I must be goin', else I'll never finish. I've extry work to do to-day, with that there leddy's-maid a-slippin' off like that."

For a moment Ole Tom could barely restrain a smile. This was what he had come for, this very item of news, and he had got it without having to resort to questioning. Surely Cook was one of the most garrulous females he had ever encountered. He showed her a face of blank amazement.

"Leddy's-maid gone!" he exclaimed, gaping up at her. "Not that there smart young miss wot jumbled up all me pretties yesterday? Not 'er, you don't mean? Why, she only come a day or two back, you say."

"And found the place not quite to her leddyship's likin', I suppose!" responded Cook tartly, shrugging her shoulders. "Them smart ones of 'er sort are allus like that. Too stylish fer service, they are! I wouldn't like ter say wot I think of 'em, fer it ain't Christian, and I prefers ter keep me mouth shut on all wot doesn't concern me."

She shook herself with that air of self-righteousness which belongs to the plain good woman whom no one would suspect of being other than what she looked, and turned back toward the kitchen door. And just as she did so, someone struck in through the pathway which led past the tradesmen's entrance and into the main garden beyond, and Ole Tom, turning quickly, perceived her ladyship fairly running toward

them, an open letter in her hand. Her face, rather paler this morning than it had been yesterday, showed every indication of anger.

Ole Tom shuffled to his feet and doffed his cap instantly, setting down his cup of tea, while Cook, caught unawares as she was in this dispensing of her mistress's largesse, flushed a deep red, and folded her hands across her apron, waiting for the charge which she fully expected to come.

But her ladyship was too interested in something else to notice the old man at that moment. She waved the letter excitedly in Cook's face, and spoke in a quick, agitated voice.

"Did you ever hear of such impertinence in your life, Bridget!" she stormed angrily. "Here I have found a note from that Marie, pinned on to my pin-cushion, if you please, saying that she had found the situation not at all to her liking, and had therefore taken her leave. Packed up her bag and gone, and left me stranded. What servants are coming to, I don't know! And when I wanted her to pack a bag for me so that I could get off to London by the twelve o'clock train, and miss that abominable inquest to which they have demanded my presence! It is most annoying, most!"

Bridget's soft calm voice broke affectionately in upon her mistress's anger. "Ah, now, don't be takin' on about it too much, m'lady," she said, with the familiarity and affection born of long



service with this mistress, for whom she would readily have given her right hand, if need be. "You just go upstairs again and rest yerself, and I'll be comin' up and lookin' after ye. Ye're not strong enough to be bothered with them flighty girls, m'lady, and I do say that that there young Dorothy is quick with her fingers, and with a little trainin' would serve yer leddyship a deal better than them foreign 'ussies. I'm sorry, of course, m'lady, but don't fret over it. I'll bring ye up a cup of sum-mink 'ot in a minute or two, and you lie down on yer sofa and rest a bit. Bridget'll see that everythink's all right."

Her ladyship smiled, and Cleek, noting the smile, saw how it illumined her whole face. The tired, hollow eyes brightened visibly. She came forward and touched her faithful servant upon the arm.

"You're a dear, good soul, Bridget," she said warmly, "and I don't know how ever I should do without you. But who's this old man? And what is he doing here? You know my orders about strangers."

Cook coloured up suddenly.

"Yes, m'lady, I do that. But this ole man's a pedler wot come yesterday, and wouldn't 'urt a fly." This last in a lowered tone, as she nodded significantly at him. "Look at 'im, m'lady, and see fer yerself. He wouldn't do no one any 'arm, 'e wouldn't. And I was feelin' so sorry for 'im, bein'

so old and all, that I give 'im a chair in the sunshine and a cup o' tea, knowin' full well that yer leddyship's kind 'eart wouldn't wish me ter do otherwise."

Lady Brentwood looked at him for a moment through narrowed lids. Then she sighed and turned upon her heel.

"Well," she said, "I don't doubt you're right, Bridget. But don't let him sit too long, and"—she came closer to the cook's ample figure and lowered her voice—"if those police officers come again and ask for me, tell them I've gone to London, Tell them I'm ill. Tell them anything, Bridget, so long as I don't have to appear at that dreadful ceremony this afternoon." Her voice thrilled with anxiety and her face had gone dreadfully white.

"All right, m'lady, never you fear," responded Cook in her kind, practical voice. "I'll see to it that they don't worry ye. Ye can trust your old Bridget, can't ye, and rest quiet now?"

Then, as her ladyship moved off, Cook stood watching her for a moment with a sad look in her eyes, and then, sighing, suddenly swung upon her heel and came toward where old Tom was sitting.

"Her's the sweetest mistress in Christendom," she said in a sorrowful, low-pitched tone, shaking her head and puckering up her lips ruminatively. "And 'er life that sad! First with the squire and then Mr. Frank, and then—this other awful thing!

But what am I standin' 'ere talkin' fer, ole man? That's what I'd like ter know, when 'er leddyship is waitin' fer a cup of 'ot soup to strengthen 'er, before she takes 'er rest. I could shake that Marie for worryin' 'er like that, I could! An' a kinder, nicer mistress never a servant 'ad!"

Then she entered the kitchen again, and for a time Cleek sat on, sipping his tea and smoking his clay pipe, and thinking over many things. What, then, was this awful thing of which Cook spoke with bated breath? Had it, perhaps, some bearing upon that tragedy which had taken place upon that fateful night so short a time ago? And why did her ladyship go up to the House on the Hill upon that very same tragic evening, on a pretence of seeing her son there? And if that were true, then why did Frank Brentwood go up there at all that night, and for what mysterious purpose? As he thought of the young man, and what he had heard out there in Limehouse last night in that hornets' nest upon the wharf's edge, his mouth grew suddenly grim. The end of the riddle was in sight, and someone was going to be severely hurt for the telling of it.

Ten minutes later he set down his cup upon the flagged path, put his clay pipe in his pocket, and shambled over to the open kitchen door, poking his head in.

"Good-morning to ye, and many thanks!" he sang out in his quavering, old man's voice. Then he



turned and went off down the pathway and out of the gate, toward the inn of the Golden Arm and the pursuit of still one more tangled thread which must be smoothed out before the end of the riddle could be successfully reached.

## CHAPTER XXX

### WHAT THE TRUNK HELD

**B**ACK at the Golden Arm, Cleek summoned Dollops to a quiet talk in his bedroom, behind locked doors. They sat side by side upon a little settee drawn back from the window, with the book that they had discovered in the bookshop in that room of death for which Dollops had shown such a marked distaste open upon Cleek's knee. Dollops's head was pressed close against his master's in an effort to read the closely written pages which Cleek had promised to share with him.

Page after page passed under their scrutinizing eyes, and as each page was read, the look of wonderment, of horror, of blank amaze grew upon each countenance, until they looked up simultaneously at the culmination of it and expressed their joint feelings in ejaculation.

"Gorblimey, sir!" said Dollops.

"Great Heavens above!" exclaimed Cleek, closing the book with a snap and locking it away in an attaché-case fitted with a patent key of which only he had the secret. "So that was it, was it? And that part of the riddle is solved. Just to think of it!

A man and a woman—like that! One didn't know such methods existed, eh, Dollops? And here, right under the nose of the Yard. Heigho! But there's much yet to learn in the handling of the educated criminal before justice and law are perfected to such a degree that they may finally eradicate wrongdoing altogether.

“Business-like old josser, wasn't it? With his neatly kept records. A lifelong habit, doubtless, too old to be broken, even under such circumstances. Which only goes to show, Dollops, how habit makes slaves of all of us, good and bad alike, until we are bound to it in chains of steel and fetters of iron. Look here. We've got three hours and a half yet before that inquest begins, and a pocketful of tangled skeins still unravelled. Game for another search of the House on the Hill, eh?”

Dollops sprang to his feet, nodding his head at the sunlight which streamed through the open window of the bedroom, as one who says, “Any mystery is easy in the daylight.”

“Ra-ther, sir! Let's hustle along now, afore the superintendent gets wind that we're back again. Any ideas where them two Chink servants got to, sir? Him what come down wiv you and the pore little prince, and him what was up at the 'Ouse on the 'Ill as the gentleman's boy?”

Cleek made a wry face at him.

“That's just the dickens of it, I haven't,” he re-



turned, with a sigh. "Those two Chinamen seem to have vanished off the very face of the earth. And until I do know, it's going to be the very devil to pin the crime on to any one person's shoulders. And yet, with Frank Brentwood there that night, and his mother, too——"

Dollops twitched up enquiring eyebrows. "'Er ladyship at the 'Ouse on the 'Ill on that fatal night, sir?" he gasped out. "Shorely you ain't thinkin' she 'ad anythink ter do wiv it. Not a real lady like 'er. I saw 'er in the village yesterday, walkin' wiv a friend, and blow me if I didn't fink she'd got the saddest phiz I ever looked at. You ain't a-thinkin' she 'ad anythink ter do wiv it, are yer?"

"I'm not thinking anything out loud just for the present, my lad," returned Cleek with a one-sided smile. "There are some thoughts I am keeping entirely to myself. And just what connection Lady Brentwood had with the tragedy is better, for the present, left severely alone. Only I mean her ladyship to appear at the inquest this afternoon, no matter what plea of sickness she gives. And that is why I toddled off to the station and interviewed the guard. Her ladyship will have no ticket for London issued to her to-day, upon any pretence whatever. And neither will Maud Ellison, even if she applies for one. With the evidence I have against both of 'em, Dollops, I don't mean to lose sight of either if I can possibly help it. Come along."

Together they descended the stairs and sidled across the hall, nodding to Betsy, who was busily dusting in the smoking room, in return for her friendly greeting.

“Got back, ’ave yer?” she said, with a laugh. “Up to some sort of tricks larst night, I’ll be bound. Well, ’ollerdays is ’ollerdays, and if Mr. Smithers wants ter tyke me ter the pictures to-morrer evenin’—which is my evenin’ orf, you see—I’ve no objection.”

She winked at Dollops, who winked back, nudging Cleek with the point of his elbow.

“Rather! I don’t fink!” he returned enthusiastically. “Me pal’s booked them, ain’t yer, Bill? So’s I kin get orf all right. And we’ll do a show together. So long.”

“S’long!” returned Betsy, blowing a kiss at him from the tips of her fingers. “Narsty sort er show on terday, though, so the milkman tells me. Hinqwest at the ’Ouse on the ’Ill at ’arf-past two. Not goin’ there, I suppose?”

Dollops did a very creditable attempt at a shiver, while Cleek shook his head decidedly.

“Rather not,” he said in a tone of distaste. “Them things don’t appeal to me, they don’t. Come on, matey. We must be off. See you later, Betsy-girl.”

Then they passed out of the front door and struck off through the adjacent woods in the direction of

the House on the Hill, and toward a new angle of the case upon which they were employed which neither had ever even dreamed of.

They found Leeson on guard outside the door. Within, several extra men from a near-by village were busy getting ready for the afternoon's gruesome business, under the directorship of Inspector Cogwell, who seemed to be making a great to-do over the arrangement of the chairs round the big dining room, so that everyone should be accommodated.

He greeted them with a curt nod, mentally registering them as "those jackanapes from Lunnon," Cleek eyed him for a minute through narrowed lids as he gave his directions. He had not liked the man on first sight, and every time he saw him he liked him a little less. There was something shifty, deuced peculiar, in this lazy inspector which got his gorge up. But under cover of his George Headland make-up he blundered up to him, and made his wants known.

"Look here," said he in his rough, uneducated voice, "I wants you and yer men to clear out of 'ere for a little while. Me and my mate is goin' ter make a little extra investigation of the place, and we don't want no onlookers."

"Oh, you don't, don't yer? And who give you your instructions, I'd like ter know?" returned the inspector with some heat. "Jist because you comes from Lunnon is no reason why you should treat other



folk who don't, like dirt! I'm not clearin' out of this room until me work's done, that's flat."

Cleek smiled a trifle grimly. "Oh, yes, you are, Inspector," he replied in his "Carstairs" tone, which gave that worthy a fright from which he would be long recovering, judging from his gaping mouth and change of colour. "You remember a gentleman called Carstairs, don't you? And a slight reprimand which Superintendent Narkom of Scotland Yard administered to you a day or so back? Well, I've my instructions straight from him. You shift, and shift now. We want this place to ourselves, if you please. In two hours' time you can return, not before."

"Oh, all right. Dashed if I know just who you are, but no offence meant, I'm sure," replied the inspector. "So long as you give me time to git the room ready for the coroner, I've no quarrel with your stayin' 'ere alone. Come along, men, I'll find work for you elsewhere."

"You might improve the shining hour by making a further detour of the gardens and seeing what you can find," threw in Cleek, as the inspector reached the doorway, followed by his quota of workers.

"I've searched every inch of the ground and found nothing, up to the present," he replied snappishly, and with a churlishness which got Cleek's blood up.

"Well, search some more, and be damned to you!" he said, and then, as the inspector left the room and shut the door, he turned the key in the lock on their

side of it, and laughed a trifle sheepishly into Dollops's face. "I can't somehow help losing my temper with that blighter. Now, Dollops, I'm going to show you a thing or two. Give a hand with this sideboard, like a good lad. That's the way. I'm going to take another squint at that Echo Chamber, and see if it will tell me anything further of the mystery which besets us at present."

They both placed their shoulders against the side of the huge monstrosity, and the sideboard moved out of its accustomed groove, showing the flat panel of wall behind it. Cleek's fingers soon found the spring and pressed upon it. He waited while the panel slid silently into place behind the remainder of the wall, showing its cavernous passage littered with crumbling plaster and mouldering brick.

"Lawks!" exclaimed Dollops, at sight of it. "So this is 'ow it's done, is it? Filthy-lookin' spot, I must s'y. Shall I go first?"

"No," returned Cleek quietly. "I will." He entered through the aperture, crawling upon his hands and knees, with the boy close at his heels. They straightened themselves in the passage, and made for the shut door, behind which they had first discovered the body of the man who had been a woman, or the woman who had been a man, they did not quite know which. Cleek turned the handle and opened it cautiously. The body had been removed to the local morgue until the afternoon's inquest, and

there was only a sinister dark brown stain upon the floor to show where it had lain.

Cleek went down on his hands and knees and began examining every inch of the flooring with his magnifying glass, while Dollops stood and gaped at him. There was no carpet, simply the bare boards, dust-laden and dirty, for the place had obviously been used as a storeroom for books and old clothing. Piles of torn papers and shabby books lined three sides of the wall, and on the other was an old trunk filled with similar articles.

After ten minutes thus spent, Cleek got to his feet and brushed the dust from his trousers' knees.

"I'm going to move that trunk, Dollops," he said at last, after a brief surveyal of the room. "I don't suppose there's a dashed thing behind it—it's too close to the wall—but all the same, I'm going to, so lend a hand, like a good chap."

"Fair furniture men we're gettin' to be, ain't we, sir?" grinned Dollops, as he placed his arms in position. "Ain't it 'eavy, eh? Takes a bit er movin', I must say."

"Old papers and books are nearly the heaviest things there are in the world," replied Cleek with a smile. "Here, let's tip some of the contents out. It can't do any harm to disarrange the old chap's papers now. So here goes."

Then he reached over, lifted the lid of the great trunk, and began to remove from the top some of the



filthy papers and books that were crowded down into it. Then he sprang back with a gasp of horrified amazement. For under the assortment of manuscripts lay the twisted body of a partly naked Chinese.

“Ow, what an ’orrible sight!” ejaculated Dollops, covering his face with his hands. “Ow orful! Anuvver blinkin’ Chink, sir!”

“Yes, Dollops, another blinkin’ Chink, as you say. What *is* the secret of this House of Horrors? This is the second Chinese body we have discovered, or, rather, the first, because the other was simply made up to look like one. Was it Octavius Spender’s boy, or wasn’t it? I’d give a good deal to know that. Cover the beastly thing down again, and let’s shift it out of the way. It’s enough to make your flesh creep!”

Then, as Dollops let the lid drop down hurriedly and hid the ghastly sight from view, the two of them leant their shoulders once more to the business of shifting the trunk, and got it well out into the middle of the room. There came a smashing sound to the left of them, near where it had stood, they were conscious of a trap door being lifted and swung back with amazing speed, and before they could move, a whirling figure leapt out and hurled itself upon them both, muttering curses in an unknown tongue. Its hand was raised high, with something that looked like a bar of iron held in it. In a flash it came down with a smashing blow upon Cleek’s head.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE INQUEST

**A**T PRECISELY half-past two that afternoon the coroner, a short, thick-set little man with keen eyes behind gold-rimmed spectacles, and with a fair share of knowledge of his own importance, entered the dining room of the House on the Hill, followed by his clerk, and took his place at the table set ready for him, nodding a brief greeting to the superintendent, who, lips pursed up, brows drawn down, and hands joined behind his broad back, was wondering what on earth had become of his famous ally, and whether Cleek had found out anything at all about the mystery of the Chinese prince's disappearance.

To be perfectly candid, Mr. Narkom was feeling decidedly unhappy about the whole affair. Somehow or other, the tangled threads of this most mysterious riddle had been almost unsolvable, and for his part he had been able to gather very little from the facts and clues that had come under his notice. Cleek, of course, he realized, was Cleek, possessor of that weird sixth sense which can scent out answers, but, receiving no word from him beforehand,

and knowing the importance of the matter and the fact that the governor of Kwang-Tin would be waiting anxiously for further news of his son, Mr. Narkom was indulging in a little private worrying upon his own account.

If Cleek hadn't said he wanted to disappear for twenty-four hours, he might not have been so troubled. But Margot was on the trail, even though she thought Cleek dead after that nicely managed dead-body affair which they had arranged, and one never knew just when Margot might discover that death to have been a trumped-up one, and that Cleek the Cracksman, for whom she had been scouring Europe fruitlessly ever since he had given up the paths of darkness for the brighter roads of day, was as alive and active as ever before.

Margot's proximity in the affair was unfortunate, and where that little prince had been carried—or his dead body hidden, together with the precious jewel which it bore upon its breast—was more than Mr. Narkom could readily conceive.

He returned the coroner's greeting moodily, and then, seeing that the room was beginning to fill with all those who had been summoned to the inquest and a good crowd of outsiders who by hook or by crook had got in to satisfy their morbid curiosity, heaved a tremendous sigh and brought himself back to the business of the hour.

Inspector Cogwell, rather hang-doggish under the



eyes of his superior officer—whose presence here in his true form gave that worthy person an uncomfortable stab of surprise—was on duty in the room, his minions behind him—Jeffries, Leeson, and another member of the force who came in from the next village five miles away.

Mr. Narkom's bright little eyes surveyed the inspector coldly, gave him the merest nod of recognition, and then continued their relentless way over the fast-filling room. There was Maud Ellison, with her pinched, pale face, which should have been beautiful, but from which anxiety—and something else—had starved out the good looks. Close beside her stood Frank Brentwood, looking miserably down at her, as one who should say, "What in the world will they do with us?" Lady Brentwood herself, here at last, because the law demanded her presence and the station master would not issue her a ticket to London, stood close by her son, her strained white look striking a note of pity in the superintendent's heart.

He looked from son to mother, from mother to son, and shook his head sadly. There was going to be some further unhappiness to stamp itself upon that pale mother face after this afternoon's findings, if the case went as he expected it should. And he wasn't too sure that Lady Brentwood herself was not also involved in the ghastly affair. For Cleek had told him about the mud-stained evening gown,

and what Cook had said of her ladyship's going to the House on the Hill in search of her son, and her interview with Octavius Spender. But she couldn't have committed the crime in league with Brentwood, surely she could not! It was asking too much of Mr. Narkom's knowledge of human nature to believe that.

For a moment more he continued his searching gaze. There was that Miss Omritt, the Lady Bountiful of the village, with her friend Miss Beverley, of the suspicious letter, her sweet face like a withered rose-petal under its black lace hat. A bright-faced little creature like that! It warmed one's heart to look upon her. The rest of the room, for the time being, held many whom Mr. Narkom neither knew nor cared about. Then Doctor Hunter came in, with a little, dark, bright-eyed lady in widow's weeds, who went instantly up to Lady Brentwood and laid a hand gently upon her arm.

Mr. Narkom could see how her ladyship's eyes brightened at sight of the newcomer, who was, no doubt, Mrs. Verity of the End House. He saw the doctor slip through the crowd and take up his position on the other side of Maud Ellison, and saw the glance which Brentwood gave him. If looks could kill, the handsome doctor would have lain dead at his enemy's feet. Mr. Narkom smiled a trifle wryly to himself.

He turned his head sharply in the direction of the

coroner and his clerk, who, between them, were examining some papers and making a great to-do of arranging them upon the table top. Mr. Narkom's own little attaché-case, with its few valuable clues within, rested at the coroner's right hand. At the correct moment it would be opened and its contents seen. That little packet of cyanide which Cleek had discovered in Frank Brentwood's room—that would take a lot of explaining away. But he hoped Cleek would turn up before anything definite had to be done. Somehow, at thought of Cleek, a little pang of anxiety entered his heart. He hoped sincerely all was well with him. The best friend, surely, a man ever had.

Then he became conscious of the coroner's droning voice, and realized that the case had begun. His faculties called themselves to attention instantly. This was the sort of thing he knew something about. One had to keep one's eyes open. No time for ruminating now. Every expression, every word spoken counted for or against the person who spoke or looked it.

He heard the droning résumé given by Mr. Piperson, the coroner, in his best style, and embellished with rhetorical touches which were rather amusing. Keenly he followed the outline of what had taken place at the House on the Hill that night, and noted that, although the worthy gentleman might be long-winded, he was amazingly accurate.



Then Mr. Piperson leant toward him with a question.

Mr. Narkom answered it grimly. "I should call young Brentwood, were I you," he said in a low-pitched tone. "No need beating about the bush. The thing must come to light. And we can get over the lesser part of the evidence before my confrère, who has been upon this case with me, puts in an appearance."

The coroner nodded, and whispered something to the clerk. "Mr. Frank Brentwood," the latter called out in a ringing voice. Mr. Narkom saw the sudden start of amazement which Maud Ellison gave at the sound of her lover's name; noted, too, the paling of cheeks and lips and the quick, darting, af-frighted look of her wide eyes. He saw how Frank Brentwood's handsome, weak face blanched, and how he drew his lips in, and then, assuming an air of affected nonchalance, nodded to his mother and his sweetheart and pushed his way toward the table.

Hand upon the Bible, he took his oath. This finished, he spoke loudly to the coroner: "I hardly understand," said he, "why I should be called upon first of all, and what evidence I can give which may have any bearing upon this appalling affair. My dear Mr. Piperson, this is really rather amusing, but——"

The coroner raised his hand for silence, his face

stern, and Frank Brentwood's words petered off into nothingness, as he stood waiting for the cross-examination to begin.

For ten minutes he stood it, question and answer flying backward and forward. Mr. Narkom could not but admire the coroner's clear-sighted vision and quick thought. He noted, too, how Brentwood began to stammer nervously, substituting "yes" when he meant "no" and "no" when he meant "yes," and altogether involving himself in speech and story.

The room was as silent as the grave. One could have heard a pin drop. Everyone was craning forward for a better view, a better hearing of what was going on.

"Having heard that you are employed with Messrs. Amos & Co., jewellers of Cheapside, Mr. Brentwood," spoke up the coroner in his calm, clear voice, "how comes it that, during the very week when this thing happened, and when the Amber Ship was expected to appear in this neighbourhood, you were on holiday from your work? You have only held it—on your own word—for a mere matter of four weeks. Rather extraordinary, that, being given a holiday so early, isn't it?"

"No, seeing that I was given it by Mr. Amos himself," returned Brentwood sulkily, and with a very tremor of nerves. "I—I—that is——"

Lady Brentwood's perfectly modulated voice,

rising now to a note of excitement, struck in upon them rapidly.

“This is monstrous, an impertinence! To dream of trying to inveigle my son in this dastardly affair! I’ll have the law upon you, sir!”

“I’m afraid, madam, that that is just what I am having upon you!” returned the coroner. “And I must ask you to keep silence while I am cross-examining the witness. Now, sir, you say you were given a holiday by your employer? You definitely state that?”

“I do.”

“Then you lie.” The words came out with barely a tremor of emotion in them. “Because here before me I have a letter from Mr. Amos, to whom Mr. Narkom here, a superintendent of that very big organization to which we owe many debts of gratitude, Scotland Yard, made enquiries as to the veracity of your statement. Mr. Amos says that you were sent out travelling for the firm, and that your destination should have been north, not south. How comes it, then, that your statement and your employer’s does not tally in any point?”

“I—I—that is——”

An agonized voice came suddenly from the back of the room. “Frank—Frank! I warned you! It was foolish not to speak the truth over so small a thing! Tell it all now, dear, every bit, *please*.”

“Silence!” The coroner shot an angry look in



the direction from which the interruption came, and caught the agonized stare of Maud Ellison's eyes.

"You own it a lie, then?"

Brentwood hung his head. "Very well, then, I do."

"H'm. One point definitely reached. Then why did you come down here at that time at all?"

"Because I wanted to see the lady to—to whom I am engaged, whom I am going to m—marry." Brentwood's stammering voice broke upon the last word.

"Oh. But why choose that particular week—especially when you would be having a week-end in which to meet shortly afterward? I can't swallow that altogether, Mr. Brentwood, much as I would like to. But we'll let that pass. The second point is this: I have evidence that you take photographs."

"I don't see what bearing that has upon the case."

The coroner smiled. "Probably you don't. But the fact remains. Is it true?"

"No. Not at all."

"Then you have a camera?"

"On the contrary, my good sir, I don't possess one."

The coroner shook his head sadly. "Mr. Brentwood! Mr. Brentwood!" he ejaculated in a mournful voice. "If you will persist in standing in the way of justice, you will only bring affairs tumbling upon your shoulders! See this snapshot taken by a small camera? You took that of Miss Ellison, did you not?"

He held up the little picture. Frank Brentwood fairly snatched at it, then his face went a shade or two paler.

“Oh, yes, I forgot. Borrowed that camera from a chum of mine who was staying in the village at the time. Chap called Morris—Fred Morris. And I took that snap of Miss Ellison under the tree in Covers’ Field. I had forgotten entirely. But where does it come in, may I ask?”

“Simply in the developing of the film. Developers contain a percentage of cyanide of potassium, and—get this clearly, please—the unfortunate woman who was masquerading as Mr. Octavius Spender and who was murdered by a Malay kris was also poisoned by that very same poison.”

“And you think I did it? You dare to think that?” The astonished note in Brentwood’s voice was very well done, if it were affected at all. “You’re trying to accuse me of that murder, are you? What reason would I have of killing old Spender? A nice, gentle old fellow like that! Oh, you must be crazy—insane. I never did it, I tell you. I never did it. I’ll swear it on the Bible.”

“I’m afraid we can’t trust to your swearing; you’ve done that already, and perjured yourself twice,” returned the coroner quietly. “We’ll leave that for the present, and come back to it later. Doctor Hunter, will you stand forward a minute, please? I want you to tell the assembled company just what

you overheard in the driveway of the House on the Hill the other morning.”

The handsome doctor rose, bowed a little stiffly, and then came with perfect self-possession down the long room to take up his place beside Brentwood, whose tall figure towered above him quite half a foot.

He took the oath quietly, and then gave his evidence.

“It was on Monday morning,” he said in perfectly clear accents. “I was passing in the roadway in my car, on my way to a case, when I heard voices at the gate of the House on the Hill, and realizing that I should have to call there and see Mr. Spender on my way back—he had borrowed a couple of books of mine, and I was bringing him another one—and recognizing the voice also”— he turned and bowed significantly toward Frank Brentwood, who glared back at him in return—“I did that abominable and pernicious thing, sir: I listened. Mr. Brentwood here was arguing with Mr. Spender over something, and pulling at his sleeve. ‘Just one little peep, to show my employer,’ he was saying. ‘Just one little glimpse, and you shall have it back immediately afterward!’ And Mr. Spender was shaking his head and puckering up his lips and looking very distressed and agitated about it.”

“You liar!” Frank Brentwood fairly sprang at the doctor and caught him by the throat. A brace of policemen drew him away, holding his arms



pinioned close behind. He struggled for freedom, his face purple, his eyes wide. "That's a damned lie! I never said it! I never did! I——"

"You give your evidence upon the Bible, Doctor Hunter?" put in the coroner quietly, ignoring the interruption.

"I do."

"Then, as a reputable gentleman, I take it as such. After that, what happened?"

The doctor smiled a little, straightening his tie and shifting his collar.

"Why, I realized that this was hardly cricket, and moved off. The rest I never heard."

"Thank you. That's all, I think. Now, Mr. Brentwood, you've heard this gentleman's evidence?"

"I have." Frank Brentwood's voice was thick, his breath came shortly. "And every word of it is a lie, every word of it. I never said such a thing at all. I was asking Mr. Spender for—something else. I never mentioned my employer at all. I swear that. Never mentioned him once."

"What was that something else, then?"

Came a sudden silence across the crowded room. Then, "That's nothing to do with you or anybody," replied the young man in a shaken voice, bracing his shoulders as for an unseen attack.

"Excuse me, but it has. Remember, sir, you have twice perjured yourself, and that is punishable by law, apart from any more serious offence against it.

Think well before you speak. What was this other thing?"

Frank Brentwood's eyes darted rapidly over the room as though seeking somewhere some method of escape. His glance met Maud Ellison's, and then travelled over to his mother's chalk-white countenance. Then he flung up his chin.

"I refuse to tell," he said sullenly, with an ugly set of the mouth.

"Oho?" The coroner's voice held a nasty note. He leant toward Mr. Narkom, who, giving a vigorous nod, opened the case at his side, and drew out a little white paper package. "You refuse to tell, do you? Well, then, perhaps this will help. Can you tell me, Mr. Brentwood, just how this packet of cyanide came to be hidden in your drawer at the Manor House? Can you tell me that?"

A startled shriek was the only answer—a woman's shriek. The coroner's eyes shifted in its direction, as all others did. Then someone went hastily for a glass of water, and someone else proffered smelling-salts. For the shriek had emanated from the lips of Lady Brentwood, and following that awful sound, her ladyship had fallen back fainting in Miss Ellison's arms.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### CLEEK INTERVENES

PANDEMONIUM instantly ensued. Her ladyship was carried toward the window, at which a constable stood on duty, and the lower frame of it was thrown open. Meanwhile Brentwood, his tortured eyes following his mother's figure, stood there, his whole figure that of a man upon the defensive for his life.

“So you refuse to tell, do you?” put in Mr. Piperson again in a sarcastic voice. “Very sorry, I'm sure, to cause your mother any extra uneasiness, Mr. Brentwood, but the thing must be discovered, the law must be served, as Mr. Narkom here will tell you. In such cases one's own personal feelings must take second place.”

“It's a damned outrage to haul me into it at all!” said Brentwood passionately. “That's what I call it, a damned outrage! Why don't you discover the chap who did the dastardly thing, without trying to stick it on someone who didn't? And you call that serving the law? Of all the thick-headed, blundering idiots——”



“Silence, please!” thundered the coroner, stung out of his bland manner by the sudden attack upon him. “This isn’t going to help you, Mr. Brentwood. From the beginning you have tried, systematically, to frustrate every effort made to attempt to come to the bottom of this thing. Candidly, I think the case looks very black against you. I should like to hear what Miss Ellison has to say first, and after that——”

“And after that, I suppose, you’ll send me to quod for a liar, though you’ll never make me hang for a murderer; that I can promise you.”

“Stand down!” The coroner’s voice fairly thundered his demands.

Then the clerk called, “Miss Maud Ellison,” and the second part of this bewildering drama was about to be played.

She gave her evidence in a low, tense voice, barely to be heard, and her eyes never once met those of the coroner. Only again and again they searched the countenance of the man who sat, for the time being, at her side; of the lover who had thus called the anger of the law down upon his head, and who might yet have to bear the brunt of its awful justice.

Something in the slender figure stirred Mr. Narkom’s heart as he watched her. She was only a slip of a girl, but this ordeal was visibly adding years to her, so that one could almost trace the marks of them stamping themselves upon her pale, wan face.

She might have been his daughter, and here she was standing on what could almost be a trial of her life, and every moment drawing herself and her lover deeper into the mire of the whole appalling affair.

At last the coroner shot a question. Lifting the little white packet from the table once more, he held it up before her eyes.

“Now, Miss Ellison,” he said quietly, “you can tell me something of this, I know. How did it come to be in Mr. Brentwood’s drawer? How did he come by it?”

“I do not know! I swear I do not know!” It was a wail rather than a reply.

“You would swear that upon the Bible?”

“I—I—oh! I know nothing of it—nothing! Why do you torture me? Do you think I committed the murder, then?—I, who would not lay my fingers upon any one to do them harm? What is it you are trying to get out of me with this constant questioning?”

“The truth!” The words shot out over the stillness, but they came from another quarter altogether. Of a sudden there was the sound of a door being flung roughly open, and Cleek’s voice ringing out over the sudden silence which had fallen, even as Cleek himself, undisguised, and with a white bandage girt about his head, and a pale face showing beneath it, pushed himself through the crowd, and came to rest at the coroner’s table.

“I’ll tell you the truth,” he cried, even as Mr. Narkom, leaping forward with thankfulness in every line of his round red face, and anxiety showing in his eyes, caught him by the arm.

“Cleek, you’re hurt?”

“Just a crack on the head which knocked me out for a time, but which, fortunately, I was able to avoid a goodly share of,” returned that gentleman, with an affectionate smile at his worried superior. “And I’m here at last, though a good half hour late. You may thank someone else for that. Mr. Coroner, may I be sworn in before this enquiry goes any further?”

“This is rather irregular, sir.”

“Yes, but then I am one of those beings to whom Scotland Yard permits the most alarming irregularities,” replied Cleek, with a faint smile. “Here’s my name.” He pushed a card over to him, and waited while the coroner suddenly began to grin and throw up astonished eyebrows, and then extended the big book for him to take his oath.

Cleek took it quietly, then he whirled round upon the assembled company.

“Mr. Brentwood, Miss Ellison, kindly go over there, together, and stand there until I give you orders to move,” he said. “I’ve something to say which will interest you both, I’ve no doubt. You don’t remember that chap, George Headland, do you, Brentwood, who stood you drinks a night or two



ago in the little smoking room of the Golden Arm? No? Well, look, and see if you do now."

Of a sudden he writhed his face, until it changed completely; until the features somehow blurred and lost their clearness of outline; until the dull stupidity of George Headland's expression came over them. A gasp of amazement went up from the crowded room. Brentwood, under the scrutiny of those uncanny eyes, that seemed to alter as well in some indescribable fashion, gave out a gasp of astonishment and paled visibly.

Cleek grinned. "Aha! I see you do recognize me now, which is all to the good. Now, Mr. Coroner, I ask but to do one thing, to perform one service for the present, and that is to produce the murderer of at least one of the victims who have died in this unfortunate and appalling affair. I have your permission?"

"You have my permission."

Cleek bowed, then, with something of the theatrical in his manner, which he could never eradicate from his being when the end of one of his riddles was in sight, he beckoned to one of the constables standing near by, fixed his eyes upon Frank Brentwood and Maud Ellison, and bore down upon them swiftly. Lady Brentwood, now recovered sufficiently to take some interest in affairs from her seat by the window, shrieked as he approached her son, and threw an arm across her face. Maud Ellison turned the

colour of freshly made dough, and shook as though with an ague, while Frank Brentwood, eyes staring out of a livid face, let his mouth drop open in terrified amazement and fear as Cleek came step by step forward in his direction.

Over the quiet room the sound of hastily dropped exclamations of amazement shattered the silence. "Good Heaven! Who'd have thought it?" "My Gawd! 'e's goin' to catch 'im fer sure, the wasting young blighter!" "Well, 'e's been and gorn and done it this time!"

Then, of a sudden, a strange thing happened, for Cleek swerved in his path, as all eyes were riveted upon the unfortunate pair of lovers, gave a little low whistle, and, as two plain-clothes men sprang out of the assembled company, bore down swiftly, all three of them, upon Doctor Hunter and his sister, Mrs. Verity. They had stood together during the whole proceedings, and with their shocked glances and constant shakings of the head had denoted how this verdict against a friend's son was affecting them.

Instantly there was pandemonium. The doctor fought like a wildcat under Cleek's restraining clutches, until the handcuffs were snicked upon his wrists and he could fight no more; Mrs. Verity became a biting, scratching, kicking devil who hurled her epithets at them in an unknown tongue. But the handcuffs were set upon her wrists, too, and at a

rapid question from the coroner Cleek whirled in his tracks and waved a triumphant hand toward them.

“The co-murderer of Octavius Spender and his assistant,” he gave out sharply. “Here you have them, a brace of crafty half-castes, taking from the country that housed them and gave them their bread that which lies against its heart! Trampling its honourable professions in the dust, using them as a means to cover their blood-stained tracks. Look at them, ladies and gentlemen, and after you have had your fill of these beauties, kindly file out as quickly and as quietly as possible, while the remainder of the affair, which belongs only to the ears of the few, is brought to its successful conclusion.”

“You beast! You mad, crazy, idiotic beast!” rapped out Doctor Hunter suddenly, biting his words off in fury. “How could you dare to say such things! You think you are clever, eh? Oh, so clever! But you do not know anything! I’ll have the law upon you for this outrage, whoever you are! You shall not go unscathed for placing my sister and me into this abominable position. Oh, if only my hands were free.”

“They would be instantly shackled once more, I promise you that,” retorted Cleek. “It’s no use losing your temper, Gungha Dal; it won’t help you at all. You and your precious sister have practised upon unsuspecting good will long enough. The Balankha-Dahs are under police surveillance now,



after my little visit to them last night, and the Amber Ship will never now fall into their hands.”

“The Amber Ship! What do you know of the Amber Ship? You have found it, then—you have it?” The Hindoo’s curiosity got the better even of his anger. He strained forward toward Cleek, between his tall captors, his eyes spitting fire.

“Oh, yes, I know where that is, all right. Like to see it before you go to your cell to await English justice? Very well; you shall.”

He gave a long, low whistle, and the most amazing thing of that whole amazing afternoon came to pass. At sound of it the door again opened, and an odd cavalcade came in. First Dollops, a triumphant grin upon his face, leading by the arm a little slip of a figure clad in negligée and bedroom slippers, above the collar of whose garments showed a pinched white face undeniably Chinese, and behind whom appeared the crouching, shuffling figure of a Chinese servant.

“Good heavens above!” It was Mr. Narkom who gave the exclamation as he rushed forward to get a better view of the newcomers, and then whirled upon Cleek and caught him by the arm, his whole face transfigured. “You miracle-worker! You amazing man! The Chinese prince himself, and alive, alive!”

Cleek beckoned the little group forward until they came face to face with the two prisoners. Then he

took the sleeve of the young prince's garment in his hands, and led him to Mrs. Verity.

“May I introduce you?” he queried, with exquisite sarcasm. “Your invalid daughter, madam, cured, you see, and able at last to speak for herself! Gungha Dal, behold, for the last time upon this earth—the Amber Ship.”

Then he lifted upward an inch or so the little chain which hung upon the young prince's neck, and showed to the assembled company the sacred emblem which hung from the end of it—a little lump of cut amber wrought into the form of a ship, a Chinese junk, with rubies, emeralds, and diamonds inset, and the rippling ocean upon which it moved cut from one gorgeous, perfectly coloured sapphire: the Amber Ship itself.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### THE TELLING OF THE TALE

CAME a murmur of undisguised amazement over that crowded room, through which one could hear the constant, reiterated question, "Who is he? Who is he?"

Cleek straightened the bandage upon his head with a wry smile, and stepped farther forward into the room. Then he fixed his eyes upon the doctor's flushed, furious face.

"You want to know who I am, and how I came to know all about your precious Balankha-Dahs, I suppose?" he queried. "Well, I'm going to tell you in a moment. Thought I didn't know what the mark of Kali the Slayer was, didn't you? Took you in there pretty well, I flatter myself. You've seen George Headland, the man to whom you gave a bottle of liver tonic, which was so full of poison that it would have killed five men instead of one—had I been fool enough to take it? You remember him, I'm sure. I just let Mr. Brentwood here have a peep at him a minute or two ago. Know who this is, eh? Remember firing that little shot at this chap while he was smoking his pipe on the stile?"



Well, before I tell you, I'm going to ask just one question, and I want you to answer it. Why was it that you fired that shot, Mr. Gungha Dal, at what you didn't know as anything but an innocent man?"

"Because I had overheard you talking to that other fellow—that boy who was with you at the time—and I knew you were on the track of the murder. I thought to get rid of you that way, the quickest and surest! You might as well know now, as the game is up, and you've nabbed me, damn you!"

The doctor's lowered tones were full of venomous fury. His lean fingers clenched and unclenched in the bracelets' close clasp. His lithe figure trembled with frustrated desire to be at this man's throat.

"Yes, I've nabbed you and your precious sister quite successfully, and it was just that chance shot of yours to attempt to get rid of me that put me upon the track," returned Cleek, with a little laugh. "If you hadn't been so militant toward me, my dear doctor, I might never have unravelled the tangled threads of this astonishing case. And it was just that chance conversation of yours with Lady Brentwood which told me that you two were related, and birds of a feather generally fly together, in my experience. You gave yourself away quite nicely, too, once or twice, in spite of your attempts to lay the blame upon Mr. Frank Brentwood. Oh, yes, I'm sorry. But you're trapped now, my brown

beauty, and trapped once and for all. You want to know my name, do you? Well, it's quite a short one. Just Cleek—Cleek of Scotland Yard, at your service."

He made his customary bow upon delivering this news to the others in that crowded dining room, but was hardly prepared for the consequences. Came a murmur of excitement in that crowded room. He heard his name pass from lip to lip, saw the crowd press forward for a better view of his face, then of a sudden the erstwhile doctor's face went a purplish crimson. He gasped and swallowed, and gasped again, and then gave vent to feelings in a venomous, low-toned voice.

"*Cleek!*" he said furiously. "Cleek, are you? Then no wonder, no wonder! Had I known that that devil incarnate was upon my track, I should have made sure of that bullet at all costs! Damn you!"

"Well, I'm afraid you're successfully damned, at any rate," replied Cleek, with a shake of the head. "Though I am obliged for all the full share of damning which you have given me. Constable, remove your prisoners, and clear the court room. And if just you, Lady Brentwood, and your son and this young lady here, Miss Ellison, who was having such a trying time when I happened to come in, will stay, we can settle the rest of the matter quietly between ourselves, and have it over and done with.

Inspector Cogwell, set a chair for His Highness, will you? He's been keeping to his bed this last few days, upon a diet of bread and water, and doesn't feel any too strong."

But the Chinese servant, who proved to be no other than Ah Sing, was up before him and fairly tore the chair out of his hands, setting it with a low obeisance before his young master, and murmuring something in Chinese as he did so.

Cleek turned to Mr. Narkom. "Calling a million blessings upon his honoured young master's head," he said, with a backward nod toward the kneeling man. "Poor devil! He's had a thin time, too."

"But who gave you the crack upon the head, Cleek, and is it a very bad one?" queried Mr. Narkom anxiously, while the room was clearing.

"He did—Ah Sing. He was hiding in a cellar under a trap door in the Echo Tower of this very house. He had escaped from the clutches of Jim the Cracksmen. I'll tell you all about it later on. But this poor chap thought, I suppose, that I was one of those who had brought about this disaster, and so took his chances with me. He was hungry, too, maddened with hunger and thirst. I've given him a jolly good feed since, along with the young prince. Hello, the room's cleared. Now, ladies and gentlemen, if you will be seated, I'll be as brief as possible, but I am afraid I must relate the whole story from the beginning, for the benefit of our friend Inspector



Cogwell here, who has been very much in the dark about the whole affair from the outset.”

Then he, too, seated himself, resting his head against his hand, while Dollops stood at his shoulder, ready at an instant to do his master's bidding, and Mr. Narkom sat upon the other side. And so to the final unravelling of the riddle that had been called the Riddle of the Amber Ship.

“To begin with,” said he quietly, “you all know, of course, of the young prince's arrival with the ill-fated jewel of that sacred Chinese order to which his caste belongs hanging about his neck? I must admit that when Mr. Narkom told me of it and of the fact that it was coming to England under the guardianship of a mere youth of sixteen summers, I thought it perfect madness! Particularly as many of the priestcraft, both Hindoo and Chinese, would be watching for its arrival, the one to guard, the other to destroy.”

“Then the Hindoo ones you speak of are those jaw-breakers whom you mentioned to me a day or so ago—the Balankha-Dahs?” asked the superintendent.

“Right, Mr. Narkom. The Balankha-Dahs, whom I will begin by explaining away first of all, are a fanatical sect of priestcraft who are out for blood in the shape of every other religion and sect than their own. Looting of temples and churches becomes a part of their plan, and this is carried out

with diabolical success. Our English churches have not, as yet, been much worried by them, but the mere fact that a portion of the sect are meeting here in England—in Limehouse, to be exact—(a fact which I learnt a year or so back, when I was dealing with another Hindoo case)—points, I think, to the certainty that, unless stamped out, they will be turning their attention to churches nearer home than the Far East.”

“And they were after the Amber Ship, then?”

Cleek nodded toward the questioner, who again was the superintendent, leaning forward, hands upon knees, whole face tense with interest in the telling of the tale.

“Yes, that is it, Mr. Narkom. They were out for the Amber Ship, and no doubt had received word of when to expect its arrival, and upon whose person. So that they were waiting in readiness in the little village of Upminster. Gungha Dal had ingratiated himself beforehand into the hearts of the townspeople by his medical work, and his sister turned up with an invalid daughter who was mentally troubled, following after her brother so that he might keep an eye upon her. No one saw that daughter, though; no one was allowed so much as to set eyes upon her, and—until His Highness here fell into their clutches, no daughter had ever existed. But their orders were to get hold of the Amber Ship, and doubtless to receive a huge sum of money for it from the

priestcraft who employed them, and who would destroy it, along with other symbols of evil religions contrary to their own particular belief. That, I take it, was what they were after. That they failed was due simply to the bravery and quickness of thought of the young prince himself.”

“And how was that, Mr. Cleek?” put in the coroner at this juncture.

“I’ll be able to tell you later, Mr. Piperson. At present I am getting ahead of my story. Where was I, now? Oh, yes, at the telling of the Balankha-Dahs’ quest.”

“And what made you think of them in the first place, Cleek?” ventured Mr. Narkom again.

“Oh, simply because I spotted that sign of blood upon the forehead of the dead woman. That was the first hint of the case, the first unravelled thread. That roughly made sign, my friend, is called the mark of Kali the Slayer, and is the emblem of action belonging exclusively to the Balankha-Dahs. It is by that that they brand their crimes, the sacred symbol of the unknown god whom they have made their mentor.”

“How abominably creepy!”

“Quite so, Lady Brentwood. It is, as you say, creepy—to the last degree. I happened across that bit of information out East, many years ago, when I first heard of their operations. And since then, whenever I see that cabalistic sign I know that



the Balankha-Dahs are about, and that there is some religious meaning attached to the murder. That poor woman who had masqueraded as Octavius Spender, the true Octavius Spender, bore it upon her forehead, and Jim the Cracksman as well. His Highness here would have borne it, too, if his own ingenuity hadn't saved his skin and his treasure at the same time."

"And where do you think Jim the Cracksman came in, then?"

"Why, he, too, was representing a gang of international jewel thieves, who would doubtless have delivered the precious jewel over into the hands of one of the priestcraft—either Hindoo or Chinese, whichever gave the highest bid for it. He hadn't any scruples in the matter; one sect was as good as another. It was the money that counted. And it was Jim the Cracksman who originally killed the woman who had charge of the prince's safety in her masquerade, killed her with a Malay kris, an implement which he has used more than once in similar crimes, eh, Mr. Narkom?"

Mr. Narkom shot out of his seat at this juncture. "But, my dear chap," he exploded excitedly, "haven't you just convicted the doctor—who, heaven knows how you found out, was a Hindoo—for that murder, and his sister as accomplice? How, then, could Jim the Cracksman have a hand in it?"

"Gently, Mr. Narkom. One step at a time, please.

And if you would only let me tell the story in my own fashion, and ask your questions afterward, I would be eternally grateful. In the first place, Gungha Dal came afterward, just when Jim the Cracksman had assassinated the person whom they believed to be Octavius Spender, whom he had concealed in the Echo Chamber, and who, in the darkness, doubtless looked as though he were asleep, while Jim himself had gone downstairs into the basement to fetch the little prince. The doctor's fingernails and his clipped method of speech gave me the clue to his Eurasian birth; that was a simple matter. But when Gungha Dal saw old Spender lying there, he no doubt did not note in the semi-darkness that any one had dealt the death-blow and pressed cyanide of potassium between the parted lips. Then, bending down, he noted the wound in the dead woman's side, and using her own life blood, traced the sign of Kali upon her forehead before descending to the basement to face Jim the Cracksman. Now, Your Highness, will you take up your share of the story? I'm beginning to feel a little weary, and my head's splitting, though not so badly damaged, old friend"—this to the superintendent—"as your anxious face seems to suggest."

The little prince flushed, and then went suddenly pale. He spoke in his soft, perfect English, facing the astonished group with calm urbanity of bearing as one befitting his race and title.

“Mr. Cleek has told you some of the story; I will tell you of what I, too, know,” he began. “In the first place, when I awoke from the drugged coffee which my servant here,” the man mentioned grovelled instantly in the dust at his master’s feet, “administered in the hope that I would prove less—how does the honourable English gentleman say it?—less difficult of management in case of trouble over the Amber Ship, I found myself upstairs in a strange bedroom, with Ah Sing leaning over me, administering to my comforts.”

“Oh, honourable master!” wailed Ah Sing, in his native tongue. “I lie here in the dust at thy feet! Forgive thy slave for any unmannerly treatment he has given thee.”

The young prince waved his hand.

“Get up, boy. All is forgiven,” he said in a dignified manner which sat oddly upon one so young and so curiously costumed as he. “And help me to remove this garment, underneath which the honourable company will perceive my own costume. That is much better,” as the boy, jumping up, unfastened the dressing gown and, slipping it off, showed the prince’s blue embroidered tunic, from which a little jagged edge of embroidery hung at the left side. “I will continue. Five minutes later, perhaps it might have been, perhaps ten, Mr. Spender himself entered the room, and spoke softly to me, asking if I had all I required. I assured him of this, declaring



that I would soon disrobe and get into my bed for a night's rest. Whereupon the honourable gentleman withdrew. And a moment or two afterward I heard a lady screaming, jumped off my bed and rushed outside to the landing and down the stairs, where I was caught hold of by some cruel Englishman disguised as one of my own race. He bore me downstairs to the cellars and hid me under a door which led underground, and which had been covered by a large wooden box. This, from the noise I heard, he must doubtless have pulled into place over me."

"You poor child!" Lady Brentwood exclaimed hastily, forgetting everything but that this boy was for the moment motherless, and had met with terrible dangers. The young prince smiled and bowed in her direction, making a deep obeisance.

"Most honourable and lovely lady!" he continued in his curious English, "your kindness causes my heart many leaps. After that, I know not what happened. I heard my attacker leaving the cellar quickly, and waited in the terrible, smelling darkness for release. I heard, too, the sound of men's footsteps later, running down into the cellar and tramping right over the secret door which hid me, but did not dare to shout out, unless these, too, be enemies come to kill."

"That was Hampden and myself searching the house for sign of someone, when we heard that wo-

man's scream," Cleek broke in, with an emphatic nod of the head. "God knows how Jim the Cracksman knew of all these hiding places, though vermin of his kind are cognizant of everything where they mean to attack. He must have carried the body of his victim out into the Echo Chamber for the time being, and himself hidden there with it. Where Ah Sing was all this time, Mr. Narkom, he will tell you."

Ah Sing began throwing his hands over his head and rocking to and fro in his distress, showing nothing of the dignified bearing of his master.

"Ah Sing bin caught, too, and taken to Echo Chamber all alongee bad man wot cotched little mastler!" he wailed out in a terrified voice. "Ah Sing bin clacked over head, and then pulled by pig-tail until he come to lifee again. Ah Sing's head velly sore. Had to follow where bad man said. Hid in Echo Chamber with bad man and hon'able gentleman-lady's departed spilit, until later. Then bad man creep away after long time, and Ah Sing pletend to die, and faint off, and bad man him give Ah Sing nasty kickee with boot, and say velly bad things and go away. Then Ah Sing him jump up and search and search and search, moving things to hiding places. No chance save little mastler then. Savee later. Then Ah Sing hear footsteps, and bad doctor-mans come into the room, *so* softly. Ah Sing pletend to be dead, and doctor-mans him put

summink into hon'able gentleman-lady's dead mouth, and then pick up poor Ah Sing and thlow him down little tlap-door under big boxee, for hiding, and push tlunk back again."

Poor Ah Sing! He began at this juncture to tremble, but Cleek spoke to him quietly.

"And then what did you hear, Ah Sing? Tell the company, like a good boy."

"Ah Sing hear vloices, lady's vloice, too. Little lady whom hon'able gentleman put wrist-snappers on." He grinned fiendishly. "Ah Sing listen an' listen. Velly dark, velly cold, velly spilit-like, that little room under the tlap-door. No chance of escape, no chance of goin'. Ah Sing hears bad lady say she hide little mastler in her house. She laugh and laugh some more, wicked laughee makin' no noisee! Bad spilit's laughee, sirs. Then all go away, and Ah Sing don't hear no more. Days pass. Ah Sing velly hungly; then hon'able gentleman and boy come, move boxee. Ah Sing jump out, hit hon'able gentleman on head, and then find him fliend. And tell him all he hears about little mastler. That all Ah Sing knows, hon'able gentlemen."

"And a good deal, too, Ah Sing. You've done very well," replied Cleek, with a nod of approval as the man stopped speaking and knelt again at his master's feet. "You helped more in this riddle than you know, and you shall be properly rewarded for it, never fear. For if it hadn't been for you, we



should never have found your master at all, or traced that part of the crime to its proper source. Now, Your Highness, if you will, please continue, and then I'll take up the tale from my side of the question."

The boy nodded again, resting his hand gravely upon the bowed head of his faithful servitor.

"After some time hidden in the evil-smelling hole where I had been placed," said he quietly, "once more my enemy came to me, and fetched me out again, handling me roughly, and catching hold of the sacred jewel of my father's order, tried to break the steel chain of it. This, however, he could not do. Then, maddened, he took out some instrument from his coat and cut it in halves. But the great god still protected me, for as the jewel of my fathers fell to the floor I pounced upon it and made to run away. My enemy caught hold of my tunic, and I heard the embroidery ripping, and then slipped the Amber Ship into an inner pocket for the moment, even as the door came open. Then another man, he who falsely called himself a doctor of the sick, entered the room. There was the sound of a shot, and my enemy fell dead to the floor."

"And then what happened?" Mr. Narkom could not restrain himself from uttering this question as the young prince paused.

"Then, sir, the doctor laughed, and spoke softly to someone over his shoulder. I fell to the ground,

pretending to faint, and heard him say, 'We will lock the youngster in for the present, and tackle him later. First to find old Spender himself.' Then they went out, and I heard a key grate in the lock and knew I was a prisoner with my dead enemy. What to do? The sacred jewel of my fathers was obviously what these bad people wanted. Where to hide it? I stole over to my enemy's dead body, and saw that his mouth was agape. Then the idea came to me. I pushed it down his throat until it became embedded in the gullet there, and then rushed away to the other side of the room and began to cry—as though my blood were water, and I was afraid of these evil-spirited people! I, a true follower of my father's race and rank! But they believed me, and returned then, and took hold of me, demanding to know where my jewel was hid. I could not tell them, I would not! They twisted my wrists and beat me, but I would not tell; I pretended, indeed, to be dumb with fear, and at length told them that it had been stolen from me by my first enemy."

He sighed deeply. "They did not, of course, believe me, sirs. But they dared not do me to death until they knew where my jewel was hid, and so, leaving me to the woman's care, the man lifted the body of my enemy and pushed it behind some boxes piled up in a corner of the filthy place. I noted where they hid it, knowing full well that my jewel

would be safe from discovery there, and then they took me away, and dressed me as a woman-child, and under torture tried to get the hiding place of my jewel from me.”

“And you never told?” It was Lady Brentwood who spoke; Lady Brentwood, with her eyes full of tears. The young prince smiled at her.

“No, I never told. Son of my father, I could never tell even though I died for it. Till at length this honourable gentleman here, with his servitor,” he nodded toward Dollops, “and Ah Sing appeared this very morning before meal time, of which I was permitted very little, as you may imagine, by my tormentors, and set me free at last, taking me back to their house and giving my servant and me much food and rest, to prepare us for this present telling of the story. Sir, I have finished.”



## CHAPTER XXXIV

“JOURNEY’S END——”

AND about time, too,” said Cleek with a kindly smile, as he reached over toward the young prince, and patted his hand. “You’ve done well, Prince, and upheld the pride of your father’s race in deed and word. He will be proud of you, I know, when news reaches him. But I want you to let us take your jewel from you for the present, and place it under safe custody, until it may be again returned to your father’s house. After all you have been through, you will agree, I feel sure?”

His Highness bowed. There was a sadness in his face, however, which betokened the disappointed boy under the shell of the dignified prince. “It shall be as you will,” he replied gravely.

“Splendid! Now there’s not much more to tell. When Dollops and I came this morning, Inspector, under the disguises by which you had previously known us, to investigate still further in the Echo Chamber, we discovered still one more dead body—that of a half-naked Chinese. Who it was I do not know, but I rather imagine it must have been Mr.

Spender’s boy, killed; doubtless shot—I swore I heard a shot when we first came up here, but the chauffeur declared it was an explosion in the engine of the car—by Jim the Cracksman, whose clothes he put on, taking the boy’s place. You must identify the body for me, for you are the only one among us who knows just what the boy looked like.”

“I shall be only too pleased, Mr. Cleek,” threw in the inspector, a new deference in his tone. “Shall I go with you now?”

“I’m coming, too, old chap!”

“And I!”—from the coroner, who jumped quickly to his feet. But Frank Brentwood preferred to sit still by his mother and his sweetheart, having had his fill of horrors for the time being.

Cleek got to his feet. “All right, you bloodthirsty individuals! And Dollops, of course? I thought so. Prince, why do not you and your servant go through into the study and rest there? The house is surrounded by police, so that you are perfectly safe, and if you will give me the jewel for the present, it will be off your mind.”

Silently the young prince handed it across to Cleek, who was touched by the trust thus placed in him and squeezed the boy’s hand affectionately.

“I’ll guard it with my very life!” he said softly, and waited until the boy withdrew, his faithful Ah Sing behind him, bowing, to each of the ladies in turn, a deep, reverential obeisance. Then Cleek

and his followers, too, left the room. Five minutes later they returned.

“It was the boy!” said Cleek, as Frank Brentwood sprang to his feet, a question on his lips. “And the last thread of the tangled skein is unravelled at last! This has been a hot day’s work! Ladies, I think you might retire. You must be fatigued with listening to this sordid tale of ill deeds and evil intents. But first of all, Lady Brentwood, may I tell you a jealously guarded secret—now, when there should surely be no reason for guarding it any more? Doctor Hunter knew it, and held it over Miss Ellison’s head as a threat to gain her forced admiration. That has been what frightened her so, the probability of your and Sir George’s displeasure. No, Miss Ellison, have no fear. The psychological moment has arrived. In very thankfulness for her son’s exoneration, Lady Brentwood will understand, and be glad.”

“Glad of what, Mr. Cleek?”

Cleek smiled, and looked at the lovers, standing together, very red of face and self-conscious of expression. “Why,” said he merrily, “the fact that these two youngsters here are married, and have been married for a matter of three weeks or more. I must admit that at first I suspected them of complicity in this matter, until, in the fulfilment of a policeman’s rather objectionable duties, I intercepted a letter from your son to his wife, and read the truth in it. You remember that morning, Mr.



Narkom, when Betsy gave me the letters? There were four to be re-addressed to Mr. Brentwood here, and one for Miss Beverley. That one proved to be exactly what she said it was: a letter from her jeweller's about the safe receipt of a gold watch and one or two valuable rings which had lately been left her by a deceased aunt. Now, Lady Brentwood, your understanding and forgiveness for these two young people, please!”

Her ladyship's eyes had flared open at this startling announcement, and she made as if to speak, and could not. Then, of a sudden, she gave a little choked laugh, close kin to a sob, and held out her hands to Maud Ellison.

“My dear, my dear!” said Lady Brentwood brokenly, looking at each in turn. “That you should have done it, have wanted to do it so much, I never knew! I never even guessed! But I will promise to make it all right with your father, Frank, if you will promise, in return, to apologize to him, and try to follow in his footsteps and give up horses and betting from now on.”

“He's promised that already, to me, dearest Lady Brentwood,” put in Maud softly, with an April smile. “And I shall stand beside him, always, until the end. Together, we should be strong enough, when temptation comes, to face it bravely. If you will only forgive, and be kind to us!”

Her ladyship wiped her eyes. “All is forgiven, my

dear child, and Frank is fortunate to have found such a good wife, who will steady him in his wild ways, I know. Come, let us go home now. I am weary, oh, so weary—and—and I feel as though I only wanted to rest.”

“Yes, go, by all means, your ladyship. Dollops here will run and fetch your car for you, if you will wait for a moment. But I should like to borrow your son for fifteen minutes longer, if I may. There are some things I wanted to say.”

Lady Brentwood whirled suddenly, put a hand to her mouth, started forward, stepped back, and then rushed over to Cleek and laid a frightened hand upon his arm.

“That little white packet—you want to ask him about that?” she said softly, with a frightened, piteous glance.

Cleek shook his head. His eyes were very kind.

“I knew,” he said significantly, in a lowered voice, “many things. Of your visit, for instance, to the House on the Hill that fatal night, after the drug which you thought so necessary. Of your interview with Mr. Spender—or the supposed Mr. Spender—who doubtless knew nothing of what you said, and put you off for a day or two until her brother should have returned.”

“Yes, yes! That is exactly what happened. Who told you I saw him, though, or that I went up to the House at all? Who told you that?”

“No one that matters. And I happened to see the dress your erstwhile lady’s-maid was brushing for you, Lady Brentwood. And, by the way, before you go, here’s a little toy which belongs to you, I think. I found it in your bureau drawer that day when Cook let me clean the windows for her. You remember Ole Tom, the pedler, whom you saw this morning sitting in the sunshine outside your kitchen door? Well, I am he. But I wish, with your permission, that I might throw this little revolver into the river. It’s safer there. And, funny thing,” his voice lifted casually, “there’s one chamber empty.”

Lady Brentwood’s pale face flushed.

“Yes,” she said in her soft, low-pitched voice. “My husband used it to kill a favourite spaniel of mine that had been caught in one of the keeper’s traps. It broke my heart to lose her, she was such a good friend, and I made him use my own little revolver which he had given me when we were first married. It had never before been used at all, and I told him it would never be used again. Get rid of it how and where you like, Mr. Cleek. God knows it might have proved fatal evidence against me if you had not been upon the case and traced the tragedy to its true source. How can I ever thank you?”

Cleek smiled. Then he reached out and laid a quiet hand upon her arm.



“Don’t thank me. Only permit me the familiarity of a little word. Just one, as a friend. Learn to *fight it*. Fight, with all your might and main, to the bitter end. The doctors nowadays can give enormous help; I’ll let you have the address of a chap I know in Harley Street who works wonders. And every day science is making more marvellous discoveries. So be brave, and learn to fight, even as your son must fight for other things. You will, won’t you?”

She looked up into his face suddenly with swimming eyes. “I will fight, you wonderful man. I will,” she answered softly, returning the pressure of his hand. “Good-bye. And God bless you for all you have done for me and mine. It is a debt I can never repay.”

Cleek smiled and opened the door for her and Maud Ellison. Then he closed it softly behind them and turned to Brentwood with a smile.

“Shake hands,” said he, “upon the beginning of a newer, happier life. There go two women in a thousand, and both belong to you.”

Brentwood’s face flushed as he took Cleek’s hand.

“I heard what you said to her; I heard what you said to Mother!” he said excitedly. “It’s cancer, you know. No hope, no hope at all, and morphine is the only thing that can bring her any relief.”

“Cancer, eh? I’m sorry for that. What a fight she will have, then, what a fight!” returned Cleek

quietly. “My sympathy goes with you, Mr. Brentwood, for mothers are such precious things! Only help her to fight it to the bitter end. For the drug will kill quicker even than the disease itself. Just tell me one or two things, will you? Who was it that obtained the drug for her?”

Brentwood coloured suddenly, then he bit his lips a moment. “I did,” he said at last.

“I see. From Mr. Spender?”

“Good God! How did you find that out, sir? Yes, from old Spender himself. That was why I was talking to him in the drive that day when the doctor drove by and listened. But I never said what he declared I did, Mr. Cleek, I’ll swear to that. But I was begging him for some for Mother, and he told me he had none down at present.”

“I see. And your—wife used to obtain it from you for her, then?”

“Yes, she was coming for some that night she was intercepted in the lane and lost her needle,” said Brentwood eagerly, anxious to clear up his share in the matter. “Mother had already been up to the Spender place and seen the old man and begged him for some. She was nearly mad with pain that night. But how the dickens could you have found out Maud and I were married, Mr. Cleek, when no one else knew? You mentioned a letter?”

Cleek put his hand into his pocket and drew out a paper and handed it to him.

“A letter, and this. Your marriage certificate,” he said serenely. “Very careless to leave it lying about where prying fingers can steal it, you know. I found it in Gungha Dal’s desk drawer when I called there the other day for a bottle of medicine. He must have stolen it from the Manor House. And it was that which he held as a sort of threat over your wife’s head. If she did not allow his attentions, well, then he would go with it to the squire, your father, and she would be dismissed instantly, and her character falsified, no doubt, to such a degree that she would never be able to obtain a position anywhere else. Put it under lock and key safely, young man. And don’t be tempted to get any more poison such as this,” he lifted the little packet of cyanide up and tossed it in his fingers for a second, “even when your mother begs you to! That’s a man’s job, to stand strong and firm for principle against temptation. Try and remember that.”

“Where did you find it?” Brentwood barely spoke the words, his voice was so low, his breath came so rapidly.

“In your drawer. I cleaned the windows up at the Manor some time back, and got a shilling and a cup of tea from your worthy Cook in return. And that little packet very nearly cost you your freedom, if things hadn’t come to light as they did. Tell me how you got it.”

“I got it for Mother,” he replied brokenly. “She



suffered so, and begged me to get her poison, until she nearly drove me mad with the constant request. At last I got it, to pacify her. Maud found out, and was furious with me. We had a real row, then it disappeared. Hunter was the chap who supplied it to me, and it cost me something, I promise you, to go to him for it at all. He, of course, knew all about it.”

“Ah! Then that was the telephone conversation I intercepted that morning from your wife,” put in Cleek at this juncture. “I must admit that it got me guessing. I didn’t just know what to make of it. She’ll tell you about it if you ask her. But you were rather foolish to go to your rival for a deadly thing like that, my friend. He might easily, with that evidence, have got you to the gallows. Probably would have, if I hadn’t intervened. And, by the way, I suppose you went after your mother to the House on the Hill that fatal night? And peeped in at the study window first to see if she was there? Ah, I thought so, by the clay on your boots. And she’d gone, eh? So you didn’t go in. Well, now, get back to your mother and your wife, and, if I may put in a word of advice as an older man—run straight. It’s better, and cheaper, in the long run.”

Then he bade Brentwood good-bye, and turned at last to Mr. Narkom and the coroner, who were standing together at the other side of the room

conversing in low tones. Dollops watched his master's pale face with anxious eyes. He knew how badly he needed a rest, and thanked fortune that the case was nearly at an end now.

"Well, old friend," said Cleek wearily, dropping into a chair and putting his hand to his aching forehead, "that's the end of that! I've served you well, I hope?"

"You've served me magnificently!" returned the superintendent in a choked voice as he looked down into the pale face of his famous ally. "Gad, Cleek, you're a marvel! To have found the prince and the jewel!"

"And the secret of that dope-dumping which has gone on for such a long time, and has been puzzling you. That, too, old friend," returned Cleek with a quick, triumphant smile. "That's interested you, has it? I thought it would! I've a little book here, the diary of the true Octavius Spender, who carried on drug-trafficking up at that second-hand bookshop of his, and hid the stuff between the covers of his books. This tells the whole thing from beginning to end. It will make you good reading, and give you all the necessary data to go upon."

"Good heavens above!"

"Yes, it is rather startling, isn't it? It tells the whole story of how his twin sister Octavia, whose shop it originally was, and who conducted it quite innocently, knowing nothing of her brother's ne-

furious plans, used to change places with him, when he came to London on one of his regular drug debauches—he seems to have been an inveterate dope fiend, poor devil!—while she came down here, and wore his clothes, and took his place to avoid suspicion. Must have been one of those women who masqueraded as a man always, because the local shopkeepers in the Edgware Road had never known her as other than what she appeared to be. That's what made the thing so difficult to discover. There have been such cases. A pair of eccentrics, both of 'em. And doubtless, with the drug-trafficking being carried on, old Spender got into the clutches of Jim the Cracksman—that seems to be what the diary hints at, anyway. He obtained information from him relative to the arrival of the Amber Ship and its illustrious young master, and so was able to lay his plans accordingly. For in defending the trust imposed upon him by the prince's father, poor old Spender, drug-fiend and dishonoured, eventually met his death. That last page of the diary poignantly tells the story. He must have been writing it when the assassin stole in upon him, and that assassin proved to be a Chinese laundryman, whom Dollops and I spotted last night stealing back to the haunts of his crime, as tradition says all criminals eventually do. Jackson, the chap I put on duty, pinched him, so he phoned me this morning, and the beggar confessed to being in the pay of Jim the



Cracksman, who had promised him £20 for the job.”

“What an intricate web you’ve unravelled!” Mr. Narkom’s voice was filled with admiration for his indefatigable ally. “You don’t think Spender was directly involved in the attempted robbery, then?”

“No, not for one moment. If he had been, he would never have left things to go on under his sister’s care, as he did, but have been on the spot himself. No, dear chap, I think old Spender was as innocent as any drug fiend could be. He felt his debt of honour to the prince’s father keenly. And he meant to take good care of the lad. There was a certain spinal weakness, I believe, in its veriest infancy in the boy, which Spender had promised to watch over and have medical treatment for, and there is a list of celebrated masseurs for this purpose pinned inside one of the pages of the book. No, he took his task seriously, and there is enclosed, also, a carefully worked-out list of expenses, inscribed as a copy, the original having been sent to the prince’s father, which, from all details, seems perfectly reasonable and above-board.”

“H’m. Then it doesn’t seem as though he had had much to do with it, poor old chap,” threw in the coroner meditatively. “But the odd thing to me is that the governor didn’t get your people to look into the status of the old gentleman first.”

“Yes, but that’s typically Chinese, Mr. Piperson. Their honour, and that of their friends, is unquestionable. Old Spender had visited there some ten years ago, as a guest of the governor, and had cemented the friendship made those many years before, when he had lived in the province and the governor had rendered him some valuable assistance. It is just that quality of honour in the Chinese nature which sometimes puts our Western temperament to shame by the immensity of it. That this father, however, was rather doting on his only son is proved by the way in which he permitted the boy to travel according to his own wishes, with practically no private retinue other than that group of legation officials who accompanied him as far as London, and then left him in the hands of Scotland Yard, according to previous arrangements. Ah Sing, his own personal boy, was the only private bodyguard he possessed, and the carrying of all those jewels, as well as the sacred symbol, the Amber Ship, seems veritable madness!”

“It does, indeed. And what do you suggest doing with the lad now?”

Cleek stroked his chin with one finger and stared out through the window of the dining room across the wild waste of garden in its tangle of shrub and early bloom. Then he turned abruptly to Mr. Narkom.

“Send word to the Chinese ambassador himself, and get him to take the lad in charge; that’s my

suggestion," he said briskly. "This whole affair has been left too much to chance! If Scotland Yard had had a hand in it from the very beginning, and had made arrangements with the legation in London to take charge of the boy first, things would probably have shaped themselves differently and a lot of innocent blood left unshed. But Mr. Narkom here was up to the eyes in another problem—the problem of the drug-trafficking which was driving the Yard nearly crazy. It was taking place right under their very noses, too, with the Chinamen coming along for books from the second-hand shop, and using the leaves which had been inserted, or doubtless taking unharmed books and returning them full according to the secret arrangements made by old Spender with the gang. That was what bothered the superintendent half out of his wits, Mr. Piper-son, until at last he sent for me and I appeared upon the scene and very nearly made a big bloomer myself by leaving the lad at the House on the Hill, after seeing the credentials presented to me by Miss Octavia Spender in the absence of her twin brother. If it hadn't been for that supposedly Chinese boy with the navy's hands, I'd never have smelt a rat at all."

"And he, Jim the Cracksman, must have been at work before you arrived, and accounted for that poor boy out there in the next room whom you and Dollops discovered in the trunk, then, Cleek?"



“Yes, doubtless. He opened the door to me, and to Miss Spender when she arrived, and had been at his nefarious and beastly business during that period when we couldn’t get into the house in the first place, and couldn’t see a light in it either. He was possibly haunting the Echo Tower just then, and didn’t hear our arrival, as he was trying to dispose of the boy’s body.

“Heigho! That’s the end of that, I think, and the holiday I had promised myself fully justified in taking. Here, let’s put this jewel into the local bank for the present, Mr. Narkom. I’m fairly itching to get word through to London to learn if they have got Margot or not. They landed the rest of the gang, Petrie phoned me this morning early, but Margot, at the time, was nowhere to be found. I’d give all I possess to get her to justice.”

Mr. Narkom nodded vigorously.

“Cinnamon! And wouldn’t I, the hell-cat! Her share in the affair, I suppose, was simply through the Balankha-Dahs, though they also employed the doctor, didn’t they?”

“Yes, but traded upon the old saying, ‘Set a thief to catch a thief.’ They didn’t mind who landed the jewel so long as it was landed. And Margot doubtless entered the lists, naming her own sum and declaring she would get the jewel, if she bargained with the devil himself! Margot has a way with her, as you know well, Mr. Narkom. We’ve

had proof of that before. Now I wonder if they have got her at last! Dollops, just nip round to the post office and phone through to headquarters, and, using the code, of course, find out if she's been nabbed or not. It would be the best night's work you or I had ever done, to bring that creature to English justice at last."

"Righto, sir! You'd oughter be lyin' down, wiv that crack on yer knob, sir, instead of gassing 'ere all day," broke in Dollops, with a fond, anxious look into Cleek's face.

Cleek smiled affectionately at him. "All right, all right. When I've got this jewel off my chest. Look here, Mr. Narkom, we'll go to the bank now, and get rid of the thing. It's burning a hole in my waistcoat. Mr. Piperson, can I leave you to see that the young prince is well looked after until we return? I've no fancy to be walking through the town alone with this priceless possession. And we must send word at once to His Excellency, the Governor of Kwang-Tin, of his son's safety. If you'd stay on guard here with the inspector, just until we return, it would help enormously."

"Certainly, certainly, my dear Mr. Cleek!" The coroner was affably delighted to be able to take some part in the proceedings at this juncture. "And I advise you to call in at the Three Sisters and have a glass of something before you go much further. You're looking done up, I must say."

“A good suggestion. Well, good-bye for the present. Come along, Mr. Narkom, we’ll be making tracks as quickly as possible.”

Then, arm in arm, the two friends sauntered out into the sunshine and down the village street to where the little bank stood opposite the post office, and there deposited their precious burden in the safe, until such time as they could send recognized officials down from Scotland Yard to bear it Londonward before it travelled back again to China, to the home of the young prince’s ancestors and the safety of a jealously guarded palace. From there it was never again to emerge into the light of day unless upon the person of the governor himself.

Dollops joined them a second or two later when, business completed and the Amber Ship under lock and key at last, Cleek and Mr. Narkom stepped out once more into the village street. The lad’s face was glum, but a spark of merriment showed in his eye.

“Well?” rapped out Cleek on sight of it. “What news, boy?”

“None, sir. She’s bin and gorn and ’ooked it somewheres. Gorn, clean gorn, Petrie says, but, sir, I—I ’ope as yer won’t be cross, but—but——”

His voice trailed off into silence, and he stood a moment drawing patterns in the dust with the toe of his boot and looking the very picture of abject misery.

Cleek’s brows went up, and then came down again.



“Hello! Hello!” he said briskly. “What have you been up to, Dollops, that you look like a pick-pocket? Margot’s free, bad luck to her, but it’s too late now to grieve. What deeds has your young ambitious soul performed while you’ve been on the phone? Out with it, quick!”

Dollops looked up, blushing, into his master’s face. Then he swung round to the superintendent and caught him by the arm.

“Mr. Narkom ’ere’ll stand by me, sir, if you loses of yer wig and cuts me off wiv a blinkin’ tanner, and casts me out upon a crool world wot doesn’t love me,” he gave out in a scared voice, with the ghost of a smile in it. “Mr. Narkom’ll stand by me, I know. Well, sir, I—I phoned Miss Lorne, and found she’s back in town. I tole her of yer crack on the top-knot, and that yer lookin’ like a bit er larst year’s cheese. And she’s a-comin’ dahn ’ere straightaway ter fetch you ’ome again, for a ’ollerday on the river! And now, do yer worst, Guv’nor, sir, and ’ave done wiv it, afore she comes. ’Er train’s a-leavin’ in five minutes, and she says positive that you must rest until she’s ’ere!”

For a moment Cleek stood there in the sunshine, blinking his eyes under the crazy bandage like a man who has had a glimpse of Heaven itself and was blinded with the glory of it. Ailsa Lorne in London again and coming down here for him! His Ailsa coming to fetch him away from all this crime and

sordid horror and endless pursual of justice which made up his life and would make it up for several years to come! Ailsa coming here?

“Dollops,” said he in a shaking, glad voice, linking his arm in the boy’s, and then turning round to include Mr. Narkom, who stood beaming and smiling like a fat Chinese idol a foot or two away from them—“Dollops, and you, too, old friend, if you’re not a pair of hoodwinking old matchmakers, the pair of you! I’ll dare swear you had a hand in that phone call, too, Mr. Narkom, for all your innocent face! Aha! I thought as much!”

Then, as they moved along the empty village street together, arms linked, Cleek lifted his head and set his eyes upon the heavens, and called upon God to witness that never had man had such good friends as he.

THE END

718



















LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00012684654

