NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES
3 3433 11200 4837

Digitized by Google
Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Hanshew

NBO

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

THE RIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Digitized by Google

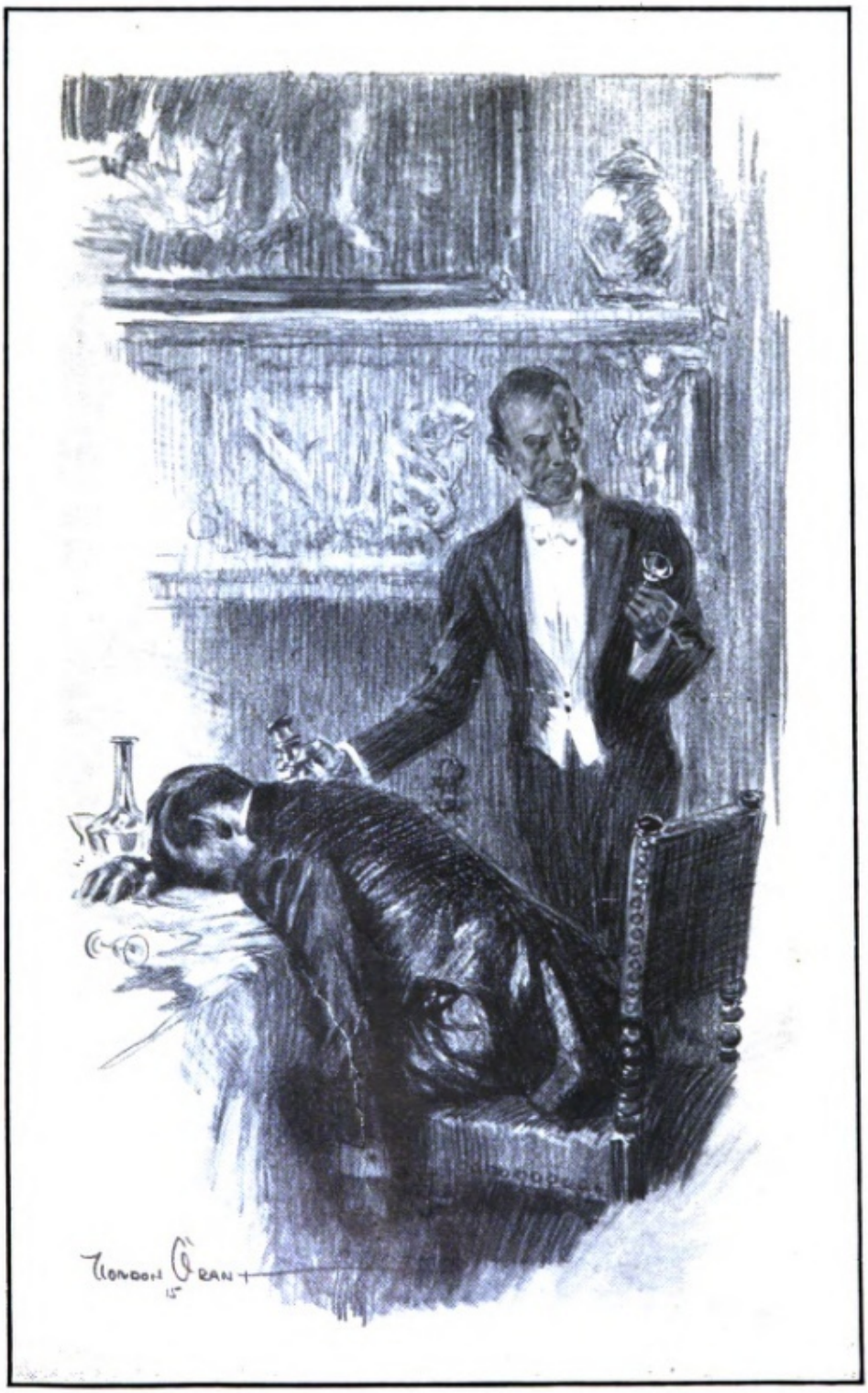
Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY



HE TOOK UP THE DECANTERS ONE BY ONE AND SAMPLED THEIR CONTENTS IN TURN

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Riddle of the Night

Being the record of a singular adventure of that remarkable detective genius, Hamilton Cleek, The Man of the Forty Faces, once known to the police as "The Vanishing Cracksman"

BY

THOMAS W. HANSHEW

AUTHOR OF "CLEEK, THE MAN OF THE FORTY FACES,"
"CLEEK OF SCOTLAND YARD," ETC.

Illustrated by Gordon Grant

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1915

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

TO NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
83143?A
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R 1926 L

Copyright, 1915, *by*
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY

All rights reserved, including that of translation into foreign languages, including the Scandinavian

COPYRIGHT, 1915, BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	A Mysterious Affair	3
II.	How the Chase Ended	14
III.	The Shadow That Lay Behind	23
IV.	Clews and Suspicions	36
V.	The Riddle of the Night	47
VI.	A Little Discrepancy	58
VII.	"Coming Events Cast Their Shadows Before"	72
VIII.	Ailsa Lorne	77
IX.	Blind Groping	88
X.	Another Strand in the Web	101
XI.	The Cloudburst	109
XII.	The Thunderbolt	120
XIII.	A Question of Veracity	127
XIV.	A Change in the Program	139
XV.	A Clew from the Air	149
XVI.	A Bold Stroke	159
XVII.	A Blunder and a Discovery	171
XVIII.	Springing a Surprise	182
XIX.	Picking up Threads	188
XX.	"How Sharper Than a Serpent's Tooth"	199
XXI.	When Two and Two Make Four	204

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXII.	When Four and Four Make Eight . .	215
XXIII.	The Lady at the Gate	226
XXIV.	The Mousetrap	237
XXV.	The Fly in the Ointment	248
XXVI.	The Open Window	260
XXVII.	The View Halloo	268
XXVIII.	Loisette is Vindicated	279
XXIX.	"Quick! Fire!"	287
XXX.	Nearing the Truth!	296
XXXI.	How the Truth Was Told	304

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

ILLUSTRATIONS

He took up the decanters one by one and sampled their contents in turn . . . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

"Ailsa—tell me—have you ever seen this thing before?" 84

Then in a flash the face was gone, and another, changed utterly and completely, was there 147

"There lies the answer to the riddle," he said 300

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHARACTERS

HAMILTON CLEEK, The Man of the Forty Faces and once known to the Police as "The Vanishing Cracksman," now the great Detective in his various disguises as Monsieur Georges de Lesparre, Philip Barch, George Headland.

SUPERINTENDENT NARKOM, of Scotland Yard.

LENNARD, his chauffeur.

HAMMOND, PETRIE } Detective Sergeants.

MELLISH, Police Officer.

DOLLOPS, Cleek's trusted assistant.

LORD ST. ULMER, the father of

LADY KATHERINE FORDHAM, who is in love with

GEOFFREY CLAVERING, the only son and heir of

SIR PHILIP CLAVERING, of Clavering Close, and

LADY CLAVERING, his second wife.

COUNT FRANZ DE LOUVISAN, found mysteriously murdered after having forced Lady Katherine to become engaged to him.

AILSA LORNE, Lady Katherine's friend and companion.

GENERAL and

MRS. RAYNOR, Lady Katherine's relatives.

HARRY RAYNOR, their son.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

THE RIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

THE RIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

CHAPTER ONE

A MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR

IT WAS half-past eleven on the night of Wednesday, April 14th, when the well-known red limousine of Mr. Maverick Narkom, superintendent of Scotland Yard, came abruptly to the head of Mulberry Lane, which, as you may possibly know, is a narrow road skirting one of the loneliest and wildest portions of Wimbledon Common.

Lennard, the chauffeur, put on the brake with such suddenness that the car seemed actually to rise from the earth, performed a sort of buzzing and snorting semicircle, and all but collided with the rear wall of Wuthering Grange before coming to a halt in the narrow road space which lay between that wall and the tree-fringed edge of the great Common.

Under ordinary circumstances one might as soon have expected to run foul of a specimen of the great auk rearing a family in St. Paul's churchyard, as to find Mr. Narkom's limousine in the neighbourhood of Mulberry Lane at any hour of the day or the night throughout the whole cycle of the year.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

For a reason which will be made clear in the course of events, however, the superintendent had been persuaded to go considerably out of his way before returning to town after mingling duty with pleasure in taking part in the festivities attendant upon the coming of age of his friend Sir Philip Clavering's son and heir, and, incidentally, in seeing, too, that Petrie and Hammond, two of his sergeants, kept a watchful eye upon the famous Clavering service of gold plate which had been brought out of the bank vault for the occasion.

All three were sitting serenely back among the cushions of the limousine at the period when Lennard brought it to this abrupt and startling halt, the result of which was to fairly jerk them out of their seats and send them sprawling over one another in a struggling heap.

There was a moment of something like absolute confusion, for mist and darkness enveloped both the road and the Common, and none of the three could see anything from the windows of the car which might decide whether they had collided with some obstruction or were hovering upon the brink of some dangerous and unexpected pitfall.

Nor were their fears lessened by perceiving—through the glass screen—that Lennard had started up from his seat, and, with a hastily produced electric torch in one upraised hand, was leaning forward and wildly endeavouring to discern something through the all-enfolding mist. Mr. Narkom hastily unlatched the door and leaned out.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"What is it? What's gone wrong?" he inquired in the sharp staccato of excitement. "Anything amiss?"

"Lord, yessir! I heard a shot and a cry. A pistol shot . . . and a police whistle . . . and a cry of murder, sir. Up the lane ahead of us!" began Lennard, in a quaking voice; then he uttered a cry of fright, for, of a sudden, the darkness was riven by the screaming note of a police whistle—of two police whistles in fact: shrilling appeal and answer far up the lonely lane.

Hard on this came a man's voice shouting: "Head him off there, whoever you are! Don't let him get by you. Look sharp! He's making for the railway arch!"

"All right, mate. I'm here!" another male voice flung back. "He won't get past me, the blighter!"

Instantly there struck out the swift-measured sound of heavily shod feet racing at top speed up the mist-shrouded lane, and rapidly increasing the distance between the unseen runner and the standing limousine.

No need to tell either Narkom or his men that the man whose steps they heard was a constable, for there is a distinctive note, to ears that are trained, rung out by the heavy, cumbersome boots which folly accords to the British policeman.

Catching the ring of that telltale note now, Narkom shouted out at the top of his voice: "All right, Constable! Stick to him! Help coming!"

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Then with a word of command to Lennard he pulled in his head, slammed the door, and the chauffeur, dropping back to his seat, threw open the clutch and sent the limousine bounding up the lane at a fifty-mile clip.

To-night, with the trees shadowing it and the mist crowding in, shoulder high, from the adjacent Common, the lane was a mere dark funnel; but to Lennard, whose boyhood had been passed within hailing distance of the place, it possessed no mysteries that the night or the vapour could hide.

He knew that it ran on for some seven or eight hundred feet, with the high brick wall which marked the rear boundary of Wuthering Grange on one side of it and straggling trees and matted gorse bushes shutting it in on the other, until it dipped down a steadily increasing incline, and ran straightway through an old brick-walled, brick-roofed arch of a long-abandoned Wimbledon Loop line.

Some two hundred feet upon the other side of this it divided into a sort of "Y," one branch swerving to the left forming a right of way across the meadows to the public highway, whilst the other struck out over the Common to the right, crossed Beverly Brook, and merged at length into the road which leads to Coombe Wood, and thence, through picturesque ways, to Kingston and the river.

The limousine took those seven or eight hundred feet between the head of the lane and the old railway arch at such a stupendous pace that it seemed to have

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

no more than started before the distance was eaten up and it came to halt again; but this time, in such a din and babel of struggling and shouting that Lennard seemed to have reached the very gateway of Sheol.

Narkom and his men were out of the vehicle almost as the brake fell into place, and clicking their electric pocket torches into sudden flame, rushed headlong into the black opening of the arch, into which they had taken but half a dozen steps, when they came upon a startling sight.

Snarling and yapping like a couple of fighting dogs and crying out in concert: "Got you, you blighter! Got you fast!" were two men, locked tight in each other's arms, reeling and swaying—one wearing the official badge of an appointed Common keeper, the other in the helmet and tunic of an ordinary constable.

"Lend a hand, gov'ner, for Gawd's sake!" rapped out the former. "Name's Mawson, sir—keeper on the Common—Number four, sir. Got the blackguard! Murder, sir—got him red handed!"

"Good Lord!" little more than gulped the man he held.

The two pairs of gripping hands dropped, the struggling figures fell apart, and the two men who but an instant before had been locked in an angry embrace stood staring at each other in open-mouthed amazement.

"What kind of a game is this?" demanded Nar-

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

kom, as with his allies he crowded forward. "You two people are paid to keep the peace, not to break it, dash you!"

"My word!" exclaimed the Common keeper, finding his voice suddenly. "A copper, is it?—a copper! when I thought . . . Gawd's truth, Constable, wot have you done with him? He run in here with me on his blessed heels. You didn't let him get past you, did you?"

"No fear!" snapped out the constable indignantly. "I stood here waiting—waiting and shouting to you—until you ran smack into my blessed arms; and if anybody but you come in *your* side of the arch, he never come out o' mine, I'll take my solemn oath!"

"Then where's he gone? Wot's become of him?" shouted the Common keeper excitedly. "I tell you I was on the very heels of him from the moment I first whistled and called out to you to head him off. I could a-most have touched him when he dashed in here; and—and his footsteps never stopped soundin' for one second the whole blessed time. Murder is wot he's done—murder!—and I've been on his heels from the very moment he fired the shot."

Narkom and his allies lost not an instant in revealing their identity and displaying their insignia of office to the two men.

"Murder is it, Keeper?" exclaimed the superintendent, remembering all at once what Lennard had said about hearing the cry and the shot. "When and how? Lead me to the body."

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Lor' bless you, sir, I aren't 'ad no time nor chanct to look after any body," replied the keeper. "All's I can tell you is that I was out there in my shelter on the Common when I heard the first cry—like as some one was callin' for help whiles some one else had 'em by the windpipe, sir; so I dashes out and cuts through the mist and gorse as fast as my blessed legs could carry me. Jist as I gets to the edge of the lane, sir, 'Bang!' goes a revolver shot jist 'arf a dozen feet in front of me, and a man, wot I couldn't see 'ide nor 'air of on account of the mist, nicks out o' somewheres, and cuts off down the lane like a blessed race 'orse. I outs with me whistle and blows it as 'ard as I could, and cuts off after him. He never stopped runnin' for a blessed instant. He never doubled on me, never turned to the right nor to the left, gov'ner, but jist dashes into this arch—straight in front of me, sir, and me running on almost within reachin' distance, until I runs smack into the arms of this constable here, and grabs *him*, thinkin' I'd got my man for sure. Wherever he's got to since, I tell you he come in here, sir—smack *in!*—and me after him; and if he didn't get past the constable——"

"He didn't—I've told you so once, and I'll stick to it!" interrupted the constable himself, with some show of heat. "What do you take me for—an old woman? Look here, Mr. Narkom, sir, my name's Mellish. It's true I've only been on the force a little over a week, sir, but my sergeant will tell you I've got my wits about me and aren't in the least likely

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

to let a man slip past me in the manner that this chap thinks. *Nothing* went past me—nothing the size of a cat, let alone a man, sir—and if the party in question really *did* come in here——"

"I'll soon settle that question!" rapped in Narkom sharply.

He flung a hurried command to Lennard, waved Petrie and Hammond aside, and an instant later the limousine moved swiftly up out of the mist until its bulk filled the entrance of the arch and its blazing acetylene lamps were sweeping it with light from end to end. Smooth as a rifle bore, its damp walls and curving roof shone out in the sudden glare—not a brick displaced, not a crevice big enough to shelter a rat much less a human being—and of the man the Common keeper had been chasing, not a sign nor a trace anywhere!

"Whatever the fellow did or wherever he went, he can't have gone far, so look sharp, my lads!" commanded Narkom. "If we're quick we're sure to nab him. Come along, Constable, come along, Keeper. Lennard, you stop where you are and guard the exit from the arch, so if he doubles on us he can't get by *you!*"

"Right you are, sir!" responded Lennard, as the superintendent and the four men made a dash toward that end of the arch through which the keeper was so positive the fugitive had come.

"I say, Mr. Narkom!" he added, raising his voice and shouting after them. "Eyes sharp to the left,

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

all of you, when you get outside this arch. Know the neighbourhood like a book, sir. Lane forks out into a 'Y' after you get about fifty yards on. Branches off on the left where there's an old house called Gleer Cottage, sir, that hasn't been tenanted for years and years. Walled garden—tool house—stable. Great place for man to hide, sir!"

"Good boy! Thanks!" flung back Narkom. "Come on, my lads! Lively!"

Then they swung out of the arch with a rush, and the last that Lennard saw of them before the shrouding mist took them and blotted them from his view, they were pelting up the lane at top speed and making headlong for the branching "Y" to which he had directed them, their footsteps sounding on the moist surface of the road and their electric torches emitting every now and again a spark like a glowworm flashing.

Five minutes passed—the click of their flying steps had dropped off into silence; the flash of their torches had vanished in the distance and the mist; even the blurred sound of their excited voices was stilled; and neither ear nor eye could now detect anything but the soft drip of the moisture from the roof of the arch and the white oblivion of the close-pressing, ever-thickening mist.

Still he sat there, waiting—alert, watchful, keen—looking straight before him and keeping a close watch on the unobstructed end of the miniature tunnel whose entire length was still flooded with the glare

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

from the motor's lamps. If a mouse had crawled down its damp walls he must have seen it; if even so much as a shadow had come up out of that wilderness of mist and crept into the place, he must have detected it. But there was nothing; neither man nor beast, neither shade nor shadow; only the loneliness and the mist and the soft "plick-plick!" of the dropping moisture.

The five minutes became eight, ten, a dozen, without the slightest change in anything. Then, all of a sudden, Lennard's tense nerves gave a sort of jump and a swift prickle flashed up his spine and through his hair. A sound had come—a rustle—a step—a movement. Not from the direction in which he was looking, however, but from the lane beyond the arch and *behind* the limousine.

He jumped to his feet and rising on tiptoe on his driver's seat flashed the light of his electric torch back over the top of the vehicle; what he saw took all the breath out of him and set his heart and pulses hammering furiously.

Against that thick blanket of mist the penetrating power of the torch's gleam was so effectually blunted that it could do nothing more than throw a pale, weak circle of light a few feet into the depths of a crowding vapour, leaving all beyond and upon either side doubly dark in contrast.

Yet as the light streamed out and flung that circle into the impinging mist, there moved across it the figure of a woman, young and fair, with a scarf of

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

lace thrown over her head, from beneath which fell a glory of unbound hair, thick and lustrous, over shoulders that were wrapped in ermine—ermine in mid-April!

A woman! Here! At this hour! In this time of violence and evil doing! The thing was so uncanny, so unnatural, so startlingly unexpected, that Lennard's head swam.

She was gone so soon—just glimmering across the circle of light and then vanishing into the mist as suddenly as she had appeared—that for a moment or two he lost his nerve and his wits, and ducked down under the screen of the motor's top, remembering all the tales he had ever heard of ghosts and apparitions, and, in a moment of folly, half believing he had looked upon one. But of a sudden his better sense asserted itself, and realizing that for a woman—*any* woman, no matter how dressed, no matter how young and fair and good to look upon—to be moving stealthily about this place, at this hour, when there was talk of murder, was at least suspicious, he laid hands upon the wheel, and being unable to turn the vehicle in the arch and go after *her*, put on full power and went after Narkom and his men. A swift whizz carried him through the arch and up the lane, and, once in the open, he laid hand upon the bulb of the motor horn and sent blast after blast hooting through the stillness, shouting at the top of his voice as he scorched over the ground:

"Mr. Narkom! Mr. Narkom! This way, sir, this way! This way!"

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER TWO

HOW THE CHASE ENDED

MEANWHILE Mr. Narkom and his zealous assistants had rushed wildly on, coming forth at last from the old railway arch into the narrow lane without so much as catching a glimpse or finding the slightest trace of either victim or murderer.

But that they had not all been deceived by an hallucination of the night, received proof from the triumphant discovery of Sergeant Petrie, who, with the aid of his torch and the bull's-eye lantern of Constable Mellish, had found the unmistakable traces of hurried footsteps on the soft, yielding earth.

"Lummy, sir! the place is alive with 'em," ejaculated Mellish. "This is the way he went, sir, down this 'ere lane, and makin' for the right of way across the fields, like wot that shuvver of yours said, sir."

Narkom, Hammond, and Petrie were at his side before he had finished speaking. It was true, other footprints were there, all the lonely tree-girt road was full of them, going down the centre in one long, unbroken line. They stopped but a moment to make sure of this, then rose and dashed on in the direction which they led.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Straight on, down the middle of the thoroughfare, without break or interruption, the foot-made trail drew them; under dripping overshadowing trees; by natural hedges and unnatural mounds where weeds and briars scrambled over piles of débris, and the light of their torches showed Narkom and his men the dim irregular outlines of a crumbling wall, green with moss and lichen and higher in parts than a man's head.

On and still on, the deeply dug footprints lessening not a whit in their clearness, until, all of a moment, they swerved slightly to the left and then abruptly stopped —stopped dead short, and after that were seen no more!

"Here's where he went!" called out Hammond, pointing to the left as Narkom and the others, in a sort of panic, went running round and endeavouring to pick up the lost trail. "Look, sir—grass here and the wall beyond. Hopped over on to the grass, that's what he did, then scaled the wall and 'went to earth' like an idiot in that old house Lennard told us of. Come along—quick!

"Fair copped him, sir, as sure as eggs," he added excitedly, plunging in through the mist and the shadow of the trees until he came to the wall in question. "Break in the wall here, coping gone, dry dust of newly crumbled mortar on the grass. Got over here, Mr. Narkom—yes, and cut himself doing it. Hand, most likely; for there are bits of mortar with broken glass stuck in 'em lying about and a drop of fresh blood on the top of the wall!"

A single look was enough, when Mr. Narkom came

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

hurrying to his side, to verify all that had been said; and with an excited, "This way, all of you. Look sharp!" the superintendent sprang up, gripped the broken top of the wall, scrambled over it and dropped down into the darkness and mist upon the other side. The others followed his lead, and the next moment all were in the dark, walled-in enclosure in the middle of which the long-abandoned house known as Gleer Cottage stood. They could see nothing of it from where they were, for the mist and the crowded screen of long-neglected fruit trees shut it in as with a curtain.

"Better let me go ahead and light the way, gents," said Constable Mellish in an excited whisper, as he again unshuttered his bull's-eye and directed its gleam upon the matted and tangled verdure. "Stout boots and thick trousers is what's wanted to tramp a path through these briars; them evening clothes of yours 'ud be torn to ribbons and your ankles cut to the bone before you'd gone a dozen yards. Lummy! there's another of his footprints—on the edge of that flower bed there! see! Come on, come on—quick!"

Too excited and too much occupied with the work in hand to care who took the lead so that they got through the place and ran their quarry to earth, Narkom and the rest suffered the suburban constable to beat a way for them through the brambly wilderness, while with bodies bent, nerves tense as wire, treading on tiptoe along the trail that was being so cautiously blazed for them, they pressed on after him.

Suddenly, without hint or warning, a faint metallic

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"click" sounded, the light they were following went suddenly out, and before Narkom, realizing that Mellish had sprung the shutter over the flame of his lamp, could voice a whispered inquiry, the constable's body lurched back against his own and a shaking hand descended upon his shoulder.

"Don't move, don't speak, sir!" said Mellish's voice close to his ear. "We've got him right enough. He's in the house itself, and with a light! There's a board or something put up against the window to shield it, but you can see the light through the chinks—coming and going, sir, like as he was carrying it about."

Startling as the statement was, when Narkom and the rest came on tiptoe to the end of the trampled path and peeped around the last screening bush into the open beyond, they found it to be the case.

Blurred, shadowy, mist wrapped—like the ghost of a house set in a ghostly garden—there stood the long-abandoned building, its blank upper windows lost in the wrapping fog; its dreary face toward the distant road; its bleak, unlovely side fronting the point from which Narkom and his men now viewed it; and from one of the two side windows thin wavering lines of constantly shifting light issued from beneath the shadow of a veranda.

"Candlelight, sir, and a draught somewhere, nobody moving about," whispered Hammond. "Window or a door open—that's what makes the light rise and fall. What an ass! Barricaded the window and never thought to stop up the chinks. Lord, for a

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

fellow clever enough to get away from the constable and the keeper in the manner he did, you'd never look for an idiot's trick like this."

Narkom might have reminded him that it was an old, old failing on the part of the criminal class, this overlooking some trifling little point after a deed of almost diabolical cunning; but at present he was too much excited to think of anything but getting into that lighted room and nabbing his man before he slipped the leash again and escaped him.

Ducking down he led a swift but soundless flight across the open space until he and his allies were close up under the shadow of the building itself, where he made the rather surprising discovery that the rear door was unlocked. Through this they made their way down a passage, at the end of which was evidently the room they sought, for a tiny thread of light lay between the door and the bare boards of the passage. Here they halted a moment, their nerves strung to breaking point and their hearts hammering thickly as they now heard a faint rustling movement and a noise of tearing paper sounding from behind it.

For a moment these things alone were audible; then Narkom's hand shot upward as a silent signal; there was a concerted movement, a crash that carried a broken door inward and sent echoes bellowing and bounding from landing to landing and wall to wall, a gush of light, a scramble of crowding figures, a chorus of excited voices, and—the men of Scotland Yard were in the room.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

But no cornered criminal rose to do battle with them, and no startled outcry greeted their coming—nothing but the squeal and scamper of frightened rats bolting to safety behind the wainscot; a mere ripple of sound, and after it a silence which even the intruders had not breath enough to break with any spoken word.

With peeling walls and mouldering floor the long, low-ceiled room gaped out before them, littered with fallen plaster and thick with dust and cobwebs. On the floor, in the blank space between the two boarded-up windows, a pair of lighted candles guttered and flared, while behind them, with arms outstretched, sleeves spiked to the wall—a human crucifix, with lolling head and bended knees—a dead man hung, and the light shining upon his distorted face revealed the hideous fact that he had been strangled to death.

However many his years, they could not have totalled more than five and thirty at most, and ghastly as he was now, in life he must have been strikingly handsome: fair of hair and moustache, lean of loin and broad of shoulder, and with that subtle *something* about him which mutely stands sponsor for the thing called birth.

He was clad in a long gray topcoat of fine texture and fashionable cut—a coat unbuttoned and flung open by the same furious hand which had rent and torn at the suit of evening clothes he wore beneath.

The waistcoat was wrenched apart and a snapped watch chain dangled from it, and on the broad ex-

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

panse of shirt bosom thus exposed there was rudely smeared in thick black letters—as if a finger had been dipped for the purpose in blacking or axle grease—a string of mystifying numerals running thus:

2×4×1×2

For a moment the men who had stumbled upon this appalling sight stood staring at it in horrified silence; then Constable Mellish backed shudderingly away and voiced the first spoken word.

"The Lord deliver us!" he said in a quaking whisper. "*Not* the murderer himself, but the party as he murdered! A gent—a swell—strangled in a place like this! Gawd help us! what was a man like that a-doing of here? And besides, the shot was fired out there—on the Common—as you know yourselves. You heard it, didn't you?"

Nobody answered him. For Narkom and his men this horrifying discovery possessed more startling, more mystifying, more appalling surprises than that which lay in the mere finding of the victim of a tragedy where they had been confident of running to earth the assassin alone. For in that ghastly dead thing spiked to the crumbling wall they saw again a man who less than four hours ago had stood before them in the full flower of health and strength and life.

"Good God!" gasped Hammond, laying a shaking

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

hand upon Narkom's arm. "You see who it is, don't you, sir? It's the Austrian gent who was at Clavering Close to-night—Count Whats-his-name!"

"De Louvisan—Count Franz de Louvisan," supplied Narkom agitatedly. "The last man in the world who *should* have shown himself in the home of the man whose sweetheart he was taking away, despite the lady's own desires and entreaties! And to come to such an end—to-night—in such a place as this—after such an interview with the two people whose lives he was wrecking . . . Good God!"

A thought almost too horrible to put into words lay behind that last excited exclamation, for his eyes had fallen on a thin catgut halter—a violoncello string—thus snatched from its innocent purpose, and through his mind had floated the strains of the music with which Lady Katharine Fordham had amused the company but a short time before. He turned abruptly to his men and had just opened his mouth to issue a command when the darkness and silence without were riven suddenly by the hooting of a motor horn and the voice of Lennard shouting.

"Stop!" commanded Narkom, as the men made an excited step toward the door. "Search this house—guard it—don't let any one enter or leave it until I come back. If any living man comes near it, arrest him, no matter who or what he is. But don't leave the place unguarded for a single instant—remember that. There's only one man in the world for this affair. Stop where you are until I return with him."

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Then he flung himself out of the room, out of the house, and ran as fast as he could fly in the direction of the tooting horn. At the point where the branching arm of the "Y" joined the main portion of Mulberry Lane, he caught sight of two huge, glaring motor lamps coming toward him through the mist and darkness. In a twinkling the limousine had halted in front of him, and Lennard was telling excitedly of that startling experience back there by the old railway arch.

"A woman, sir—a young and beautiful woman! And she must have had something to do with this night's business, gov'ner, or why should she be wandering about this place at such a time? Hop in quick, sir, and I'll run you back to the spot where I saw her."

At any other time, under any other circumstances, Narkom might, probably would, have complied with that request; but now—— A woman indeed! No woman's hand could have nailed that grim figure to the wall of Gleer Cottage, at least not alone, not without assistance. This he realized; and brushing the suggestion aside, jumped into the limousine and slammed the door upon himself.

"Drive to Clarges Street! I must see Cleek! Full speed now! Don't let the devil himself stop you!" he cried; and in a moment they were bounding away townward at a fifty-mile clip that ate up the distance like a cat lapping cream.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER THREE

THE SHADOW THAT LAY BEHIND

IT HAD but just gone midnight when the car slowed down before the house in Clarges Street. Here in company with his faithful henchman, Dollops, and attended upon by an elderly housekeeper and a deaf-and-dumb maid of all work, there dwelt—under the name and guise of "Captain Horatio Burbage," a superannuated seaman—that strange and original genius who chose to call himself "Hamilton Cleek," but who was known to the police of two continents by the sobriquet of "The Man of the Forty Faces."

In the merest fraction of a minute Narkom was out of the limousine, had crossed the narrow pavement, mounted the three shallow steps, and was standing in the shadow of a pillared porch, punching a signal on the button of an electric bell. In all he could not have been kept waiting more than a minute, but it seemed forty times that length when he at last heard a bolt slip, and saw, in the gap of the open door, the figure of a slim, red-headed youth arrayed in a bed quilt, a suit of pink flannelette pajamas, and a pair of white canvas tennis shoes.

"Come in, sir, come in quick!" this young man

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

whispered, in the broadest of Cockney accents, as he opened the door just wide enough for Narkom to sidle into the semi-dark passage.

"Where's your master, Dollops?" put in the superintendent. "Speak up! Is he in? I've got to see him at once!"

The voice which answered came, not from Dollops, but from the dark top of the dim staircase.

"Come up, Mr. Narkom," it said. "I thought that young beggar had gone to bed ages ago and was just coming down myself to let you in. Come along up. You know the way."

Narkom acted upon the invitation so promptly that he was up the stairs and in the cozy, curtained, and lamp-lit room which Cleek called his den almost as quickly as his host himself. In fact, Cleek had scarcely time to sweep into the drawer of his writing table a little pile of something which looked like a collection of odds and ends of jewellery, bits of faded ribbon, and time-stained letters, and turn the key upon them, before the police official was at the door.

"Hullo!" said Cleek in a tone of surprise and deep interest as the superintendent came fairly lurching into the room. "What's in the wind, Mr. Narkom? You look fairly bowled. Whisky and soda there—at your elbow—help yourself. I presume it is a case —nothing else would bring you here at this time and in such a state. What kind is it? And for whom? Some friend of yours or for the Yard?"

"For both, I'm afraid," replied Narkom, pouring

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

out a stiff peg of whisky and nervously gulping it down between words. "God knows I hope it may be only for the Yard, but considering what I know—— Get your hat and coat. Come with me at once, Cleek. It's a murder—a mystery after your own heart. Lennard's below with the limousine. Come quickly, do, there's a dear chap. I'll tell you all about it on the way. The thing's only just been done—within the hour—out Wimbledon way."

"I might have guessed that, Mr. Narkom, considering that you were to mingle duty with pleasure and spend the evening at Wimbledon with your old friend, Sir Philip Clavering," replied Cleek, rising at once. "Certainly I will go with you. Did you ever know the time when I wouldn't do all that I could to help the best friend I ever had—yourself? And if it is, as you hint, likely to be in the interest of the friend of *my* friend——"

"I'm not so sure of that, Cleek. God knows I hope it's a mistaken idea of mine; but when you have heard, when you have seen, how abominably things point to that dear boy of Clavering's and to the girl that dead fellow was conspiring with her father to take away from him——"

"Oho!" interjected Cleek, with a strong rising inflection. "So there is that element in the case, eh?—love and a woman in distress! Give me a minute to throw a few things together and I am with you, my friend."

"Thanks, old chap, I knew I could rely upon you!

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

But don't stop to bother about a disguise, Cleek, it's too dark for anybody to see that it isn't 'the Captain' that's going out; and besides, there's everything of that sort in the limousine, you know. The street is as dark as a pocket, and there's nobody likely to be on the watch at this hour."

The curious one-sided smile so characteristic of the man looped up the corner of Cleek's mouth; his features seemed to writhe, a strange, indefinable change to come over them as he put into operation his peculiar birth gift; and an instant later, but that he had not stirred one step and his clothing was still the same, one might have thought that a totally different man was in the room.

"Will it matter *who* watches?" he said, with just a suspicion of vanity over the achievement. "It will be—let us see—yes, a French gentleman whom we shall call 'Monsieur Georges de Lesparre' to-night, Mr. Narkom. A French gentleman with a penchant for investigating criminal affairs, and who comes to you with the strong recommendation of the Parisian police department. Now cut down to the limousine and wait for me, I'll join you presently. And, Mr. Narkom?"

"Yes, old chap?"

"As you go out, give Dollops directions where and how to get to the scene of the tragedy, and tell him to follow us in a taxi as expeditiously as possible."

"Oh, Molly 'Awkins! There ain't no rest for the wicked and no feedin' for the 'ungry this side of

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Kensal Green—and precious little on the other!" sighed Dollops when he received this message. "Not four weeks it ain't since I was drug off in the middle of my lunch to go Cingalee huntin' in Soho for them bounders wot was after Lady Chepstow's 'Sacred Son,' and now here I am pulled out of my blessed pajamas in the middle of the night to go 'Tickle Tootsying' in the bally fog at Wimbledon! Well, all right, sir. Where the gov'ner goes, I goes, bless his 'eart; so you can look for me as soon as I can get out of these Eytalian pants."

Narkom made no comment; merely went down and out to the waiting limousine and took his seat in it, full of a racking, nervous impatience that was like a consuming fire; and there Cleek found him, ten minutes later, when he jumped in with his kit bag and gave the signal which set Lennard to speeding the car back on its way to the scene of the mysterious tragedy.

"Pull down the blinds and turn up the light, Mr. Narkom, so I can make a few necessary changes on the way," he said, opening the locker and groping round in the depths of it as the limousine scudded around the corner and tore off up Picadilly. "You can give me the particulars of the case while I'm making up. Come on—let's have them. How did the affair begin, and where?"

Narkom detailed the occurrences of the night with the utmost clearness, from the moment when the shot and the cry attracted Lennard's attention to

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

that when the ghastly discovery was made in the semi-ruined cottage.

"Oho!" said Cleek, with one of his curious smiles. "So our friend the mysterious assassin disappeared in the middle of a sort of tunnel did he—and with a man at either end? Hum-m-m! I see, I see!"

"Do you? Well, I'm blest if I do, then. There wasn't a place as big as your hand to hide anything in, much less shelter a man; and the fellow who could do a diabolical thing like that——"

"That is a question which simply remains to be seen," interposed Cleek. "The thing is not so supernatural as it appears at first blush. Once—in the days that lie behind me, when I was the hunted and not the hunter—in that old 'Vanishing Cracksman' time of mine, I myself did that 'amazing disappearance' twice. Once in an alley in New York when there was a night watchman and a patrolman to be eluded; and once in Paris when, with Margot's lot, I was being hunted into a trap which would have been the end of one of the biggest coups of my career had I been nabbed that night."

"Margot?" repeated Narkom. "Yes, I remember the Queen of the Apaches—the woman with whom you used to consort. Said she'd get even with you when you turned down the old life and took sides with the law instead of against it, I recollect. And you tell me that in those old days you practised a trick such as this fellow did to-night?"

"Yes. Beat him at it—if you will pardon the

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

conceit—for I vanished in the middle of a narrow passage with a sergeant de ville chasing me at one end and a concierge accompanied by a cabman and a commissionaire racing in at the other. I always fancied that that trick was original with me. I know of no one but Margot and her crew who were aware of the exploit, and if any man has borrowed a leaf from the book of those old times—— Oh, well, it will be the end of all your fears regarding any friend of yours, Mr. Narkom, for the fellow will stand convicted as a member of the criminal classes and, possibly, of Margot's crew. We shall know the truth of that when we get to the scene of this mysterious vanishment, my friend."

"Yes, but how was it done, Cleek? Where did he go? How did he elude the chasing keeper and the waiting constable? A man can't vanish into thin air, and I tell you there wasn't a place of any sort for him to hide in. Yet you speak of the trick as if it were easy."

"It *is* easy, provided he had the same cause and adopted the same means as I did, my friend. Wait until we come to investigate that railway arch and you will see. Now tell me something, Mr. Narkom: How came you to be in the neighbourhood of Mulberry Lane at all to-night? It is nowhere near Clavering Close; and it was decidedly out of your way if, as you tell me, you were on the way back to town. It is peculiar that you should have chosen to go out of your way like that."

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"I didn't choose to do it. As a matter of fact I was executing a commission for Lady Clavering. It appears that a jewel had been found by the maid-in-attendance lying upon the floor of the ladies' room, and as Lady Clavering recollected seeing that jewel upon Miss Ailsa Lorne's person to-night, she asked me to stop at Wuthering Grange and return it to her."

"Ailsa Lorne!" A light flashed into Cleek's face as he repeated the name, and rising into his eyes, made them positively radiant. "Ailsa Lorne, Mr. Narkom? You surely do not mean to tell me that Ailsa Lorne is in Wimbledon?"

"Yes, certainly I do. My dear fellow, how the name seems to interest you. But I remember: you know the lady, of course."

Know her? Know the woman whose eyes had lit the way back from those old days of crime to the higher and the better things, the woman who had been his redemption in this world, and would, perhaps, be his salvation in the one to come? Cleek's very soul sang hymns of glory at the bare thought of her.

"I did not know Miss Lorne would be in Wimbledon," he said quietly, "or anywhere in the neighbourhood of London. I thought she had accepted a temporary position down in Suffolk as the companion of an old school friend, Lady Katharine Fordham."

"So she did," replied Narkom. "And it is as that unhappy young lady's companion that she was at

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Clavering Close to-night. Lady Katharine, as you doubtless know, is Lord St. Ulmer's only child."

"Lord St. Ulmer?" repeated Cleek, gathering up his brows thoughtfully. "Hum-m-m! Ah-h-h! I seem to remember something about a Lord St. Ulmer. Let me see! Lost his wife when his daughter was a mere baby, didn't he, and took the loss so much to heart that he went out to Argentina and left the girl to the care of an aunt? Yes, I recall it now. Story was in all the papers some months ago. Got hold of a silver mine out there; made a pot of money, and came home after something like fifteen years of absence; bought in the old family place, Ulmer Court, down in Suffolk, after it had been in the hands of strangers for a generation or two, and took his daughter down there to live. That's the man, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's the man. He's worth something like half a million sterling to-day—lucky beggar."

"Then why do you allude to his daughter and heiress as an 'unhappy young lady'? Surely with unlimited wealth at her command——"

"Which I dare say she would gladly give up to get back other things that she has lost," interposed Mr. Narkom. "Her hopes of becoming young Geoff Clavering's wife for one!"

"Young Geoff Clavering? The chap whose coming of age was celebrated to-day?"

"Yes, the son and heir of my friend, Sir Philip Clavering, as fine a boy as ever stood in shoe leather.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

He and Lady Katharine have almost grown up together, as her uncle and aunt, General and Mrs. Raynor, are close neighbours at Wuthering Grange. They were engaged at seventeen, a regular idyllic love match, old chap. Sir Philip and Lady Clavering were immensely fond of her and heartily approved the match. So apparently did her father, to whom she wrote, although she had not seen him since she was a baby. Even when he returned to England with a fortune big enough to warrant his daughter wedding a duke, he still appeared to approve of the engagement, and suggested that the wedding should be celebrated on the young man's twenty-first birthday."

"Which, as to-day is that day, and you still speak of her as Lady Katharine Fordham, I presume did not take place?"

"No, it did not. Some three months ago, a certain Count de Louvisan, an Austrian, appeared on the scene, claiming acquaintance with St. Ulmer; and it seems that after a subsequent interview, Lord St. Ulmer informed his daughter that her engagement with Geoff Clavering must come to an end, and that it was her father's intention that she should become the wife of Count de Louvisan."

"Oho!" said Cleek, in two different tones. "All of which goes to suggest that the count had some hold over the old gentleman and was using it to feather his own nest. Of course the girl couldn't be compelled to marry the man against her will, so if she

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

consented to the breaking of the engagement—— Did she?"

"Yes."

"Then something must have been told her—something which was either a lie or an appalling truth—to make her take a step like that, for a woman does not break with the man she loves unless something more than life is at stake. And it is this Count de Louvisan, you tell me, that has been murdered? Hum-m-m!"

"Yes, the worst of it is," said Mr. Narkom gloomily, "there was a scene between him and young Clavering but a couple of hours before the murder was discovered."

"What's that?" rapped out Cleek. "A 'scene'! A quarrel do you mean? How and where? Or perhaps you don't know?"

"As it happens, I do," said Narkom, "for I happened to be at Clavering Close when it took place. You see, Lord St. Ulmer is laid up with a sprained ankle at Wuthering Grange, where he has been staying with his sister and brother-in-law, the Raynors. Lady Katharine seized the opportunity to say farewell to Geoff, and came over at about eight o'clock; and I hope, Cleek, I may never in my life again see anything so heartbreaking as was made those last few minutes of parting."

"Few? Why few, pray?"

"Because they had not been together half an hour when the Count de Louvisan came over, posthaste,

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

after his fiancée. Lady Katharine's absence had been discovered from the Grange, and naturally he was the one who would come after her. You can guess what followed, Cleek. Young Clavering fairly flew at the fellow, and would have thrashed him but that his father and I got hold of him, and Hammond and Petrie hustled the count out of the room. But even so, nobody could prevent that wild, impetuous, excited boy from challenging the man, then and there. To that the count merely threw back a laugh and said, as Petrie and Hammond hustled him out of the room: 'Monsieur, one does not fight a fallen foe—one merely pities him!' And it took all his father's strength and mine to hold the boy in check. 'Pity yourself if ever I meet you!' he shouted. 'There'll be one blackguard the less in the world if ever I come within reach of you again, damn you! I had nine years of hope until you came, and I'll put a mark on you for every one of them that you've spoilt!"

"'A mark'!" repeated Cleek, with some slight show of agitation. "A mark for every year? It is true that the barking dog is the last to bite but—— What were those figures that you tell me were smeared on the dead man's shirt bosom—2–4–1–2, were they not? And that sum equals nine!"

"Yes," said Narkom, with a sort of groan. "Just nine, Cleek, just exactly nine. That's what cut the heart out of me when I saw that dead man spiked to the cottage wall, bearing the very mark he had sworn that he should bear."

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"I see," murmured Cleek thoughtfully. "Of course, the wisest of men are sometimes mistaken, but somehow I took those numerals to stand for a sign of a secret society; but, as you say, the numbers do indeed total nine—the years of young Clavering's threat, but——"

His voice trailed off; he sat for a moment deep in thought.

"Then there is the 'spike,' that is an old Apache punishment. They spiked Lanisterre to the wall when he went over to the police. Which is it? The Apaches or this foolish, hot-headed boy lover?"

Narkom wisely refrained from comment. He knew the ways and methods of his famous ally only too well, and he sat silent therefore till Lennard pulled up the limousine sharply in front of Gleer Cottage.

"Here we are at the cottage—unless you would like to see the arch first?"

"Oh, no," Cleek smiled softly. "That part of the mystery, my friend, is quite simple. Lead the way, please."

They alighted without further remark, and Narkom was followed by as complete a specimen of a French dandy as could be found in Paris, from the gardens of the Tuileries to the benches of the Luxembourg.

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER FOUR

CLEWS AND SUSPICIONS

A MINUTE more and Cleek was in the house—in the presence of Hammond and Petrie—and Narkom had introduced him as "Monsieur Georges de Lesparre, a distinguished French criminologist who had come over to England this morning upon a matter connected with the French Police Department and who, in the absence of Mr. Cleek, had consented to take up this peculiar case."

"My hat! Wouldn't that drive you to drink!" commented Petrie in a disgusted aside as he eyed this suave and sallow gentleman with open disapproval. "What will we be importing from the continent next, Hammond? As if there aren't detectives in England good enough to do the Yard's work without setting them to twiddling their blessed thumbs whilst a blooming Froggie runs the show and—beg pardon! what's that? Yes, Mr. Narkom. Searched the house from top to bottom, sir. Nobody in it, and nobody been here either, sir, not a soul since you left."

"You are quite sure, monsieur?" This from Cleek. "About the 'nobody in the house,' I mean, of course. You are quite sure?"

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Of course we're sure!" snapped Hammond savagely. "Been from the top to the bottom of it—me and Petrie and the constable here—and not a soul in it anywhere."

"Ah, the constable, eh? You shall tell me, please, Mr. Narkom, is this the constable who was at the one end of the arch while the keeper was chasing the man in at the other? Ah, it is, eh? Well—er—shall not we see the keeper, too? I do not find him about and I should much like to speak with him. Where is he?"

"Who—the keeper?" said Narkom. "Blest if I know. Is he about, my lads?"

"No, sir. Ain't *been* about—has he, Petrie?—for the Lord knows how long. Never thought of the beggar until this moment, sir."

"Nor did I," said Narkom. "Come to think of it, I haven't seen the fellow since we came to the 'Y' of the road and found those footprints leading here. No doubt he has gone back to his shelter on the Common and—— Monsieur! Why are you smiling? Good God! you—I—— Monsieur, shall I send my men for the fellow? Do you want to see him?"

"Yes, Monsieur Narkom, I want to see him very, very much indeed—if you can find him! But you can't, monsieur; and I fear me that you never will. What you will find, however, if you will send your men to the shelter of which you speak will be the *real* keeper, either dead or stunned or gagged, and his coat and hat and badge removed from his body by the man who personated him."

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Good heavens above, man, you don't mean to say——"

"That you had the real criminal in your hands and let him go, that you talked with him, walked with him, were taken in by him, and that he told you no lie when he said the assassin really *did* run into the arch," replied Cleek quietly. "It is the old old trick of that fellow who was called the 'Vanishing Cracksman,' my friend: to knock down the fellow who first gives the alarm, rip off his clothing, and then to lead the hue and cry until there's a chance to steal away unobserved. Send your men to the keeper's shelter and see if I have guessed the truth of that little riddle or not. I'll lay you a sovereign, my friend, that your man has slipped the leash, and it will be but a fluke of fate if you ever lay hands on him again."

In a sort of panic Narkom turned to his men and sent them flying from the house to investigate this startling assertion; and, turning as they went, Cleek walked into the room where that awful dead figure hung. He had taken but one step across the threshold, however, when he stopped suddenly and began to sniff the air—less to the surprise of Narkom, who had often seen him do this sort of thing before, than to Constable Mellish, who stood looking at him in open-mouthed amazement.

"Good lud, man—I should say, monsieur," exclaimed the superintendent agitatedly, "after what you have just hinted, my head is in a whirl and I am prepared for almost anything; but surely you cannot

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

find anything suspicious in the mere atmosphere of the place?"

"No; nothing but what you yourself must have observed. There is a distinct odour of violets in the room; so that unless that unhappy man yonder was of the kind that scents itself, we may set it down that a woman has been in here."

"A woman? But no woman could do a thing like that," pointing to the position of the dead man. "Nor," after sniffing the air repeatedly, "do I notice anything of the odour which you speak."

"Nor me nuther, sir," put in the constable.

"Still, the odour is here," returned Cleek. "And —no! it does not emanate from the dead man. There is scent on him to be sure, but it is not the scent of violets. Odours last at best but a little time after the person bearing them has left the room, and as it must now be upward of an hour since the discovery of the crime——"

Cleek sucked in his upper lip and took his chin between his thumb and forefinger and pinched it hard. What was that that Narkom had told him regarding Lennard's startling experience after he had been left on guard at the old railway arch? Hum-m-m! Certainly there was *one* woman abroad in this neighbourhood to-night, and a woman decidedly *not* of the lower classes at that, as witness the fact that she had worn an ermine cloak. Certainly, that would point to the wearer being a woman to whom money was no object —and to Lady Katharine Fordham, with all the great

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

St. Ulmer wealth behind her, it assuredly was not. Clearly, then, whoever was or was not the actual perpetrator of this night's crime, a woman of the higher walk of life—a rich and fashionable woman, in fact—was in some way connected with it.

The question was, did Lady Katharine Fordham possess an ermine cloak? And if she did, would she be likely to have brought it up from Suffolk at this time of the year? The curious smile slid down his cheek and vanished. He turned to Mr. Narkom, who had been watching him anxiously all the time.

"Well, my friend, let us poke about a bit more till your assistants get back from the shelter on the Common," he said and dropped down on his knees, examining every inch of the flooring with the aid of a pocket torch and a magnifying glass. For some moments nothing came of this, but of a sudden Narkom saw him come to an abrupt halt.

Twitching back his head, he sniffed at the air, two or three times, after the manner of a hound catching up a lost scent; then he bent over, brought his nose close to the level of the bare and dirty boards, sniffed again, blew aside the dust, and exposed to view a tiny grease spot not bigger than a child's thumbnail.

"*Huile Violette!*" he said, with a sound as of satisfied laughter in his voice. "No wonder the scent of violets lingered. Look! here is another spot—and here another," he added, blowing the dust away and creeping on all fours in the direction the perfumed trail led. "Oh, I know this stuff well, my friend," he

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

went on. "For many, many years its manufacture was a secret known only to the Spanish monks who carried it with them to South America and subsequently established in that part of the country now known as Argentina a monastery celebrated all over the world as the only source from which this essential oil could be procured."

"Argentina?" repeated Narkom agitatedly. "My dear chap, have you forgotten that it was in Argentina Lord St. Ulmer spent those many years of his self-imposed exile? If then, the stuff is only to be procured there——"

"Gently, gently—you rush at top speed, Mr. Narkom. I said '*was*,' recollect. It is still the chief point of its manufacture, but since those days when the Spanish monks carried it there others have learned the secret of it, notably the Turks who now manufacture an attar of violets just as they have for years manufactured an attar of roses. It is enormously expensive; for the veriest drop of it is sufficient, with the necessary addition of alcohol, to manufacture half a pint of the perfume known to commerce as 'Extract of Violet.' At one time it was a favourite trick of very great ladies to wear on a bracelet a tiny golden capsule containing two or three drops of it and supplied with a minute jewelled stopper attached to a slender golden chain, which stopper they occasionally removed for a moment or two that the aroma of the contents might diffuse itself about them. I knew one woman—and one only

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

—who possessed such a bracelet. You, too, have heard of her. Whatever her real name may be, she is simply known to those with whom she associates as 'Margot.'"

"Scotland! The queen of the Apaches?"

"Yes."

"You are sure of that?"

"I ought to be. I, myself, stole the bracelet from the collection of the Comte de Champdoce and presented it to her. I remember that the stopper to the capsule was carved from a single emerald that, owing to its age—it was said to have belonged in its day to Catherine de Médicis—had worn loose, and could only be prevented from dropping out and allowing the contents to drip away by wedging it into the orifice in the capsule by winding the stopper with silk."

Narkom's face positively glowed.

"My dear Cleek, you give me the brightest kind of hope," he said enthusiastically, as he stooped and investigated the tiny, perfumed grease spots on the floor, so clearly made by the dropping of some oily substance that there could be no question regarding their origin. "Then, there can be no possibility of connecting young Geoff Clavering or the girl he loves with this ghastly business if that Margot woman has been here, and it was from her bracelet that these stains were dropped? Besides, after what you said about that fellow of her crew who was spiked to the wall as this poor wretch here is——"

"A moment, my friend—you are on the rush

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

again," interjected Cleek. "All that we actually *know*, at present, Mr. Narkom, is that some one, and very likely a woman, has been here and—unconsciously, of course—has spilled some drops of a very valuable and highly concentrated perfume. This naturally points to a defective stopper to the article containing that perfume, but whether or not that defective stopper was one carved from a single emerald and wound with silk——"

He stopped and let the rest of the sentence go by default. All the while he had been speaking he had been following, after the manner of a hound on the scent, the trail of that perfume's lead; now it had brought him to a litter of rat-gnawed paper and a parcel containing a peach and the remnants of a roasted fowl. As if the scent seemed stronger here than elsewhere—so strong, in fact, that it was suggestive of a goal—he began tossing the scraps about, till at last he gave a sort of cry and pounced upon something in a distant corner.

"Cleek!" rapped out Narkom in an excited but guarded tone, as he noted this, "Cleek, you have found something? Something that decides?"

"Yes," the detective made answer. "Something which proves that, whoever the woman who dropped the scent may be, Mr. Narkom, she was *not* Margot!"

He unclosed his hand and stretched it out toward the superintendent, and Narkom saw lying on his palm a crushed and gleaming thing which looked like a child's gold thimble that had been trodden upon.

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

The snapped fragment of a hairlike gold chain still clung to it, and at the end of this dangled a liliputian stopper, a wee mite of a thing that was little more than a short, thick pin of plain, unjewelled, unornamented gold.

"One of the 'capsules' of which I spoke, you see," said Cleek, "and bearing not the slightest resemblance to the one belonging to Margot. The thing has snapped from its fastening and been trodden upon—trodden under a very heavy foot, I should say, from the condition of it. There is something engraved upon it, something that won't tend to ease your mind, Mr. Narkom. Take my glass and look at it."

Narkom did so. Engraved on the crushed and fragrant-smelling bit of gold he saw a coat-of-arms—arms which he, at least, knew to be those of the house of St. Ulmer—and under this the name "Katharine."

"Good Lord!" he said, and let the crushed bauble fall back upon the palm from which he had lifted it. "That child—that dear girl who is as much as life itself to young Geoff Clavering? But how could she—a slip of a girl like that——"

He turned and looked over at the dead figure spiked to the cottage wall.

Cleek made no reply—at least for the moment. He had gone back to the "hound's trick" of sniffing the trail and was creeping on again—*past* the litter of papers this time—and crawling on all fours toward the very doorway by which the police had first gained access to the room.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Wait! Cross no bridges until you come to them," he said at last in an excited whisper. "Some one who trod upon that thing passed out this way. I *knew* I smelt the oil the very instant I crossed the threshold; now I can understand why. The assassin left by the very door you entered, but whether man or woman——"

By now the trail had led him to the very threshold of the room. Beyond lay the dark hall by which Narkom and his men had entered the house, and the light of his upraised electric torch shining out into that black passage showed him something that made his pulses leap. It was simply a fragment of some soft pinkish material, caught and torn off from a woman's skirt by a nail head that protruded above the level of the boarded floor. He rose and ran out to it; he caught it up and examined it; then, with a laugh, shut his hand over it and went hurriedly back to the superintendent's side.

"Mr. Narkom," he said, "tell me something! We have, presumably, found a perfume receptacle belonging to the Lady Katharine Fordham; but did you notice—can you remember what manner of frock her ladyship wore at Clavering Close to-night?"

"I remember it very well indeed. It was a simple white satin frock, very plain and very girlish, and she wore a bunch of purple pansies with it."

"Ah-h-h!" Cleek's voice was full of relief, his eyes full of sparkle and life. "Then she did *not* wear a gown of some soft, gauzy pink material, eh? An

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

airy sort of gown trimmed at the hem with scalloped embroidery of rose-coloured silk. Good! Can you remember any lady to-night that did?"

"Yes," said Narkom promptly. "Miss Ailsa Lorne did. She wore some soft, gauzy pink stuff—chiffon, I think I've heard the wife call it—with a lot of rose-coloured silk stitchery on the edges of the flounces, and she had a band of pink ribbon in her hair."

Cleek made no comment, nor did his countenance betray even the slightest trace of emotion. He simply put the shut hand that held that gauzy pink fragment into his pocket and shoved it far down out of sight.

A while ago he could have sworn that Ailsa Lorne's foot had never crossed the threshold of this house of crime; now he knew that it had, and if the evidence of this scrap of chiffon stood for anything, crossed it *after* she had left Clavering Close—after she had heard that threat against the Count de Louvisan's life.

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER FIVE

THE RIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

BEFORE Mr. Narkom could ask any questions, the sound of excited voices and hasty footsteps coming up the drive and making toward the lonely house drove all other thoughts from his head.

"Come along," he whispered to Cleek. "It's Hammond and Petrie returning from the keeper's shelter on the Common. I know their voices. And they have unearthed something startling or they wouldn't be talking so excitedly."

They had, indeed, as he learned when he hurried out and intercepted them at the cottage steps; for between them they were supporting a man stripped of coat, waistcoat, and hat, and wearing bound round his head a bloodstained handkerchief. His bearded face was bruised and battered, his shirt and trousers were covered with mud, and he was so weak from loss of blood that it was next to impossible for him to stand alone.

"Sir," broke out Hammond, as they came up with Mr. Narkom and paused with this unexpected newcomer beforehim, "I don't know whether that French mounseer is a wizard or not, but he copped the lay

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

at the first guess, Mr. Narkom, and foreigner or not I take off my blessed hat to him. Here's what we found when we got to the shelter, sir—this here party, knocked senseless, tied up like a trussed fowl, and tucked out of sight under the gorse bushes nigh the shelter. Coat, cap, badge, and truncheon all gone, sir—nicked by that dare-devil who took us in so nicely down there at the old railway arch. The murderer himself he were, I'll lay my life; for look here, sir, here's what he most brained this poor chap with—a hammer, sir—look! And a hammer was used, wasn't it, to spike that dead man to the wall? Had him, Mr. Narkom, had the rascal in our very hands, that's what we did, sir, and then like a parcel of chuckle-heads we went and let him go."

"It is a trick that has succeeded with others besides yourselves," said Cleek, who had been bending over the injured man. He looked up at Narkom significantly. "Monsieur, I expect my assistant here any minute now. Would it not be as well to report this shocking affair to the local authorities?"

"Certainly, monsieur!" agreed Narkom, who had forgotten that Dollops might arrive now at any moment.

"What about this poor chap here, sir?" interposed Petrie. "He's in a desperately bad way. Oughtn't we to take him with us, and turn him over to the hospital folk?"

"Non—that is, not yet, my friend," softly interposed Cleek. "Your good superintendent and I will

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

look after him for a little time. There is a question or two to ask. He will bear the strain of talking now better than he might be able to do later. Notify the hospital officials as you pass through the town proper, and have an ambulance sent out. That's all. You may go."

"Well, so help me," began the indignant Petrie, then discreetly shut up and went. A moment later the limousine had whizzed away into the mist and darkness with the three men, and Cleek and Narkom were alone with the injured keeper.

"I expect that is Dollops in his taxi," whispered Cleek. "I thought I heard the sound of a motor. That will obliterate every track if you don't stop him. Head him off if you can, dear chap, and set him to work directly you have dismissed the taxi. Tell Dollops to measure and make a drawing of every footmark in and about the place. Quickly, please, before it is too late."

Mr. Narkom hurried off and vanished in the mist, leaving his ally alone with the dying man, for that he was dying there could be no question.

A bullet had gone through his body; a hammer had battered in the back of his head; he was but partly conscious—with frequent lapses into complete insensibility—and the marvel was not that he occasionally uttered some wandering, half-coherent sentences, but that he was able to speak at all.

"My poor chap," Cleek said feelingly, as he administered a stimulant by which the keeper's flagging

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

energies were whipped up. "Try to speak—try to answer a question or two—try—for a woman's sake."

"A woman's?" he mumbled feebly. "Aye, my poor wife—Gawd 'elp her—her and the kiddies! And me a-goin' 'ome, sir—me a-gettin' of my death like this for jist a-doin' of my duty—doin' of it honest and true, sir, for king and country!"

"And both letting you face the nightly peril of it unarmed!" said Cleek bitterly; then, passionately: "Will you wake up, England? Will you wake up and do justice by these men who give their lives that you may sleep in peace, and who, with a badge and a truncheon and two willing hands, must fight your criminal classes and keep law and order for you?"

"Aye—some day, may like—some day, sir," mumbled the dwindling voice; then it trailed off and sank sobbingly away, and Cleek had to administer more brandy to bolster up his fading strength.

"A word," he said eagerly, the hammering of his heart getting into his voice and making it unsteady. "Just one word, but much depends upon it. Tell me—now—before anybody comes: Who did it? Man or woman?"

"I dunno, sir—I didn't see. The mist was thick. Whoever it was, come at me from behind. But there was two—there must have been two—one as I heard a-runnin' toward me when I challenged, sir, and—and got shot down like a dog; and 'tother as come at me in the back when I sang out 'Murder' and blew my whistle for help. But men or women,

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

whichever it may a-been, I never see, sir, never. But one woman *was* on the Common to-night. A lady, sir —oh, yes, a lady indeed."

"A lady? Speak to me—quickly—my friend is returning. What did that lady wear? Was it a pink dress? Or couldn't you see?"

"Oh, yes, I could see—she came near me—she spoke in passing. She gave me a bit of money, sir, and asked me not to mention about her bein' out there to-night and me havin' met her. But it wasn't a pink dress, sir; it was green—all shiny pale green satin with sparklin' things on the bosom and smellin' like a field o' voylits on a mornin' in May!"

The sense of unspeakable thankfulness that Cleek experienced upon hearing that the dress of this unknown "lady" was not pink, was lost in a twinkling in one of utter and overwhelming surprise at learning that it was *green!* Pink, white, and green, here were three evening dresses called into the snare of this night's mystery; and yet a *third* woman now involved. White satin, that had been Lady Katharine Fordham's gown to-night; pink chiffon, that had been Ailsa Lorne's. Who then was the wearer of the pale green satin gown? Here was the riddle of the night taking yet another perplexing turn.

A clatter of hasty footsteps came along the drive and up the steps to the veranda, and Narkom, in a state of violent excitement, stood beside him.

"All right," he said, answering Cleek's inquiring glance. "I headed the taxi off and set Dollops to

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

work as you suggested—and a blessed good thing I did, too, otherwise we might have lost valuable clues."

"There *were* footsteps then?"

"Footsteps? Great Scott, yes, heaps of them: the absolute continuation of those which led me and my men to this house. But the madness of the thing, the puzzle of the thing! No man on earth can run away in two directions, yet there the blessed things are, going down the road at full tilt and coming back up it again still on a dead run. Two lines of them, old chap, one going and the other returning and both passing by the gate of this house. By it, do you hear?—*by* it, and never once turning in; yet in the garden we have found marks that correspond with them to the fraction of a hair, and we know positively that the fellow *did* come in here. It licks me, Cleek—it positively licks me. It's beyond all reason."

"Yes," admitted Cleek, thinking of the green satin dress. "It is, Mr. Narkom, it certainly is."

"Dollops will bring the drawings he's making to you as soon as he has covered all the ground," resumed the superintendent almost immediately. "Clever young dog that and no mistake. But to return to our muttons, old chap. Did you get anything out of this poor fellow? Any clue to the party who assaulted him?"

"None. He doesn't know. For one thing, the mist prevented him seeing his assailant, and for another, he was first shot down by some one who was

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

running toward him and answered his challenge with a bullet, and then pounced upon by somebody else who was behind him and floored him with the hammer. I take it that the person who was running and who fired the shot was advancing toward him from this direction—was, in fact, the actual assassin—and that having discharged the pistol and caused this poor fellow to whistle a call for assistance to the constable in Mulberry Lane, he was put to it to get out of the box in which he found himself by those two things. To escape across the Common meant to be pursued by the constable and driven across the track of one of the other keepers; so he took the bold hazard of putting on this poor chap's coat, cap, and badge and playing at joining in the hue and cry in the manner he did. Is that"—turning to the dying man—"the truth of it?"

The keeper could only nod—he was now too far gone to make any verbal response, and even the administering of another dose of brandy failed to whip up his expiring strength.

"I'm afraid we shall never get any more out of him, poor fellow," said Cleek feelingly. "He is lapsing into unconsciousness, you see. Raise him a bit, make him a little more comfortable if pos—— Quick! Catch his head, Mr. Narkom! Don't let it strike the boards. Gone!—a good true servant of the public gone! And the blackguard that killed him still at large!"

Then he gently folded the useless hands and closed

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

down the sightless eyes, and shaking out the coat which Petrie had bundled into a pillow, spread it over the dead man and was very, very still for a little time.

"There's a widow—and some little nippers, Mr. Narkom," he said when he at length rose to his feet. "Find them out for me, will you? And if you can see your way to offer a good substantial reward for the clearing up of this case and the capture of the criminal, I'll pull it off and you may pay that reward to the mother of this man's children."

"Cleek, my dear fellow! How ridiculously quixotic. What on earth can you be thinking about?"

"A woman, Mr. Narkom—just a woman—and a few little nippers . . . who might take the wrong road as—well, as somebody I know of took it once—if there wasn't a hand to help them or a friend to guide. That's all, dear friend, that's all!"

Lifting his hat to that silent, covered figure, he turned and walked away. But at the foot of the steps leading down to the mist and darkness of the drive he came to a halt; and there Narkom, following almost instantly, joined him again.

"My dear fellow, of all the impulsive, of all the amazing men," he began; but got no further, for Cleek's upthrown hand checked him.

"We won't go into that, Mr. Narkom," he said. "We'll stick to the case, please. I've got something to tell you that you haven't heard as yet. Something that that poor dead chap did manage to tell me. A

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

woman—a lady—was out there on the Common to-night and paid him not to disclose the fact."

"Great Scott! My dear fellow, you don't surely mean to hint that by any possibility that poor child, Lady Katharine Fordham——"

"No, I do not. The lady in question was neither Lady Katharine Fordham, who, you tell me, wore a white satin dress to-night, nor yet Miss Ailsa Lorne, whose frock you say was of gauzy pink. The lady in question wore, I understand, a gown of very pale green satin with what I take to have been several diamond ornaments upon the corsage; furthermore, a delicate but very distinct odour of violets clung about her."

"Good Lord!"

"No wonder you are surprised, Mr. Narkom. Ladies dressed in that fashion are not, as a general thing, given to wandering about Wimbledon Common either by night or by day, and the presence of this particular one is curious, to say the least of it. I am of the opinion, however, that she was no stranger to the Common keeper, otherwise he would have hurried her into the shelter the instant she offered to bribe him, whistled up the constable in Mulberry Lane, and given her in charge as a suspicious character. Then there is another side to the affair which we must not overlook. An entertainment was in progress at Clavering Close to-night, and there must have been quite a number of ladies present dressed in gala attire. But if your exclamation means that you

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

have no recollection of seeing one who wore a gown of pale green satin——"

"It doesn't!" rapped in Narkom excitedly. "It was the absurdity, the madness, the—the utter impossibility of the thing. That she—she of all women——! What rot!"

"Oho!" said Cleek, with a strong, rising inflection. "Then there *was* such a gown in the rooms at Clavering Close to-night, eh? And you do remember the lady that wore it?"

"Remember her? There's nobody I should be likely to remember better. It was Lady Clavering herself!"

"Whew-w! The hostess?"

"Yes. Sir Philip's wife—young Geoff's stepmother; one of the sweetest, gentlest, most womanly women that ever lived. And to suggest that she . . . either the fellow must have deliberately lied or his statement was the delusion of a dying man. It couldn't have happened—it simply couldn't, Cleek. Why, man, her ladyship was there—at the Close—when I left. It was she who put that jewel into my hand and asked me to leave it at Wuthering Grange when——"

He stopped, biting his words off short and laying a nervous grip on Cleek's arm; and Cleek, facing about abruptly, leaned forward into the mist and darkness, listening.

For of a sudden, a babble of angry voices, mingled with the sounds of a scuffle, had risen from the road

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

beyond the gates, and hard on the heels of it there now rang forth sharply the shrill tones of Dollops crying out at the top of his voice:

"None o' yer larks, now! Got yer! Gov'ner! Mr. Narkom! This way! Come quick, will yer? I've copped the bounder. Out here in the bushes under this blessed wall!"

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER SIX

A LITTLE DISCREPANCY

THE distance between the gates of Gleer Cottage and the porch wherein lay the body of the dead keeper was by no means a short one, but at the first sound of Dollops's voice the two men sped down the centre of the dark, mist-wrapped drive and out into the lane, their electric pocket torches sending two brilliant streams of light in front of them. The sounds of scuffling feet and of wrangling voices guided them along the broken, irregular line of the crumbling brick wall which encircled the grounds of the cottage, and following the lead of them, they came presently upon an amazing picture.

Close to that identical spot where, earlier in the night, Hammond had found the gap in the wall, two figures struggled together: the one, in a vain endeavour to free himself from the clutches of his captor; the other intent on bringing him to the ground, on which lay scattered all the drawings and paraphernalia with which Dollops had evidently been carrying out his master's instructions. The light of the torches revealed his prisoner to be a sturdy, fair-haired young man, and a first glance showed Cleek that he was arrayed in a fashionable light-weight

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

overcoat which, torn open in the struggle, showed him also to be in immaculate evening dress. It hardly needed Mr. Narkom's startled exclamation, "Geoff!" to tell the detective that this was indeed the son and heir of Sir Philip Clavering, the young man whose bitter threats against the dead man in the cottage had been so swiftly carried out.

But the exclamation had a far-reaching effect upon Dollops's prisoner, for he ceased struggling at once and faced round upon the superintendent so that the full glare of the torches could fall upon his features and leave not a shadow of doubt regarding his identity.

"Hullo! Mr. Narkom!" he exclaimed. "This *is* a stroke of good luck and no mistake! Who and what is this enterprising individual upon my back? I can't see his interesting face, for he pounced upon me in the dark; but if I had known that his yells and cries were likely to bring *you* upon the scene, I certainly shouldn't have gone to the length of struggling and getting my clothes in this awful mess."

Cleek made a mental tally of that remark, and set alongside of it the circumstance that Dollops, when he first called out, had most distinctly mentioned Mr. Narkom by name. He said nothing, however; merely removed the pressure of his thumb from the controlling button of his torch, slipped that useful article into his pocket, and busied himself with picking up Dollops's effects from the ground.

"Here you, whoever you are! You keep your

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

blessed thievin' irons off them things!" snapped Dollops, with a wink at the superintendent. "I say, Mr. Narkom, sir, don't let that josser go carryin' off my drorin's—them's for my gov'ner, *you* know that. And, sir," he went on earnestly, "don't you be took in by none of the gammon of this 'ere person. Actin' suspicious and creepin' along in the dark he was when I 'opped up and copped him, sir, and no matter if he *is* a party as you're acquainted with, sir——"

"He is," interrupted the superintendent curtly, not, however, without some slight show of agitation at finding this particular young man in the neighbourhood at this particular time. "The gentleman is Mr. Geoffrey Clavering, my friend Sir Philip Clavering's son and heir."

"Well, sir, I can't 'elp that," began Dollops, but his words were interrupted by the captive himself.

"I shouldn't have blamed you if you had failed to recognize me from the state I'm in through the mistaken ardour of this enterprising youth, Mr. Narkom," he said. "He appears not to have left one inch of my person unmarked with his hands; and if you would oblige me by requesting him to detach himself from me as expeditiously as possible, I shall be unspeakably obliged."

"Certainly, Geoff. Dollops, let the gentleman go."

"But, sir—Mr. Narkom——"

"Stand back, I tell you!"

"But upon my sacred word of honour, sir——"

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"You have heard what I said, haven't you? That's enough," interrupted Narkom, sharply.

Dollops gave a swift glance at Monsieur Georges de Lesparre's face, then sullenly relinquished his hold on his prisoner, and with a knowing wink over his shoulder, busied himself with picking up his scattered and muddied papers.

"A jolly cheeky young beggar that, Mr. Narkom; I wonder you take his impertinences so lightly," said young Clavering, who seemed, somehow, to have lost a little of his self-possession now that it became evident the matter of his presence must inevitably be the topic of conversation. "I say, send him away, won't you? And if you would—er—send your friend away, too, I'd be obliged. I'd like to have a little conversation with you in private, if you don't mind."

"Certainly, Geoff. Dollops, take yourself off—hot shot!"

"Me, sir? My hat! Where'll I go? Wot'll I do, sir?"

"Go and continue what you were told to do in the first place. Gather up your traps, and be off about it."

"Oh, yuss—of course—nuthink easier than *that* after the way as the gent 'ere has went gallopin' all over 'em with his muddy boots!" said Dollops with apparent disgust. "Look at that for a sample of drorin', will yer?"

He slyly twitched the corner of his eye round in Cleek's direction, turned the mud-stained paper so

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

that he should see the footprint, and mumbling and muttering shambled away in the direction of the cottage and disappeared in the mist and darkness.

"I'm afraid, Geoff," went on Narkom as soon as Dollops had gone, "that I can't humour you to the extent of requesting this gentleman, too, to leave us; but let me have the pleasure of introducing him—Monsieur Georges de Lesparre, the famous French criminologist. We are engaged together upon a very serious matter to-night. In short, an exceptionally ghastly murder has been committed since I left Clavering Close, Geoff, and you will be horrified to hear——"

"Gently, gently, monsieur," softly interposed Cleek, who, while appearing to be absorbed in acknowledging the introduction, had been quietly taking in every detail relative to the young man's appearance and had decided offhand that he liked him; that he was simply a handsome, straight-looking, frank-faced, clear-eyed young fellow who, in the general order of things, ought not to have one evil impulse in him. "Shall one go into details that may, possibly, be unnecessary?" he went on. "Perhaps Mr. Clavering has already heard of the crime, and it is that which is accountable for his presence in this neighbourhood."

In his heart he knew that there was no such possibility, that there was not even the ghost of a chance that news of the murder could so soon have gotten abroad when even the local police had not yet learned

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

of it, and he threw out this "feeler" hoping that young Clavering would rid himself of any shadow of complicity by at once rejecting it. To his disappointment, however, Geoff rose to it as a trout to a fly; and his face, which had betrayed a strong effort to repress an overwhelming agitation from the instant Narkom made mention of the crime, now lit with something like relief and thankfulness.

"Yes, that's the case. You have guessed it, monsieur," he said gratefully, a sound that seemed a curious blend of a sigh and a sob getting into his voice despite an effort to keep it level and emotionless. "I had gone to bed—that is, I mean to say I was getting ready to go to bed—but I knew I shouldn't be able to sleep, so I came down into the grounds for a walk and a smoke. The open air always does me good. All at once a motor came along with Mellish, the police constable, in it. I stopped him, and he told me of this awful thing. I nearly went mad. To think what it means to my dear girl! She hasn't heard yet, of course——"

"No," said Mr. Narkom. "She will have to be told in the morning. Poor girl, it will be a shock to her, but it means a great obstacle removed from your path."

"Yes," agreed the young man uneasily. "That's what made me so anxious to come here and find out for myself if the murderer had been traced. You see I lost my head a bit to-night," he added half apologetically, "and you never know what people will say, so

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

I was just coming cautiously along when that cheeky young chap threw himself on me, mistaking me, I suppose, for the assassin."

He made an attempt to laugh, but even to Mr. Narkom it was palpable that the young fellow was making a desperate effort to cover up his agitation.

"You can't, in the circumstances, blame him for that, Geoff," replied Narkom. "Besides, it was a most indiscreet thing for you—you of all men—to come here to-night, especially after what happened at the Close."

"You mean about my threatening De Louvisan?"

"Yes. At least twenty or thirty persons heard that; and although after you were calmer and the Austrian had left the house, you excused yourself to your guests and were said to have gone to your room for the night——"

"I did go to it!" rapped in Geoff excitedly. "Purviss, my valet, will prove that if there's any question regarding it. Simply because I didn't have the heart to indulge in any more dancing or tomfoolery of that sort when my dear girl had been dragged away from me as though I were a leper. Good God, Mr. Narkom! *you* don't believe I had anything to do with this awful thing, do you?"

Cleek took the reins before Narkom could utter so much as a single word.

"Of a certainty he does not, monsieur. Who could on so slight a thing as the mere hot-headed outburst of an excited young man?" he said suavely,

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

making, as was his way, a cunning hazard that should at once prove or disprove a suspicion that lay at the back of his head. "And to base it upon no stronger circumstance than that you afterward left the drawing-room and did not return! Ridiculous! One might as well suspect Lady Clavering herself when she, too, was obliged to retire and leave her guests for the time, if merely absenting one's self is to be regarded as suspicious. It is what you Anglais shall call 'tommyrot,' that, eh?"

"Of course it is, monsieur—er—what's-your-name—of course!" assented Geoff gratefully, rather liking this suave and gentle Frenchman who seemed bent upon coming to his rescue and showing him the way out whenever matters took an awkward turn. "You're a jolly, sharp-sighted chap, you are, and you spot the weak points in these affairs like a shot. My stepmother doesn't often suffer from headaches, but just as it happens, she was so queer that she had to lie down for about an hour; but her maid can prove that she stopped in her room, just as Purviss can vouch for it that I remained in mine."

The curious one-sided smile moved up Cleek's left cheek, then vanished again.

"Quite so, quite so," he said blandly. "Besides, it is not with Lady Clavering that we are concerned, but with the owner of a jewel that we found on the spot—a little gold scent bangle that smelt of violets——"

"My God! Kathie's! She said she lost it!" cried

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Geoffrey through his clenched teeth; then realizing what his words meant, he turned on the two men fiercely.

"What do you mean? What are you trying to infer? That she—my dear girl—— Good heavens! but if you dare to bring her name into this horrible business, I'll throttle the pair of you! You shan't connect her with the abominable affair! By God, you shan't!"

"M'sieur is too quick with his threats," put in Cleek suavely. "Would it not be as well to wait? Unfortunately, we have only too much proof that a woman was concerned in the murder, and——"

"But it was not Lady Katharine. That I swear!" The young man's voice shook with emotion, and his strained eyes gazed from one face to the other in heartbreaking intensity.

"You are absolutely sure that you have no suspicion of the murderer's identity?" Cleek asked with a sharpness unusual to him. "No reason to doubt any living soul?"

For just the merest fraction of a second young Clavering appeared to hesitate.

"No," he said curtly. "No, I have not. I know no more about it than a child. Mellish told me about the murder, and it was only natural that I should come up here to make inquiries."

"But, yes, monsieur, of course," agreed Cleek softly. "There is, then, no more to be said save good-bye. I fear me I shall not have the pleasure of

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

meeting you again, as I return to Paris to-morrow. The case is one of the most mysterious, and I leave it to your English detective, Mr. George Headland. So it is adieu, monsieur, and not au revoir."

He held out his hand to the young man, who grasped it in his own trembling one, and then, with a sharp "good-night," Geoff Clavering turned and strode back in the direction whence he had come.

"Hum-m-m!" said Cleek, taking his chin between his thumb and forefinger and rubbing it up and down. "A total denial! And with enough decency to blush! Quite so! Quite so!"

Mr. Narkom, knowing the signs and being torn with eagerness for the father of that rash boy, moved forward and laid a shaking hand upon his sleeve.

"Cleek," he said in a whisper full of anxiety and excitement, "don't keep it back, dear chap. You've come to some conclusion. Speak up, do, and tell me what you make of it?"

"Make of it, Mr. Narkom? Well, for one thing, I make of it that that young man lied like a pick-pocket and deliberately attempted to throw dust in our eyes. He not only *does* suspect some one—and with good grounds, too—but he has been here before and in that house to-night. In other words, his was the foot that crushed that golden capsule. The scent of the *Huile Violette* was upon the drawing paper, the measure, the muffler, the cap—every blessed thing he trod on in his scuffle with Dollops!"

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Good God! Oh, his poor father! Surely, surely, Cleek, you do not believe——"

"My dear Mr. Narkom, I never suffer myself to 'believe' anything until I have absolute proof of it. What I may *think* is a different matter."

"And you think of that boy—what?"

"That he is either a hot-headed, quixotic, loyal, lovable young ass, Mr. Narkom, or he's a remarkably dangerous and crafty criminal! I'm put to it for the moment to decide which. One thing is pretty certain, and that is that young Geoffrey Clavering knows more of this crime than he will admit, and that the woman he is shielding is Lady Katharine Fordham, who was not only on the Common but in Gleer Cottage itself with Master Geoffrey."

"Good heavens! Cleek, how do you know that?" cried Mr. Narkom, his voice hoarse and shaken.

"Firstly, because his clothes are all scented with that peculiar scent of violets, and although I know from the dead keeper that another woman, probably Lady Clavering, was on the Common, he is certainly not shielding her; otherwise he would not have admitted that she had absented herself from her guests. No, I think you will find that both the young people were out here to-night. Let's hear now what Dollops has to say."

A minute later there sounded the familiar cry of a night owl, which brought the boy himself running up at full speed.

"Lor' lumme, sir!" he cried disgustedly, as a quick

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

glance revealed the absence of his former prisoner. "You never went and let 'im go after me a-showin' of you the footprint wot he'd left on my drorin' paper! It's just the same as one of 'em in the lane wot you told me to measure, sir; measure 'em off yourself and see. And him a-playin' off innercent and actin' like he was a respectable gent as was comin' here unsuspectin' and got copped by mistake! He wasn't, the bounder! He was tryin' to sneak away, that's wot *he* was a-doin' of—trying to do a bunk before anybody dropped to where he was a-hidin'."

"What's that? Hiding? Did you say hiding?"

"Yes, I did, Mr. Narkom, and I'd a-told you of it at the time, only you wouldn't let me open me blessed mouth, but jist shuts me up and orders me off prompt. Hidin' in that blessed 'oller tree there—look!" He flashed the light of his torch upon a tree which stood about three or four yards distant. "In that he was," he went on, "and jist as soon as the motor had went and the way was clear, I sees him sneak out and make toward the Common; so I ups and does a tiptoe run along this strip o' grass, sir, so's me feet wouldn't make no noise, and jist as he starts to do a bunk I does a spring, and comes down on his blessed back like a 'awk on a guinea 'en."

Narkom twitched up his chin and looked at Cleek; and for a moment there was silence, a deep significant silence, then Cleek spoke.

"How shall we sum him up by the measure of these things, Mr. Narkom, as a hero or as a scoundrel?" he

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

said. "If he is innocent, why was he hiding? And if not for a criminal purpose, why did he come to this place at all?"

"Heavens above, man, don't ask *me!*" returned Narkom irritably. "It's the most infernal riddle I ever encountered. My head's in a positive whirl. But look here, old chap. Supposing he did have a hand in the murder, how on earth could he have coaxed De Louvisan to this house—a man who had cause to dread him, a man whose life he had threatened?"

"Perhaps he didn't, Mr. Narkom; perhaps somebody did the coaxing for him. A woman is a clever lure, my friend, and we know that one or two, perhaps three—— Oh, well, let it go at that."

A faint sound of an automobile horn sounded its blare through the distance and darkness.

"Lennard is coming back with the local authorities. I'd know the hooting of that horn among a thousand, Mr. Narkom. And with their coming, 'Monsieur de Lesparre' returns to his native kit bag. This way, Dollops—look sharp! Pick us up at the old railway arch as soon as you can, Mr. Narkom. We'll be on the lookout for you. Now then, Dollops, my lad, step lively!"

"Right you are, gov'ner. So long, Mr. Narkom. We're off—as the eggs said to the cook when she got a whiff of 'em."

"Good-bye for a little time," said Cleek, reaching out and gripping the superintendent's hand. "At

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

the arch, remember. It has been child's play up to this, Mr. Narkom. Now the real work begins. And unless all signs fail, it promises to be the case of my career."

And so, like this, he stepped off into the mist and darkness, and went his way—to the beginning of the chase; to the reading of the riddle; to those things of Love and Mystery, of Faith and Unfaith, of Sorrow and of Joy, whose trail lay under the roof of Wuthering Grange and which walked as shadows with Lady Katharine Fordham and Ailsa Lorne.

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER SEVEN

"COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE"

ONCE the affair had been reported to the local police, news of the tragedy spread over the neighbourhood with amazing velocity, and by nine o'clock next morning there wasn't a soul within a radius of five miles who had not heard of it; by ten the Common and the immediate vicinity of Gleer Cottage were literally black with morbid-minded sightseers and reporters.

As yet, however, none but the police and the representatives of the press had been permitted to cross the threshold of the house or to obtain even the merest glimpse of the murdered man. For all that, certain facts relative to the position in which the body had been found, together with the mysterious marks upon his shirt bosom, had leaked out, and as Scotland Yard, as represented by Cleek and Superintendent Narkom, had chosen to remain silent for the present relative to such clues as had been discovered, this gave room for some fine flights of fancy on the part of the representatives of the press.

The special correspondent of the *Evening Planet* "discovered" that the Count was "a well-known Austrian nobleman" who had offended the famous

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Ravaschol group, and was the author of the equally famous "Ninth Clause" which had acted so disastrously against it—a circumstance which, the *Planet* claimed, left no shadow of a doubt regarding "the true meaning of the mysterious markings upon the shirt bosom of the unfortunate gentleman." Whereupon the representative of its bitterest rival, the *Morning Star*, as promptly discovered that he was nothing of the sort; that he had been "positively identified" as the former keeper of a sort of club in Soho much frequented by Russian, German, French, and Italian anarchists; and that, on its being discovered by those gentry that he had sold to the police of their several countries secrets thus learned, he had been obliged to disappear from his regular haunts in order to save his skin. And, furthermore, as the address of the house in which that club had been maintained, and from which he had carried on his system of betrayal, was 63 Essex Row, the explanation of the markings was quite clear—to wit: "Four and two make six; one and two make three; furthermore, the peculiar formation of the repeated figure 2 is, of course, a rude attempt to make it serve for the letter S. as well; which, taken in conjunction with the three X's, leaves no room for doubt that these markings stand for Number Sixty-three Essex Row and for nothing else."

Now as it happened that 63 Essex Row had, at one time in its career, been the seat of just such a club and just such a proceeding as the *Morning Star* stated,

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

nothing was left the *Evening Planet* but sneeringly to point out that "the imaginative genius of our esteemed contemporary should not let it fail to remember that the man Lovetski—to whom it doubtless refers, and whose mysterious vanishment some years ago has never been cleared up—had his supporters as well as his accusers. It was clearly shown at the time that although he dwelt in the house where the 'club' in question held forth, there never was any absolute proof that he was himself in any way actually connected with it, his vocation being that of a maker of dressing for boots, shoes, ladies' bags, and leather goods generally, which dressing he manufactured upon the premises."

This statement, being correct, gave the *Morning Star* a chance to clinch its argument yet more forcibly and to prove itself better informed than its rival by coming out in its next issue with the declaration that "there can no longer be any question relative to the identity of the murdered man. That he is, or rather was, the long-vanished Ferdinand Lovetski who was formerly identified with the club *and* the boot-dressing industry carried on at 63 Essex Row, is established beyond all cavil, since the marks smeared upon his shirt bosom are now known to have been made with shoe-blacking of that variety which is applied and polished with a cloth, and which has of recent years almost entirely superseded the brush-applied variety of our fathers' and grandfathers' days!"

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Narkom, much impressed thereby, showed these two articles from the *Morning Star* to Cleek.

"An ingenious young man that reporter, Mr. Narkom, and his deductions regarding those marks reflect great credit upon him," said the latter. "For it is positively certain that whoever he may or may not have been, the man certainly was *not* the Count de Louvisan, for the simple reason that there is *no* 'Count de Louvisan' in the Austrian nobility, the title having lapsed some years ago. The theory that the dead man is that Ferdinand Lovetski who formerly lived at 63 Essex Row, however, will bear looking into. It is well thought out. I should, perhaps, be more impressed with the genius of the chap who worked out so likely a solution to those mysterious figures if he hadn't made me lose faith in his powers of observation by the 'shoe blacking' statement. It is not a bad *guess*, in the circumstances—for each would leave marks very similar, if one trusted to the eye alone—but I happen to *know* that the figures were *not* smeared on with shoe-blacking, but with a stick of that greasy, highly scented black cosmetic which some actresses use for their eyelashes and some men employ to disguise the gray hairs in the moustache. You know the kind of stuff I mean. It is always wrapped in a brilliant, ruby-coloured tin foil; is to be found in most barbers' and hairdressers' establishments, and is very heavily and peculiarly perfumed. You will remember that, when I wanted to ascertain if the odour of the *Huile Violette* emanated

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

from the body of the dead man or not, I told you he *was* scented, but *not* with violets? Very well, the scent which was upon him was the peculiar spicy fragrance of that particular kind of cosmetic; and I had only to get one whiff of his shirt bosom to understand what had been used to make those marks upon it."

"My dear Cleek, could you be sure of that?" ventured Narkom. "I know the kind of stuff you mean. But few Englishmen use it these days, though I remember it was once very popular. It comes in light brown shades for fair people, as well as in black for dark ones; and the Count was extremely fair, almost flaxen. Could you be positive then that what you smelt was not on his hair or moustache? If he had used the light sort it would not show, remember."

"My dear Mr. Narkom, have you so poor an opinion of my methods that you fancy I would be likely to be slipshod in my examination, and to pass over so important a possibility as that? The man had brilliantine on his hair and moustache, and the latter had been dressed with curling irons! Believe me, when we find who put those marks upon him, we shall find some one who is addicted to the use of black cosmetic of the kind which I have mentioned."

And afterward, when the rush of events had crowded yet more important ones from his mind, Mr. Maverick Narkom remembered those words and set that statement down in his diary as another proof of the amazing thoroughness and the shrewd far-sightedness of this remarkable man.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER EIGHT

MRS. RAYNOR positively jumped as the premonitory knock trembled on the door before Johnston the butler opened it and entered. Ordinarily she was but little given to "nerves" and was by no means easily startled, but this morning was a decided exception to the rule. And why not? You don't get called up out of your bed every morning to learn that a gentleman who had been walking about your tulip beds yesterday afternoon had been barbarously murdered during the night in a house but a few yards away. Nor is it pleasant to face the likelihood of getting your name and your residence mentioned in the daily papers in connection with a police affair, and to know that before nightfall every groom, washerwoman, and chambermaid within a fifty-mile radius will have read exactly what the interior of your home is like, exactly what you wore when "our representative" called, and will know a good deal more about you than you ever knew about yourself.

"Begging pardon, madam, but a gentleman——" began Johnston, but was suffered to get no further.

"If it is a reporter I will not see him," interrupted

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY