

***THOMAS
W. HANSHEW***



***THE RIDDLE
OF THE NIGHT***

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Thomas W. Hanshew

The Riddle of the Night

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CHARACTERS

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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 } Detective Sergeants.

PETRIE }

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.



CHAPTER ONE

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A MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR

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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.

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.

"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!"

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 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 Narkom, 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."

"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 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, 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 Glee 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 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 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!"

CHAPTER TWO

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HOW THE CHASE ENDED

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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.

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 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 "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 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.

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 expanse 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:

2x4x1x2

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 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."

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.



CHAPTER THREE

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THE SHADOW THAT LAY BEHIND

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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 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 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