

*The Thrilling Adventures of
The 18th Century Club*

*Written by
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Chapter Fifteen

A Most Singular Communication.



It began much as any day at the Club.

I arrived at noon, decanted hastily from my calash and sprinted, after my fashion, across the rain besmirched cobbles; whereupon I gained the reassuringly imposing vestibule. The outer door was open, and the familiar aroma of cigars and damask enveloped me at once. Function, the doorman, lay snoozing in his alcove, a bottle of porter half concealed within the folds of his livery.

“I say, old boy” I accosted him gently, and he sprang at once to attention with an alacrity that belied his somewhat dishevelled appearance.

“Lord Shuteye, Sir! Forgive me, I was just resting my eyes for a moment.” “Think nothing of it my good man. How’s the court case proceeding?”

“Deferred pending psychiatric reports, thank the Lord. The Lord Advocate, that is. Fellow’s a pure master of obfuscation. It’s almost worth committing the most venal acts, just for the joy of watching him construct one’s defence.”

“Good show. I knew we could count on him, though it’s a rare favour. Prefers banging a

blighter up to getting him off, don't you know?"

"Indeed I do sir, and may I thank you again for interceding on my behalf. Why, did I ever tell you about the time..."

"I'll wager you probably did, Function old sport. Now then, how's about opening the door, I've got a damnable chill from this wretched downpour, and fancy a large brandy might take the edge off it."

"Of course sir. Why, at times like this I recall your father at the battle of Copeland's Bot- tom. There we was, sir, utterly surrounded, and down to the last case of arrack. Thousands of 'em, there was, screaming over the hills..."

Thankfully, as Function embarked upon his gripping narrative he simultaneously had the wherewithal to usher me through the double doors into the Club proper. As his voice drifted off into wistful reverie I divested myself of greatcoat and fez, and proceeded at a fair crack down the oak panelled corridor towards the reading room.

Upon entering I was at once struck by an almost tangible silence. It was, as Function himself might have deemed it, perhaps too quiet.

Casting my steely blues about the interior I at first perceived nothing untoward. The volumes nestled as ever in their cases on all sides, forming a veritable cocoon of leather-bound wisdom. Choice objet d'art perched with stately solemnity upon cunningly wrought tables of rare wood. The Turkish rugs in peacock hues swathed the floor in a blanket of sultanate luxury. And yet...

At that moment, I espied a plume of purple smoke curling leisurely from beyond the high back of a distant armchair. Assuming my panther-like entrance had failed to impress itself upon the consciousness of the occluded occupant, I ventured to make my presence known by the simple artifice of loudly uncorking a bottle of Napoleon from the Morning Table, and pouring myself a large bumper of France's finest.

"Ah, Shuteye. I've been expecting you."

"Lord Arse!" cries I, for indeed it was none other. "I rather assumed you'd failed to detect my arrival".

"Nothing of the sort, dear chap" he rejoined, from the hinterland of upholstery in which he remained ensconced. "Forgive me for not rising. I find myself decidedly nonplussed by a most singular communication".

My curiosity piqued, I necked the tumbler in one and poured myself a generous refill before advancing on his position.

"A singular communication, you say?"

"Singular indeed sir." he responded, rising at last, and giving his fine moustaches a hussar-like twirl. Peculiarly, for this hour, he was sporting full regimentals, and I could not help but note a certain agitation in his usually insouciant bearing.

"I say old boy, whatever is the matter?"

By way of answer he gestured towards the mahogany table to his left, upon which, besides a decanter of claret which bore eloquent testimony to a morning's guzzling, and the stub of a fine cigar smouldering unattended in an ornate chinoiserie ashtray, I espied what I took to be the object of his discomfort.

"A letter?" I ventured, "from whom?" "That's just it, old boy; it don't say, do it?"

I approached the table and took hold of one corner of the single sheet of vellum which lay there.

"May I, my Lord?" "By all means."

As I took up the sheet Lord A moved around to the other side of the table and emptied the remains of the claret into his glass.

"Dashed bad business" he said, before gulping down the contents with commendable gusto. He then paused somewhat expectantly, as if awaiting some Holmesian deduction on my part, that should instantaneously clear up whatever it was that was that was bothering him.



Function the Doorman

I cast my eyes first over the table once more, then examined the item that I held more intently.

The hand was spidery yet directly applied in a dirty, reddish ink that recalled nothing so much as the unintelligible daubings of a moron. Yet the parchment was undoubtedly of exquisite quality.

There was no package that I could see, though the familiar tracery of indentations indicated that the epistle had until recently been folded upon itself, no doubt acting in the capacity of its own envelope. Naturally, before considering its contents further, my first thought was to the mode of adhesion.

I turned it over.

"There's no seal, I already looked." Lord A interjected, surmising my line of thought and

retrieving his cigar from the porcelain.

“No seal?” says I, “what then, a common glue?”

“Not that either old boy. Precisely folded and interlocked it was, and, as you can see, addressed to me here at the Club in as fine a hand as you could wish.”

“And yet it contains nowt but gibberish?”

“Alas, sir, gibberish it ain’t.” sighed Lord A, and evidently perplexed by my incomprehension, flung himself back into the armchair and began puffing furiously on his Havana, as if, in the Ruskie’s memorable phrase, its very length was keeping him from reaching, or in this case declaring, the truth.

Seconds passed. The room seemed to shrink inwards as if tinged by a premature twilight. I strode to the window. The downpour had indeed intensified, and a mask of cloud shrouded the rooftops of the buildings opposite. This was not shaping up into the afternoon of lan- guid inebriation I’d anticipated.

“Dash it all, old boy.” I said at last, “if these wretched scrawlings carry some import, then I entreat you to declare them. Sink me, what on Earth’s the matter, for I declare I can make neither foot nor hoof of it!”

“Not foot” says Lord A. “Say rather, neither hand nor claw!” “Claw, sir?”

“Claw sir!” And with this he sprang once more to his feet and strode towards me, his face the colour of cinnabar. “This” he cried, snatching the item in question from my grasp, “this wretched scrawling as you term it, is none other than that which I have not seen, save only in nightmares, these last twenty years. It is written in the forbidden language of Abu Abu, the ancient and most despicable Cult of the Furious Drumming Monkey Ape!”

“I say!”



