

*The Thrilling Adventures of  
The 18th Century Club*

*Written by  
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## Chapter Eight

Blend sir!? Blend!?

"Well I never," I mused aloud, "a submersible. How frightfully Jules Verne."

"More like Das Boot." growled the Viceroy. "I've been entombed in this damnable pilchard tin since the Aegean. Ain't even set foot on dear old Blighty to stretch me pins, and we're off again."

And so indeed we were.

An hour or so had passed since our alarming descent beneath the waters of the harbour, during which time the initial consternation of both myself and Lord A had been duly belayed by a series of encouraging if oblique announcements from the Surgeon General - or should I say, "skipper" - via the communication tubes. "All hatches secure and anchors aweigh!" "Five fathoms deep and tight as a matron's corset." That sort of thing.

Clearly mad as a midshipman's hatter, he at least seemed to know what he was about, boat-wise, so myself and Lord A settled back to enjoy our postprandial smokes, and await further developments.

The Monk had remained blissfully oblivious in his slumbers throughout, whilst the Viceroy had regained some degree of consciousness, and, having secured himself a "liver" in the shape of a cask of Efes Pilsen which had rolled under the table, he now puffed away vigorously on a hand carved fiammata, so that the cabin rapidly became suffused with a reassuring aroma, redolent of the officer's mess in Sevastopol.

Thus, as we ploughed on beneath the waves in relative comfort, I prevailed upon the Viceroy to recount his recent exploits, in the hope of shading the blanks.

"I'd just returned from me morning dip at the bagnio, and was at me eggs," he began, between glugs of Turkish beer and plumes of latakia, "And was diligently perusing the latest despatches, when I noticed, amongst the usual ministerial ephemera and tedious memoranda apposite to my plenipotentiary obligations, a most peculiar piece of correspondence".

I caught Lord A's eye, as my mind made an involuntary leap back to the Club. His battleship greys met mine momentarily, before fixing again on the Viceroy. Who continued:

"No seal, you see. No official stamp or diplomatic franking, and yet clearly of fine quality, and intricately folded, so as to be self-enveloping."

Despite the cosiness of our surroundings, I felt a deathly chill dance the polka up my

vertebrae.

"Naturally, I assumed it was from some admirer or other," the Viceroy continued, "Some mooning subaltern's fiancée, or the lovelorn paramour of a scrawny embassy politico, yearning for a slab of proper British beef. Happens all the time."

"I'm sure" says I, "But you were saying, about the letter?"

"Letter? Ah yes. So, naturally, I opened the thing."

"And?"

"Absolute gibberish. A fine hand, I'll grant you, and inked in a quite pleasing shade of vermilion. But utter, unintelligible tosh, nonetheless."

"My God!" I had no thought other than for the Brigadier, who's countenance had drained entirely to the colour of an Icelandic panorama, whilst his right hand detached the cigar from his suddenly pallid lips and crushed it, still smouldering, in a vice-like fist.

"For all I know, that might have been the end of it," the Viceroy went on unperturbed, seemingly taking no notice of Lord A's condition, "had it not been for the salient fact that in that very same batch of mail spread across me breakfast bureau, I happened just then to notice an epistle bearing a very distinctive crest."

Hearing this, I returned my attention to Kebababad, who had paused his narration to fish for a match, re-lighting of pipe for the use of.

"A crest, you say? Arms?"

Duly sparked, he continued.

"Surmounted by a crown, the escutcheon was quartered with cross of Saint George and vertical stripes of Gules and Or, the centre charged with the Yorkist bloom."

"Gules and Or you say... Catalonian?" I wondered out loud, "and embossed with the white rose? Why, sink me! That's Foulmouth!"

"Good show, Shuteye. Thought for a moment there you'd lost your touch, old boy."

"I say, Foulmouth! I ain't seen that wiry cove since he eloped with the Contessa. Mind you, can't say I blame him. What news?"

"It ain't all good, but it's pertinent." Came the ambivalent reply.

Just then, a raucous hooting nearly split me inner-ear and put paid to further immediate

discourse.

“Avast there! Land ho, land ho! We lay off ’till seven bells dogs!”

Bartington’s giddy tones bellowed down the pipes.

The Monk jerked bolt upright in his armchair, crossed himself, then passed out again forthwith. Meanwhile, the Viceroy hurled his formidable frame toward the cabin wall and snatched up a brass mouthpiece which, attached by a fine gilt ferrule, connected to a silvery tube which I surmised must form part of the on-ship communications system.

“Broadsword to Danny Boy” bellowed the Viceroy, “Broadsword to Danny Boy!”

“Kebababad, what is it? I’m trying to run a tight ship, damn you!” responds Bartington.

“For the love of God, will you cease this infernal yelling of announcements?”

“Naval etiquette old sport. Just keeping you informed.”

“Navy my gravy! This is my ship, Bartington, and I say pipe down, sir!”

“Aye aye, Cap’n! Anyway, I’ll be down presently, so splice the main brace. We’re laying off ’till seven bells, dogs.”

The Viceroy glared at the mouthpiece, released it, and sauntered back to his armchair.

“He’s a complete loon, you know. Bartington.”

“We have been a trifle concerned. But he seems to be doing alright. What’s this bells and puppies malarkey?”

“Don’t fret yourself old bean. What time do you have?”

I uncased my hunter. “Just after nine p.m.”

“We’re here a good while then. Tides and cover, that’s the ticket. Might as well make ourselves comfortable. There’s berths aft, or might I prevail upon you to indulge in further libations?”

He proffered a decanter.

“Don’t mind if I do. Now, will you tell me more of Foulmouth?”

The Brigadier, who had remained both silent and motionless during this exchange, bestirred himself to speak.

"Sorry about that, Shuteye old chap," he apologised, brushing the compounded tobacco residue from his hands and trouser. "Think I might have another?"

"Here, dear Arse" says Kebababad, reaching into a pocket, "try a snort of this. Set you bang to rights in a jiffy." And so saying he proffered a curiously contrived snuff box fashioned in the likeness of a bejewelled scarab.

"The box, as you'll no doubt discern, is of Egyptian provenance. The blend within, pure Turk."

Lord A filled his nostrils with a pinch of powder. Almost instantaneously his pupils dilated.

The accompanying sneeze damn near set his whiskers spinning.

"Blend sir!? Blend!? Good Christ and his angels!"

"I knew you'd appreciate its subtleties, sir." The Viceroy nodded approvingly. "Care for a toot, Shuteye?"

"Not right now, old chap, still enjoying me Monte Christo." And thank the blazes too, I thought, as I watched the tears streaming from the Brigadier's bloodshot peepers.

"Hi ho." says the Viceroy, cheerily snorting an inch of the Byzantine devil dust without so much as a blink. "Now then, where was we?"

"You'd had word from Foulmouth..." I prompted, pouring myself a modest portion from the crystal.

"Ah, that's right." resumed the Viceroy. "I have it hereabouts."

He began fumbling through various pockets and slits in his robe.

"And what of the other letter?" Lord A's voice sounded curiously over-wrought, though that could have been the snuff.

"Do you have that?"

"Not about me, no. But we'll get to that, never fear. Ah, here it is. Shall I?"

"Indeed." says I.

"My Dearest Lambretta, Viceroy of Kebababad, Order of the Star of Vespa First Class, Quadrasonic Representative to the Court of..."

"Oh do get on with it old boy" rasps the Brigadier. "And pass me the drink, Shuteye. I feel like a weasel died in me gullet."

The Viceroy hummed and ahh-ed his way down to the middle of the sheet.

"Ah, here's the meat in the pitta."

He drew the paper closer to his face and read on.

"...have received a singularly maleficious missive. Come at once. Foulmouth."

He sat back and surveyed us.

"Is that it?" says I.

"Surely it's enough?"

"Think on and look sharp, Shuteye." interposes the Brigadier. "Don't you see? Foulmouth, Kebababad and myself, all in receipt of these despicable, indecipherable communiqués from the same devilish source. Oh, the game's afoot, by God, and sink me, I'll be no blighter's fox!"

"I say, less of the sink me's if you don't mind." says I, sparing a glance at the portholes.

I addressed myself to the Viceroy. "I take it then you headed direct for the peninsula to confer with Foulmouth?"

"Post haste. Couldn't go ashore, mind. Diplomatic issues. He sallied out in his yacht and we rendezvoused surf-side. Upshot is, he had some of his chaps take a look at the documents. They're quite up on this type of thing, the Dons. The Inquisition and such like, d'you see? Never happier than when sinking a cask of Amontillado and probing about in the intricacies of secret cults and nebulous superstition."

"Did somebody call?"

"Ah, Cardinal, you're awake."

"I am risen. Where's Bartington?"

"On the bridge, I suppose." says I. "By the way, I meant to ask when we arrived, but you were too stupefied to converse. Why didn't you join us at Bartington's laboratory?"

"Ah, yes. Well, you see, it's like this: I'd just got back from my parochial visitations when I decided on a whim to check the repository for parish notices affixed to the side door of the

*Manse. You'll never guess what I found."*

*And with that he withdrew, from the voluminous folds of his bespattered cassock, a yellowing copy of a now all too familiar manuscript.*