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Various other brands	26,251

176,443

Compiled from the United States Custom House Records.

make a rich haul. An attempt has evidently been made to force it."

"No doubt; but had the safe been the primary object of the visit, it is likely—or rather certain—that the necessary tools would have been brought to open it. No, Mr. Emberson, that explanation will not fit the case. My theory is," he continued, fixing his keen eyes upon the young man's face, "that the would-be robber knew nothing whatever of your father's safe—and only attempted to force the latter when he failed to find the object of his search elsewhere. Now, what is that object, I want to know?"

"I am sorry I cannot tell you," replied Dick shortly. He purposely avoided looking in Enid's direction now, and she in his; but the omission only caused a slight smile to hover round the detective's lips. They were so transparent in their wiles, these young people, he thought.

"Because you have no idea yourself?" he queried, with as guileless an air as he could affect at a moment's notice.

Dick flushed angrily. "Surely the fact is sufficient for you, without my entering into reasons," he answered stiffly.

"Hm! You went up to town, I think, yesterday, Mr. Emberson?" remarked Mr. Screed, suddenly—changing the point of attack.

"I did." "Have you any reason to connect in your mind in any way your visit to London with last night's affair?"

"Certainly not!" Dick was a bad liar, and the blood flushed hotly in his face as he made the reply.

"Do you object to telling me your movements during the day, so that I may judge for myself?"

"I strongly object; and I think it is a gross piece of impudence on your part to ask it," replied Dick angrily.

Mr. Screed might have scored an easy victory by drawing from his pocket and reading aloud the detailed account of Dick's movements from hour to hour on the preceding day, together with the history of the assault made upon him in the street, and his subsequent refusal to prosecute his assailant. He had received it by the morning's post, and could almost have quoted it line by line from memory. But it was not his policy to do this; he was playing a waiting game, and he was slowly unravelling a very tangled web. The young man's denials and reservations were as instructive to him as any admissions could have been. He only, therefore, smiled benignly as Ted Alston, marvelling at his friend's hostile attitude, tried to smooth matters over, saying in a tone of remonstrance—

"I am sure, Dick, Mr. Screed had no intention of offending you. You must expect to be asked questions when you call the police in."

"I did not call Mr. Screed in," remarked Dick, turning upon the luckless intervener with a brow as black as night. "When I do so, I will give him permission to ask what questions he likes."

Ted was about to reply that if his friend had not applied to the detective for assistance, the Colonel undoubtedly had; but a light touch on his arm, together with an appealing look from Enid, arrested the words.

"Mr. Alston is perfectly correct in saying that I had no intention of giving offence by my questions, Mr. Emberson," said Mr. Screed, calmly. "It is usual in cases like this for people to give every assistance in their power to the police; but, if you will forgive my saying so, you treat me as if I were your natural enemy instead of your ally."

"If I do so," replied Dick hotly, "it is because you exceed your office. I am perfectly willing to tell you all I know about last night's business, which, as I said before, is next to nothing; but I decline to have my private affairs dragged into the matter."

Mr. Screed shrugged his shoulders. "In that case," he replied with perfect equanimity, "I must do without your assistance, as I have done before." He walked towards the door as if about to depart, paused as if in reflection, and then, turning, retraced his steps and came to a halt facing Enid, whom he fixed with his steely glance.

"Perhaps you, Miss Anerley, may be in a position to give me a hint as to the underlying purpose of this outrage?" he said, with great suavity.

"I!" she feebly ejaculated.

"Yes, you. Have you, for instance, entrusted any packet of, say, jewellery, letters, no matter what, to Mr. Emberson's keeping. If you had, the fact might have leaked out in some fashion, and we should arrive at a motive for the very deliberate search made in that particular quarter, and also for the otherwise incomprehensible neglect of Colonel Anerley's plate-basket."

Mr. Screed seemed to have arrived so uncommonly near the truth that Enid changed colour nervously, as she stammered—

"No; I have never given Mr. Emberson anything to take care of for me."

"Ah, well," he answered at last, "it was just an idea of mine; it seems there was nothing in it. Good morning, Miss Anerley. Good morning, gentlemen."

This time he really departed, and transferred his energies to the lower regions of the house and to the garden, carefully taking the impression of the various footprints and finger-marks left by the intruder.

The next two days passed uneventfully away; no arrests were made by the police; and the Colonel, whilst loudly expressing his contempt for their inefficiency, made elaborate preparations for another nocturnal visit, having electric bells affixed to doors and windows, and stretching thin cords across the stairs at various points to trip up unwary feet.

On the evening of the third day Enid came to young Alston in great distress. Dick had announced his intention of going up to town again the next morning, and she trembled for his safety. She begged Ted, with tears in her eyes, to accompany his friend.

"My dear Miss Anerley, I shall be only too glad to do so if he will allow me," said the latter; "but you heard yourself how he shut me up last time when I suggested it."

"You may have business in London as well as he," she urged. "He cannot prevent your going up in the same train with him."

"No, but he can, and probably will, prevent my following him any further. Dick can turn up rough when he is contradicted, you know, Miss Anerley. I would not mind risking that; but I don't see that we shall be very much further advanced. Now, if you were to make it a personal favour that he should take me with him, he might perhaps yield. This last nasty business gives you a very good excuse for nervousness."

"I will try," she said; "but you must come and back me up."

The two conspirators joined Dick on the verandah where he was awaiting the summons of the dinner bell. Ted opened the ball by announcing—

"Well, this is my last night here, Dick."

"Oh, are you leaving us then?" asked the other indifferently. If the tone hurt young Alston, he made no sign of it.

"Yes," he replied, "I am going up to London to-morrow. Miss Anerley tells me you are also; in that case we can keep each other company."

"As far as the terminus certainly," acquiesced Dick.

Enid came up close to her lover and slipping one hand through his arm, linked the other in it, and leant her head against his shoulder.

"Dearest," she said tremulously, "I shall be so horribly anxious about you all the time you are away. You may be followed and attacked again when no one is at hand to help you. Terrible pictures float before my mind; sometimes I think I see a murderous hand clutching a knife and thrusting at you in the darkness; sometimes I seem to hear a shot and see you fall to the ground—dead." Here her voice broke into a sob.

"Why, what a little goose you are, sweetheart," said Dick, looking down fondly at the lovely, pathetic face, "to torture yourself with such absurd fancies. I am big enough to take care of myself, forewarned is forearmed; besides which, I carry a very serviceable revolver."

At this indirect admission of possible danger, Enid shivered and hid her face on his arm.

"Do me a great, great favour, love," she whispered, nestling closer up to him. "Let Mr. Alston go with you."

With a little inarticulate ejaculation

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