

was a small packet that the man had taken from you. Correct me if I am wrong. Ah, you are still silent! Well, that constable was an agent of mine who had been set to shadow you.

"The packet you would have lost then but for him, must have been of extreme value to someone. How else is it possible to explain the second attack made upon you—the nocturnal visit when you were drugged and your room exhaustively searched? These two attempts, following so closely on each others heels, proved that you were in possession of some dangerous and incriminating piece of evidence, either in the shape of letters or jewellery; and that the person whom it concerned was prepared to go any lengths to wrest it from you.

"I gathered from the little importance that you attached to the second incident—from your disinclination to be questioned on the subject, that it had been a failure like the first; and came to the conclusion that, feeling the object concerned to be no longer safe in your possession, you had passed it on to a third person. My suspicions fell naturally then on Miss Anerley."

"This is all pure fancy, pure guess-work, on your part!" interrupted Dick impatiently.

"So far, yes; but now we pass from the regions of guess-work into that of fact. Whilst my agents were following your steps abroad, I devoted my energies to the discovery of the mysterious packet, in which I felt sure I should find the key to the whole enigma. I knew it was perfectly useless to approach Miss Anerley on the subject, so I laid siege to her maid. I will spare you the details of how I affected my purpose: there are more ways than one of managing these matters." Here a sort of self-satisfied smirk passed over the little man's face, which conveyed to his listeners the idea that his personal fascinations had been successfully brought to bear upon Enid's Abigail. "Sufficient to say that I persuaded the latter to search amongst the belongings of her mistress for such a packet as I described; although, to do the girl justice, she only consented to place it, when found, in my hands on condition that after examination it should be returned intact to its hiding-place. Whilst Miss Anerley was at dinner one evening, I went carefully through the papers, making notes of their contents and drawing a little sketch, for further reference, of the pair of gold sleeve-links marked with the initials, 'A. K.' which I judged to have an important bearing upon the case in which I was interested."

As Mr. Screeed paused for a moment to take breath, the two young men exchanged rapid glances. "What is to be done?" was the mute question of each pair of anxious eyes; and signalled back again came the equally mute answer, a despairing shake of the head which signified eloquently enough, "God knows, I don't!"

This by-play was by no means lost on the third person present; but, ignoring it, he took up again the thread of his narrative.

"The first use I made of the knowledge thus obtained was to set active sleuth-hounds on the track of Dr. Aram Kalfian, with instructions to foreign agents to obtain a search-warrant which would enable them, when arresting him, to make an exhaustive search amongst his belongings, and about the place of his domicile, for a certain grim piece of evidence known to be in his possession; and which he would find it extremely difficult to explain away. Well," with a short sigh, "you, gentlemen, may flatter yourselves that, between you, you have spoilt my game: you have robbed the scoundrel I was hunting down of what would have been the strongest proof of his criminality. How you managed it, I don't know; Mr. Alston's intervention in the affair seems effectually to have puzzled my agents. They allowed him to slip away unnoticed whilst they attach themselves to your footsteps, Mr. Emberson, and to the Armenian's. You should at least be grateful to me, for, through my instrumentality, you were again rescued from maltreatment—in this case probably from death."

"Purvis was your agent, then?"
"Scotland Yard's any way; acting,

for the time, under my orders. Thus, you see, Mr. Emberson, I have, by deputy, followed your every step. I appeal now to your good sense. Is it not labour lost on your part to keep up longer the farce of concealment from me? Would it not be wiser for you to treat me with perfect frankness? If, in the past, I have ruffled you by groundless suspicions, you must remember that your own conduct was mostly to blame for them. As for myself, it seems a queer thing to say (but, there, human nature is queer), I have liked you, and believed in you ever since you knocked me down for what you considered an insult to your dead father. I felt that the man who would do that was himself incapable of a criminal action. Now, I have said enough, have I not, to prove my right, I won't say to your gratitude, but to your tolerance? At all events," he added persuasively, "you will no longer seek to hamper me in the execution of what I consider a necessary duty?"

He paused for a reply, looking kindly enough in the dark, brooding face of the man he addressed. In truth, Albert Screeed, in spite of his profession, had deep down in his heart a soft corner; knowing, as he did now, all the circumstances of the case, he was sincerely sorry for this young fellow into whose life grim tragedy had suddenly stalked, threatening with its monstrous shadow to darken his whole existence; and he was prepared to do all that was in his power to let him down easily. But, obsessed with one idea, Dick was deaf to the voice of reason, deaf even to gratitude. Of what importance was the life it appeared he owed to this man's officiousness, he said to himself bitterly, in comparison with the secret he had filched from him, with the indignity to which he was now subjected.

"You have beaten me, Mr. Screeed," he answered sullenly. "I yield to the force of circumstances; I cannot prevent your acting as you wish."

"Oh, now, that is reasonable," replied Mr. Screeed cheerfully, whilst from Ted Alston's lips there issued a deep sigh of relief. He was prepared to stand by his friend; right or wrong, to make the latter's quarrel his own; but he had recognized from the first the futility of resistance—the madness of fighting against the will of this apparently insignificant little man who represented a great power—the power of the law. Quickly and deftly, Mr. Screeed, dropping to his knees, brushed away the loose earth with his hands, and lifted out the black-japanned box.

"I must ask you for the key, Mr. Emberson," he said pleasantly.

"I have not got it," was the dogged reply.

"You, Mr. Alston, then?"

"I stole the box, but not the key," replied Ted. "You must apply to Aram Kalfian for the latter."

"I think we need scarcely wait for that!" retorted Mr. Screeed, still with perfect good humour; and drawing as he spoke a strong penknife from his pocket, with a deft turn of the hand, he pried open the lid of the box. The object inside was hidden by a white cloth, and when, with a hand that trembled in spite of himself, carefully and reverently the detective threw back the corners there lay revealed a human head in perfect preservation—that of Mr. Emberson. Although, they all knew what was coming, the sight sent a thrill of horror through the veins of the three men; yet, in itself, there was nothing repulsively gruesome about it. A perfectly peaceful expression was on the face, which looked like a waxen mask; and the closed eyes seemed to sleep. A pungent, aromatic odour perceptible as soon as the box was opened, betrayed the fact that the severed head had been embalmed.

(To be continued.)

None to Spare.—In the days when the Clyde was navigable to Glasgow for only very small vessels, a steamer stuck in the mud near Renfrew and the skipper was not sparing in strong language. While waiting for the rising of the tide he saw a little girl approaching the river with a bucket to fetch some water. This was too much for the poor captain, and, leaning over the side, he thus addressed her:

"If you tak' ae drap o' water oot here till I get afloat, I'll warm yer ear for't."

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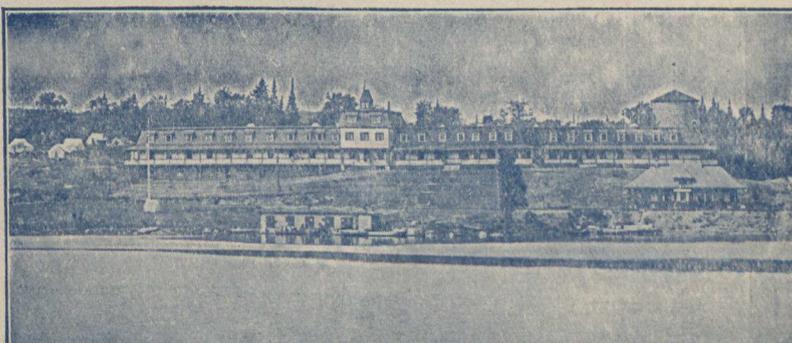
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