

# Dr Aram Kalfian

By Effie Adelaide Rowlands



## CHAPTER XVI.

## Mr. Screed Once More Intervenes.

IT was with great difficulty Ted Alston restrained himself from following his friend; he had a high opinion of the latter's courage and intellect; but a very poor one of his prudence and caution where his own personal safety was concerned; and he felt convinced that Dick was rushing recklessly into the very jaws of danger. It was little less than agony to have to leave him in such an emergency; but there was no alternative; come what might, Ted must obey his orders. His mission was to remove that which Emberson valued more than his own life, as rapidly as possible from out the danger-zone. Common-sense told him that to do otherwise would be to court disaster. Well, he would do it, he said to himself, setting his teeth in grim determination; he would carry out his instructions to the letter, return to England as rapidly as possible, and await Dick at the place appointed; but personally, he felt that it would comfort him but little to know that he had succeeded in robbing Kalfian of his booty, if that success had to be paid for by the life of his friend. That such an eventuality was only too possible, he was well aware. Again and again, as by land and sea, he retraced the ground he had previously traversed, he asked himself, "Supposing Dick never returns; supposing he is destined to add yet another to the already long list of men who have disappeared without leaving a trace behind, how shall I ever face Enid? How break the news of her bereavement to the girl who placed her lover's safety in my hands as a sacred trust?"

And the answer was always the same—"If anything happens to Dick, I would rather—far rather—put a pistol to my head than have to meet her eyes."

HE arrived at Charing Cross at 7.30 in the morning, and engaging a room at the hotel, spent a large portion of the day in tracing out the various routes by which his friend might travel, and the different hours at which he might arrive; in going over them again and again, always with that deadly fear lurking in the background that the man he so anxiously awaited would never come.

When, after a sleepless night, he saw his own reflection in the glass, saw the white, drawn visage with dark circles round the eyes which had the look in them of one who has seen death face to face, he only marvelled that his black hair showed no trace of white; and, in the years to come, he often wondered how it was that day and night of terrible strain left no indelible mark upon him.

Having met all sorts of trains at all sorts of times on the preceding day, and having an idea that Dick, if he succeeded in escaping from his enemies, would choose a different route to that by which he had himself come, Ted made no attempt to meet the morning's Continental train. The flickering hope which had now and again asserted itself within him was now almost extinct—for he had calculated that, owing to his own lengthy wait at Salzburg, his friend should reach England almost as soon as himself. He determined that, if no news of him came within the next twenty-four hours, he would ensure the safety of his trust by placing it in the hands of his bankers, and return to Vienna to seek him out. When a knock came to the door, which, opening, disclosed Dick on the threshold—Dick in the flesh, although a Dick whose eyes glittered fev-

erishly in his ghastly white face, and whose gait as he advanced was halting and feeble—he stared open-mouthed; and then, with a great cry, flung himself upon his friend, nearly bringing the latter to the ground. Clutching at the back of a chair, young Emberson just saved himself from falling; and then sinking into it, with a groan, promptly lapsed into a dead faint. It was some little time before his distracted companion could restore him to consciousness, and still longer before he was sufficiently recovered to relate his adventures.

HAVING brought his narrative to the point where Tigran, taking advantage of a moment's unweariness, had stabbed him in the back, he continued—"I was dazed almost as much by the fall as by the wound inflicted; but I never quite lost consciousness. I heard a tremendous shout, which seemed to come from English lips, followed by the sound of my assailant's flying feet, which gradually faded away in the distance. I was trying to struggle to my own when I felt myself gently raised, whilst a voice inquired anxiously, 'Are you much hurt?'"

"That was more than I could tell him; I felt a tingling smart in the region of the left shoulder-blade; and an ominous trickling down the spine; but beyond that I knew nothing. Finding I was not in a position to answer his question, the good Samaritan—a sturdy-looking Englishman—promptly removed my coat and waistcoat and examined the wound. By this time a crowd of children of various ages and sizes began to gather round, chattering vociferously, and attracted by the hubbub, also perhaps by the previous stentorian shout, sundry females came flying out of the surrounding houses. Seeing that I was bleeding like a pig, some of them volunteered assistance, providing some impromptu bandages, with which my rescuer—who had evidently studied first aid—succeeded finally in checking the flow of blood. During his ministrations the women kept up a regular fire of questions as to how it had happened, who was my assailant, etc., etc. Not being disposed to satisfy their curiosity, I feigned ignorance of German as the shortest way out of the difficulty. My very evident weakness and faintness enlisted their sympathies—and they were most energetic in their denunciations of the unknown scoundrel who, they naturally concluded, had attacked me with a view to robbery and been scared away by the unlooked-for advent of a third person. Someone, I don't know who, ran for a conveyance. Into this I was assisted by the Englishman, who gave his name afterwards as Purvis, and glad enough I was to get away from the scene of the catastrophe, and the surrounding crowd, now amounting to a swarm of voluble sympathisers. Purvis was a rattling good fellow, for he took me to an hotel, got me safely landed in bed, and then fetched a doctor.

"My wound turned out to be less serious than I had at first feared. Fortunately for me the rascal had been flurried by Purvis's timely arrival upon the scene, and consequently struck at random. The knife had glanced off the shoulder-blade, thus escaping all vital organs. 'A nasty cut and a painful; but not a dangerous one,' was the doctor's verdict; all the same when, on the strength of it, I said it was imperative that I should leave Vienna the next day, he held up his hands in holy horror, and vowed that such a proceeding was utterly impossible. One never knows how much or little fever would follow a wound such as I had received. To travel at once would be madness! I

should retard my recovery and probably find myself landed in some hospital on the way.

"Purvis adding his persuasions, I was obliged to promise I would give up the idea of travelling the next day. I carefully limited it to that, but the reservation escaped their notice.

"The doctor was much annoyed with me because I would not allow him to report the affair to the police. He got quite warm about it, saying that it was a duty I owed to society; but when I, in my turn, became angry and vehement, saying I refused to be dictated to upon a matter which concerned only myself, and should call it a piece of impertinent presumption on his part if he disregarded my wishes, he remembered that his first duty at all events was to his patient, and hurriedly begged me not to excite myself, promising that he would do nothing without my permission. He came to see me again in the evening, reported my condition as satisfactory, and said that in another couple of days, if all went well, I should probably be able to travel. On the strength of that, the next morning, I paid my bill and caught the early express—and here I am."

"You have been horribly imprudent." "Yes, I know. Don't bully-rag me, there's a good fellow. I don't feel equal to it! Just order up some breakfast, and, whilst it's preparing, I wish you would see to my back; for it feels uncommonly stiff and painful."

TED, finding the wound to be in a decidedly inflamed condition, slipped out of the room on pretence of ordering the breakfast, and told the waiter to send for a doctor. One chanced to be on the premises, and appeared therefore, somewhat to Dick's astonishment, in company with the breakfast.

This gentleman, a Dr. Lynn, quite agreed with his Austrian confrere as to the imprudence of a man travelling in the patient's state; he also displayed a not unnatural curiosity to learn how the latter had come by such a wound, together with a dignified huffiness when Dick, by his very short replies, showed plainly that he did not intend to throw any light upon the subject.

The doctor took his fee and leave, with stiff politeness and walked to the door; then, looking back over his shoulder, remarked drily:

"Of course it does not matter to me what you do; but if you wish to avoid awkward complications, I advise you to keep quiet until that wound is healed."

"He is right, you must be reasonable, Dick," urged young Alston as the door closed behind the offended medico. "There's no earthly reason now why you should not keep quiet and give that wound of yours a chance to heal."

"After to-morrow I will keep as quiet as you like," was the reply.

"To-morrow! Why to-morrow?"

"Because we go down to-night to Bin-gleford."

"Surely there's no necessity for that!" remonstrated Ted. "Of course I can understand your impatience—none better; but you can write to Miss Anerley, tell her that we have returned safely, and that you hope to see her shortly. You need not mention your wound if you think it would alarm her. You know that she would not wish to run any risks that you could avoid."

"I was not thinking of Enid," answered Dick shortly; "and as for risks, good God! man, what is any trifling risk to myself in comparison compared with the big risk of being overtaken by those hell-hounds, who will hunt us down as

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