

Dr Aram Kalfian

By Effie Adelaide Rowlands



SYNOPSIS OF OPENING CHAPTERS.

DICK EMBERSON, aged twenty-five, of Ardwell Court, Sussex county, England, has become engaged to Enid Anerley. He is summoned to London by a letter from Denise Alston, a widow, whom he had loved and who still loves him. He tells her of his engagement. She says that she will not give him up, and she shows him a letter which greatly worries him. Soon after his return, his home burns down, and his father's body—the head missing—is found in the ruins. Searching about Dick found a sleeve link bearing the initials "A. K." His attitude towards his friends shows a decided change. The arrival of a detective from Scotland Yard makes Dick's position more difficult. He finds it harder to maintain the incendiary story. The detective believes there is a mystery to be solved. Dick also has a mystery to solve. The two men go to work, each basing his efforts on his own theory. Dick seeks out Dr. Kalfian at his London abode and has an exciting interview. As he leaves he is attacked by Kalfian's bodyguard and saved by a detective. Shortly afterwards Kalfian disappears and the rest of the story is occupied with Dick's search for him.

CHAPTER XII.

The Writer of The Warning.

WHEN an honest man pits himself against a knave in a war of wits, he generally gets the worst of it. The announcement of Kalfian's departure came as a staggering blow to Dick, and yet he felt, with a bitter sense of humiliation, that he ought to have foreseen and guarded against the danger of that proceeding. Yes, in the first moves of the game, Aram Kalfian had decidedly scored. There was however a strain of bull-dog tenacity in the young man's nature which refused to accept defeat! Even whilst he ground his teeth with impotent rage at the check administered, he mentally vowed to be even yet with his antagonist—to follow him, if it were possible, to the end of the world. But he had first to strike the latter's trail; and this threatened to be no easy matter, for the caretaker had evidently been well-coached; and met each and all of his questions with a stolid "Dunno" or "Tain't none of my bizness!"

Dick held up a sovereign between forefinger and thumb, saying persuasively: "Come now, think a little; you must have heard or seen something which would give you an inkling of the direction of the Doctor's journey."

At sight of the gold piece, a hungry gleam came into the woman's dull, fishy orbs, and a patch of colour to each yellow cheek; but she shook her head, and putting her hands behind her as if to keep them out of temptation reiterated, albeit in a lower key, "I dunno nothin' about it."

Dick dropped the sovereign back with an ostentatious flourish into his waistcoat pocket and shrugged his shoulders.

"Pity," he remarked carelessly, "you are so much the poorer; you don't often have the chance, I should say, of gaining twenty shillings so easily. It does not matter to me, I shall easily find out what I want to know elsewhere. Good-day to you."

He made a feint of departure; the woman caught his arm as he was turning away.

"You won't split on me if I tells you somethin', will yer?" she asked hoarsely; "e'd pay me out cruel if 'e thought I'd gabbed."

"Do you mean Dr. Kalfian?"

She nodded apprehensively.

"No, don't be afraid, he shall never learn that I got my information from you."

Thus re-assured, after a furtive look round as if she suspected lurking eavesdroppers in every corner, the woman bent forward and whispered low:

"Well, I dunno for certain; but from what I 'eard 'im say to that man of 'is, I fancy 'e's gone fust to Paris."

"He left no address for letters to be forwarded?"

"No; said 'e didn't expect none."

"Didn't you hear him tell the cabman what station to drive to?"

She gave a little mirthless snigger.

"'E whispered it too low for me to hear, but the cabby, not catchin' it quite, sez after 'im, 'Charin' Cross Station, is it, guv'nor?' With that, the Doctor 'e gives a angry sort of a snort and steps into the cab."

"And that is all you can tell me?"

"Every bit, sir," wistfully. "I suppose it ain't worth the quid."

"You shall have it anyway; and look here"—hastily scribbling down name and address, Dick gave it to the woman together with the gold piece—"if you should find out anything more definite, let me know; you shall be well paid for any information you can give me."

The two friends turned and walked away. Ted Alston, who had maintained his role of passive observer in the foregoing scene, felt, it must be confessed, slightly curious as to its meaning; but true to his promise, he asked no questions. After one glance at Dick's absorbed face, he silently fell into step with him and awaited patiently the result of his cogitations.

DICK realised that this was no blind flight from danger, but part of a well traced out course of action, in which he, himself, counted for little or nothing. No doubt at their last interview the Doctor had already received his marching orders from headquarters (his mission having been successfully carried out); and when asking for the interval of three days, had calculated that he should be out of reach by that time. Probably his stay in Paris would be short; if not overtaken there, it would mean a long chase from capital to capital of Europe; and should the scoundrel once suspect that he was being followed, dangers and difficulties innumerable would be thrown in the pursuer's way.

How to catch him in Paris? To catch him and wrest from him that which Dick Emberson valued more than life or property? This was the question which the latter asked himself again and again, until his eyes met by chance that mute inquiring appeal of his friend's glance, when, in a trice, the answer presented itself. Through Ted's uncle, Pierre Marcel, the writer of this anonymous letter which had been placed in his hands by Mrs. Alston; he lived in Paris. The fact of his having sent that warning proved that he must be somehow or other in touch with the mysterious community of which Kalfian was but a humble tool. In all probability he would be able to give the information needed.

"Do you know your uncle's address in Paris, Ted?" he asked, coming to a sudden halt, and turning an eager face to his companion.

"Yes; he has a house in the Rue Victor Hugo," replied the young gentleman staring at his friend in open-mouthed astonishment; he could not see any possible connection between his uncle, Pierre Marcel, whom Dick, to his certain knowledge, had only met twice, and the latter's mysterious business at Peckham Rye.

"What's the number?"

Ted told him, this time amazement got the upper hand of discretion, and a half-involuntary "Why?" escaped his lips.

"Because he is the one man in the world who can help me, if he will!" was the agitated reply. "Ted, you must return to the Lindens alone, and explain that I have been obliged to go to Paris."

The person addressed shook his head with great decision.

"Sorry I can't oblige you," he remarked coolly. "You must send a wire from the station. I am coming with you, old chap; don't think you are going to shake me off so easily. The fair lady to whom we have both sworn allegiance has so ordained it."

"This is no time for jesting, Ted," said Dick gravely; "you don't understand the position; and, worse luck, I can't explain it to you; but I may have a long and dangerous quest before me; for me there is no turning back; but there is no earthly reason why you should attach yourself to my forlorn fortunes, or mix yourself up in what is, at best, a desperate hazard."

"There is every reason in the world," replied the other hotly, "beginning with that common and oft-misapplied term friendship. I have always thought ours was the real article—warranted to bear strain and stress; but," reproachfully, "it seems you doubt me, Dick, since you expect me to drop off scared at the mere mention of danger. Why, man alive, if our expedition has really a spice of peril in it, I shall be all the better pleased."

THE speciousness of this plea did not in the least deceive Dick; he knew that it was attachment to him and not a thirst for adventure which animated Ted; and, against his own will, he was touched by the other's staunch fidelity, touched and also shamed; unconsciously to himself, there had always been a slight element of patronage in his relations towards the younger comrade who had taken him as his boyish ideal of manly perfection.

Stretching out his hand with a smile which lent a wondrous sweetness to a face recent events had made grave and stern beyond its years, Dick answered simply—

"As far as I am concerned, I shall be glad enough to have you, old chap. I could not wish for a better man—a more loyal chum."

The hands of the two men met in a grip more eloquent than words; and Ted's generous heart swelled high with happiness as he felt that the friend who, for some to him unknown reason, had seemed to be drifting out of his reach, had returned to him.

Dick broke the silence which ensued with a short, impatient sigh.

"There is so much I cannot explain to you, dear lad," he repeated miserably. "I feel such a curmudgeon in having to ask you to take everything on trust!"

"Don't worry about that, old chap," replied the other promptly. "So we start for Paris to-night, eh?"

"Yes, we start for Paris to-night," Dick replied gravely.

It was about noon the next day when the two friends, having crossed by the night-boat, presented themselves at Pierre Marcel's house in the Rue Victor Hugo.

That gentleman greeted his nephew warmly; but his manner towards the latter's friend was a trifle constrained and embarrassed. He seemed also nervously anxious to keep up the ball of conversation, inquiring volubly after the health of various friends and connections in England, and expressing again and again his regret that his wife and daughter were away at the seaside, and so would lose this opportunity of seeing their nephew and cousin. At last he paused a second from sheer lack of breath; and Dick Emberson, who had been impatiently awaiting his opportunity, quickly seized it.

"The events of the past week must be known to you, Monsieur Marcel," he said gravely; "and you guess, no doubt,

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