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Dr. Aram Kalfian

(Continued from page 18.)

Meanwhile, for miles around, everyone was discussing the catastrophe, and speculating as to its cause. It was clear to all that the mischief must have originated in the bedroom of the master of the house; the general theory being that he must have been reading in bed, and the curtains had caught fire. This explanation held good till, the ruins being searched, the remains of the unfortunate master of Ardwell Court were found. Then a gruesome element of horror and mystery was brought into the affair by the discovery that the head was missing from the body—had, in fact, completely disappeared!

CHAPTER IV.

What Lay Hidden in the Ivy.

It was late on the evening of the day following the fire. A deep gloom had been cast over the whole district by the tragedy which had cost the owner of the property his life; and when the new element of mystery was added to the affair, surmises and suspicion ran riot: the local police, superintending the work of examining and clearing the debris, wagged their heads portentously and spoke under their breath of foul play; and the chief-constable, with a solemn face and a pleasant feeling of importance, made his way up to "The Lindens."

He asked to speak to Mr. Emberson, and the Colonel showed him into the little study, where the two young people had spent the greater portion of the day. Mrs. Anerley followed, anxious to know what the constable's visit portended.

The latter told his tale, and a murmur of horror escaped the lips of all but the person most concerned—the son of the dead man.

After the one wild burst of grief, Dick had collapsed into a state of dull inertia most painful to behold, speaking only when forced to do so; and apparently impatient of observation or sympathy. He was past reasoning, past thought, past aught but a dumb suffering. Enid's was the only presence which did not jar upon him, chiefly because she made no attempt to frame her sympathy into words; but would slip her hand into his or lean her head upon his shoulder, sitting thus by his side for hours, feeling instinctively that her mute companionship was a help to him, that her proximity, her touch, soothed his strained nerves as nothing else could.

He had listened at first apathetically enough to the constable's story, but towards the close straightened his limp figure with a sudden jerk, a spot of angry colour flaming out on each pale cheek as he said sharply—

"Surely this matter is bad enough Pollard, without your trying to make it worse by bringing in an element of utterly unfounded and absurd suspicion?"

The chief constable was not a man of brilliant intelligence, and this reception of his news disconcerted him considerably. With the idea of mystery had come the hope of distinguishing himself by its elucidation—of proving to the world in general, and an unappreciative Scotland Yard in particular, what hitherto unsuspected talent was wasting its powers in a rural district; the words "foul play," though horrible to others, were to him pleasant and fair sounding, serving as they did as a basis for day-dreams of rapid promotion; and young Mr. Emberson's remark pricked the bubble of his self-importance and made him doubtful of himself and his opinions. Scratching his head in a bewildered fashion, he replied in a crest-fallen tone—

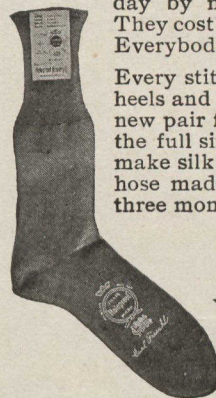
"Then you don't think, sir, as there's cause for suspicion in what I've told you?"

"None whatever!" came the reply, with the same uncompromising sharpness as before. "I have not the slightest doubt that the—the circumstance to which you allude is the result of purely natural causes, and as the person most concerned in the matter, I beg—nay, I insist—that you will do your utmost to prevent any such absurd idea getting afloat. You will please make it generally understood that such idle gossip is painful to me in the extreme."

This was too much for Pollard's feelings; he had expected to be thanked for his zeal and complimented on his perspicacity; and behold, he was held up

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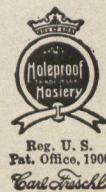
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