

Dr. Aram Kalfian

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tion to her, but she was content—more than content. Nestling closer against him, her eyes strayed idly over the garden, now in its full spring beauty. At that moment the gate was pushed open, and a young man appeared, carrying a kit-bag, who paused with his hand on the latch and looked round. He was a stranger to Enid, and his manner showed the hesitation of a person uncertain in which direction to turn his steps. Seeing the two figures upon the verandah, he lifted his hat and advanced quickly towards them.

Enid, instinctively increasing the distance between her and her companion, glanced up at the latter; he was quite unconscious of the new arrival; with brows and lips fixed in a straight line, as if wrestling with some mental problem, he was staring over the tree-tops which formed the boundary line between the garden and the grounds of Ardwell Court.

She pulled his sleeve, and whispered—“Dick, there is someone coming up the path—a gentleman and a stranger. I wonder who it can be? If you don’t want to see him, go in and I will speak to him.”

With a start, and the half-scared expression of a man whose nerves are so badly shaken that he sees in every fresh arrival a fresh danger, her companion bent his glance upon the youthful figure advancing rapidly up the path.

“Ted!” he cried with amazement, a flush of pleasure rising to his pale face as he hurried down the verandah steps with outstretched hands to meet the newcomer.

Enid stayed where she was, wondering who the stranger could be. “Ted,” her lover had called him: the Christian name betokened a close intimacy; and yet she had never heard him speak of this friend of his. For a moment the two men stood with hands locked in a grip more eloquent than words. It was a frank, boyish face, with a something of foreign vivacity in it, which looked up into Dick’s. Its owner was the first to break the silence.

“I only heard of your trouble yesterday evening,” he said in a husky and rather unsteady voice, for the change in his friend’s appearance almost frightened him, “and came on by the first train from Oxford this morning. They told me at the station where to find you!”

“It was good of you, Ted!”

“Good! pooh, nonsense!”

The words were nothing, but the young face was alight and quivering with sympathy. For the moment Dick was touched, deeply touched; then an expression of the brown eyes, filled with an almost dog-like affection, suddenly reminded him that it was Denise Alston’s son who stood before him, and with the remembrance came a sudden revulsion of feeling. Dropping the other’s hand, he turned his head sharply away.

Guessing that the movement was an attempt to hide emotion, but very far removed from suspecting the cause of the same, Ted patted his friend soothingly on the shoulder.

“Bear up, dear old boy, bear up!” he murmured; then after a pause, added, “I felt I could not rest till I had seen you and heard what I could do to help you.”

Dick turned slowly round; the light had faded out of his face, leaving it blank and expressionless.

“No one in the world can help me,” he said; “no one!”

The words fell from his lips so desolately, so hopelessly, that they struck to the heart of the listener on the verandah, whose slight figure swayed against the rail as if a momentary faintness had come over her, whilst a quick flush of moisture suffused Ted’s eyes. Shaking his head as much in protest against his own weakness as his friend’s statement, he answered energetically—

“We will soon see about that. Why, Dick, it’s not like you to throw up the sponge, even though Fate has dealt you a nasty, knock-down blow! But your nerves are all to pieces, old man, and no wonder! That’s just why you need me; there will be all sorts of small worries I can take off your shoulders. Now

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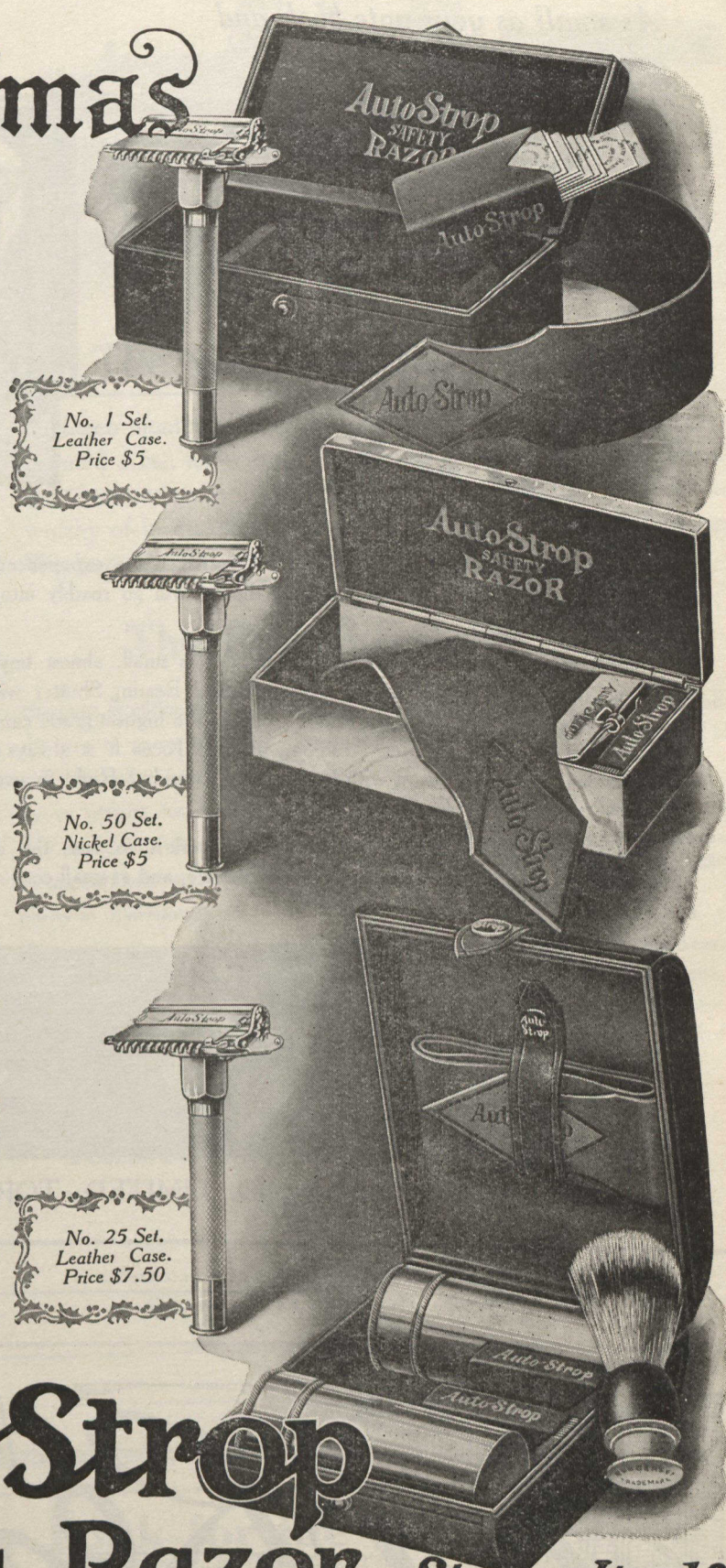
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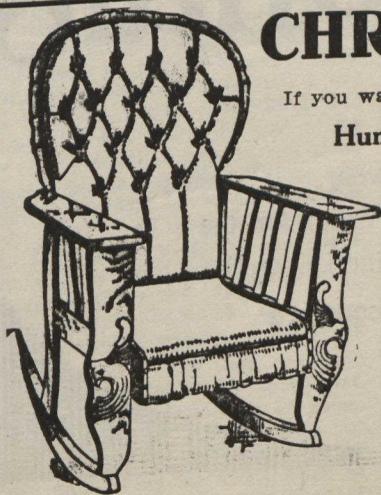
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