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the idea. "Are you not a little inconsistent, Mr. Alston? You suggest that I am wronging Dick by consulting even you on this subject, and yet you wish me to discuss it with one who is, after all, to me a stranger."

"You misunderstand me; I only thought it advisable for you to enlist my mother's aid in finding out the writer of this anonymous slander. She is older than you—has more experience of the world, and would be glad to help you for Dick's sake. Putting this matter entirely aside, I should like you two to meet. You must allow me to introduce you to her."

Ted spoke in all good faith and honesty of purpose; yet, had he been Dick's bitterest foe, he could not have given advice more disastrous to the latter's interest—could not have suggested a course of action more likely to be fraught with fatal consequences.

CHAPTER IX.

Dick Interviews Dr. Aram Kalfian.

MR. ALBERT SCREED, disdaining the attractions of "The Black Bull," had secured apartments in the village at a point just overlooking the turn of the road leading to the station. When within, he passed most of his time at the open window—watching—watching—much after the fashion of a cat at a mouse-hole. He took his meals even without deserting his post, much to the astonishment of his landlady, Mrs. Skeggs—who considered him quite demented.

"He don't seem able to take his eyes off that there road, even for bite or sup!" she told her cronies; "and what does he look to see, I'd like to know; there ain't much coming and going at Bingleford."

Had the worthy Mrs. Skeggs overheard her lodger issuing his commands to his subordinate—a man in plain clothes who had been sent down from headquarters by Mr. Screed's special request—she would probably have been more mystified still. The substitute was left on guard when the detective's business took him from the house; and his standing orders were that if any member of the "Lindens" household attempted to leave Bingleford, he was to follow, shadow their movements, and, when opportunity served, wire results to his superior.

The detective was still lingering over his breakfast one morning, with the table as usual drawn up close to the window, so that no stray dog or cat could pass without his perceiving it, when Dick Emberson's stalwart figure came into sight. The latter's head was bent as if in deep thought as he walked quickly up the hill towards the station. A smile of satisfaction spread over Mr. Screed's face as he watched him.

"Making a move at last, are you?" he muttered. "Well, my fine fellow, you shall have a long rope."

To summon his assistant, who lodged near by, send him flying up the hill, and follow himself at a more leisurely pace, was for the detective only the work of a moment. He did not enter the station, not wishing to put young Emberson on his guard; but waited outside till his colleague appeared and whispered hurriedly that their quarry had booked for London.

"Right! stick to him; see that he does not give you the slip at intermediate stations; point him out at Paddington to one of the staff whom you will find awaiting you; then return. I may need you here."

With a nod of comprehension, the man departed; and Screed, as the train steamed out of the station, flashed an urgent message across the wires to Scotland Yard.

In blissful ignorance of the fact that he was under close surveillance, Dick Emberson, arriving at Paddington, walked on to the Bakerloo Tube, journeyed by this as far as Westminster Bridge Road, then, boarding a County Council tram, proceeded to Peckham. This abode of suburban respectability being practically terra-incognita to him, he was forced on alighting to inquire his way of a passing pedestrian; but a few minutes later he reached the object of his search, a small house overlooking the Rye.

It was rather dingy and dirty in appearance; most of the surrounding houses had pots of bright flowers in their windows, which served the double purpose of decoration and of screening those within from the gaze of passers-



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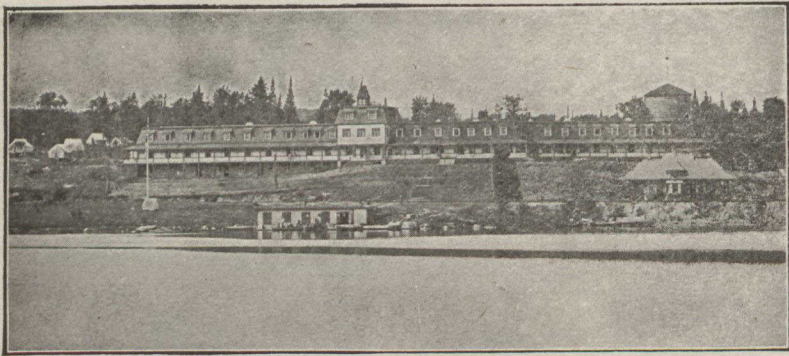
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