

A MAKER OF HISTORY

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM,

Author of "The Master Mummer," "A Prince of Sinners," "Mysterious Mr. Sabin," "Anna the Adventuress," Etc.

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[CONTINUED.]

Duncombe gave vent to a little exclamation of triumph. Pelham for the moment was speechless.

"Awfully sorry if I misled you in any way," Spencer continued. "I never imagined your connecting my request with the disappearance of Phyllis Poynton. Why should I?"

"The fact is," Duncombe interposed, "there is a girl staying at Runtun House whose voice Pelham declares is exactly like Phyllis Poynton's and whose general appearance, I will admit, is somewhat similar to the photograph I showed you. It is a coincidence, of course, but beyond that it is absurd to go. This young lady is a Miss Fielding. She is there with her father, and they are invited guests, with all the proper credentials."

Spencer nodded. "I suppose it is because I am not a lady's man," he said carelessly, "but I must admit that all girls' voices sound pretty much alike to me."

"I wish to heaven that I could see your face!" Pelham exclaimed. "I should know then whether you were telling me the truth."

"The weak point about my temporary profession is," Spencer remarked thoughtfully, "that it enables even strangers to insult one with impunity."

"If I have misjudged you," Pelham said, with some dignity, "I am sorry. I am to understand, then, that you have no news whatever to give us about the disappearance of Phyllis Poynton and her brother?"

"Not a scrap," Spencer answered. "I will wish you both good night, then," Pelham said. "No, don't trouble, George. I can find my way quite well by myself."

He disappeared, and Duncombe drew a little sigh of relief.

"Excitable person, your friend?" Spencer remarked.

Duncombe nodded.

"Very! I am frightened to death that he will make an ass of himself before Miss Fielding. If he hears her speak he loses his head."

"Nice girl?" Spencer asked.

"Yes—very!"

"What sort of a fellow's the father?"

"Very quiet. I've scarcely spoken to him. They're Americans. Friends of Lord Runtun's brother out in New York. Ever heard of them?"

"Yes, a few times."

"You seem interested."

"I am—very."

Duncombe turned suddenly white.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

Spencer held his cigarette between his fingers and looked at it thoughtfully.

"Mr. Fielding of New York," he said, "sailed for America from Havre last Saturday. His daughter has gone to Russia with a party of friends."

Duncombe sprang from his seat. His cigarette slipped from his fingers and fell unheeded upon the carpet.

"Then who—who are these people?" he exclaimed.

Spencer shrugged his shoulders.

"I thought it worth while," he said, "to come over and find out."

CHAPTER XIX.

A FEW minutes before 10 the following morning a mounted messenger from Runtun House brought the following note for Duncombe:

Runtun House, Friday Morning.
My Dear Duncombe—Fielding has cried off the shoot today. Says he has a motor coming over for him to try from Norwich, and his dutiful daughter remains with him. Thought I would let you know in case you cared to come and look them up. Best I could do for you. Ever yours sincerely,
RUNTUN.

Duncombe had breakfasted alone. Pelham had asked for something to be sent up for him, and Spencer, after a cup of coffee in his room, had gone out. Duncombe did not hesitate for a moment. He started at once for Runtun House.

A marvelous change had taken place in the weather since the previous day. The calm splendor of the early autumn seemed to have vanished. A strong north wind was blowing, and the sky was everywhere gray and threatening. The fields of uncut corn were bent like the waves of the sea, and the yellow leaves came down from the trees in showers. Piled up masses of black clouds were driven across the sky. Scanty drops of rain kept falling in earnest of what was to come as soon as the wind should fall. Duncombe had almost to fight his way along until, through a private gate, he entered Runtun park. The house lay down in the valley about a mile away. To reach it one had to cross a ridge of

hill covered with furze bushes and tumbled fragments of ancient rock.

Halfway up the first ascent he passed. A figure had struggled into sight from the opposite side—the figure of a girl. Her skirts and cloak were being blown wildly about her. She wore a flat tam-o'-shanter hat, from under the confines of which her hair was defying the restraint of hatpins and elastic. She stood there swaying a little from the violence of the wind, slim and elegant notwithstanding a certain intensity of gaze and bearing. Duncombe felt his heart give a quick jump as he recognized her. Then he started up the hill as fast as he could go.

She stood perfectly still, watching him clamber up to her side. Her face showed no sign of pleasure or annoyance at his coming. He felt at once that it was not he alone who had realized the coming of the tragedy.

No words of conventional greeting passed between them as he clambered breathless to her side. The wind had brought no color into her cheeks. There



A figure had struggled into sight from the opposite side.

were rims under her eyes. She had the appearance of one who had come into touch with fearsome things.

"What do you want with me?" she asked. "Why are you here?"

"To be with you," he answered.

"You know why."

She laughed mirthlessly.

"Better go back," she exclaimed. "I am no fit companion for any one today. I came out to be alone."

A gust of wind came tearing up the hillside. They both struggled for breath.

"I came," he said, "to find you. I was going to the house. Something has happened which you ought to know."

She looked back toward the long white front of the house, and there was terror in her eyes.

"Something is happening there," she muttered, "and I am afraid."

He took her gloveless hand. It was as cold as ice. She did not resist his touch, but her fingers lay passively in his.

"Let me be your friend," he pleaded.

"Never mind what has happened or what is going to happen. You are in trouble. Let me share it with you."

"You cannot," she answered—"you nor any one else in the world. Let me go! You don't understand!"

"I understand more than you think," he answered.

She turned her startled eyes upon him.

"What do you mean?" she cried.

"I mean that the man whom we employed to trace the whereabouts of Phyllis Poynton and her brother arrived from Paris last night," he answered. "He wanted a list of Lord Runtun's house party. Can you guess why?"

"Go on!"

"Mr. Fielding of New York left Havre on Saturday"—

"Stop!"

Her voice was a staccato note of agony. Between the fingers which were pressed to her face he could see the slow, painful flushing of her cheeks.

"Why did you come to tell me this?" she asked in a low tone.

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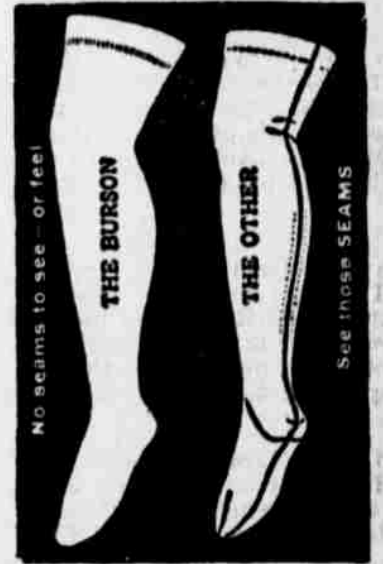
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