

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.]

"You will remain here. Half the servants of the household have been dismissed, and every one who is not absolutely trustworthy has been got rid of. We are in close consultation with your English cabinet, and the moment the time arrives for us to disclose our knowledge of these secrets you will be free to go where you please."

"Absolutely free?" Guy asked anxiously.

"Certainly," the vicomte answered. "The other little affair is canceled by your present services. In fact, as regards that, you need not give yourself another moment's anxiety."

A small telephone which stood upon the table rang sharply. The duke exchanged a few sentences and replaced the receiver. He turned to Guy.

"It is an affair of the tides," he said. "Your body was washed up this afternoon, six hours before time. It will be in the evening papers. Ah!"

The telephone rang again. This time it was M. Grisson who was required. He listened for a moment or two with inscrutable countenance; then he glanced at the clock and replied:

"The Russian ambassador," he said, replacing the receiver, "desires an immediate interview with me on a matter of the utmost importance, and the Russian fleet has left the Baltic!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DUNCOMBE was passed from the concierge to a footman and from a footman to a quietly dressed groom of the chambers, who brought him at last to Mme. la Marquise. She gave him the tips of her fingers and a somewhat inquiring gaze.

"Sir George Duncombe, is it not?" she remarked. "I am not receiving this afternoon, but your message was so urgent. Forgive me, but it was not by any chance my husband whom you wished to see?"

"Your husband would have done as well, madame," Duncombe answered bluntly, "but I learned that he was not at home. My visit is really to Miss Poynton. I should be exceedingly obliged if you would allow me the privilege of a few minutes' conversation with her."

The forehead of the marquise was wrinkled with surprise. She stood amidst all the wonders of her magnificent drawing room like a dainty Dresden doll—petite, cold, dressed to perfection. Her manner and her tone were alike frigid.

"But, monsieur," she said, "that is wholly impossible. Mademoiselle is too thoroughly upset by the terrible news in the paper this morning. It is unheard of. Monsieur may call again if he is a friend of Mlle. Poynton's—say, in a fortnight."

"Marquise," he said, "it is necessary that I see mademoiselle at once. I am the bearer of good news."

The marquise looked at him steadily. "Of good news, monsieur?"

"Certainly!"

"But how can that be?"

"If madame will give me the opportunity," he said, "I should only be too glad to explain—to Mlle. Poynton."

"If, indeed, it should be good news," the marquise said slowly, "it were better broken gradually to mademoiselle. I will take her a message."

"Permit me to see her, marquise," he begged. "My errand is indeed important."

She shook her head. "It is not," she said, "according to the conveniences. Mademoiselle is under my protection. I have not the honor of knowing you, monsieur."

Duncombe raised his eyebrows. "But you remember calling at my house in Norfolk and bringing Miss Poynton away," he said.

She stared at him calmly. "The matter," she said, "has escaped my memory. I do not love your country, monsieur, and my rare visits there do not linger in my mind."

"Your husband," he reminded her, "asked me to visit you here."

"My husband's friends," she replied, "are not mine."

The calm insolence of her manner toward him took him aback. He had scarcely expected such a reception.

"I can only apologize, madame," he said, with a bow, "for intruding. I will await your husband's return in the hall."

He bowed low and turned to leave the room. He had almost reached the door before she stopped him.

"Wait!"

He turned round. Her voice was different.

"Come and sit down here," she said, pointing to a sofa by her side.

He obeyed her, thoroughly amazed. She leaned back among the cushions and looked at him thoughtfully.

"How is it that you, an Englishman, speak French so well?" she asked.

"I lived in Paris for some years," he answered.

"Indeed! And yet you returned to Norfolk, is it?"

He bowed.

"It is true, madame," he admitted. "How droll?" she murmured. "Miss Poynton—she is an old friend of yours?"

"I am very anxious to see her, madame."

"Why?"

He hesitated. After all his was no secret mission.

"I have reason to believe," he said "that a mistake has been made in the identity of the body found in the Seine and supposed to be her brother's."

She gave a little start. It seemed to him that from that moment she regarded him with more interest.

"But that, monsieur," she said, "is not possible."

"Why not?"

She did not answer him for a moment. Instead she rang a bell.

A servant appeared almost immediately.

"Request M. le Marquis to step this way immediately he returns," she ordered.

The man bowed and withdrew. The marquise turned again to Duncombe.

"It is quite impossible," she repeated. "Do you know who it was that identified the young man?"

Duncombe shook his head.

"I know nothing," he said. "I saw the notice in the paper, and I have been to the morgue with a friend."

"Were you allowed to see it?"

"No; for some reason or other we were not, but we managed to bribe one of the attendants, and we got the police description."

"This," madame said, "is interesting. Well?"

"There was one point in particular in the description," Duncombe said, "and a very important one, which proved to us both that the dead man was not Guy Poynton."

"It is no secret, I presume?" she said.

"Tell me what it was."

Duncombe hesitated. He saw no reason for concealing the facts.

"The height of the body," he said, "was given five feet nine. Guy Poynton was over six feet."

The marquise nodded her head slowly.

"And now," she said, "shall I tell you who it is who identified the body at the morgue—apart from the papers which were found in his pocket and which certainly belonged to Mr. Poynton?"

"I should be interested to know," he admitted.

"It was Miss Poynton herself. It is that which has upset her so. She recognized him at once."

"Are you sure of this, madame?" Duncombe asked.

"I myself," the marquise answered, "accompanied her there. It was terrible."

Duncombe looked very grave.

"I am indeed sorry to hear this," he said. "There can be no possibility of any mistake then?"

"None whatever!" the marquise declared.

"You will permit me to see her?" Duncombe begged. "If I am not a very old friend, I am at least an intimate one."

The marquise shook her head.

"She is not in a fit state to see any one," she declared. "The visit to the morgue has upset her almost as much as the affair itself. You must have patience, monsieur. In a fortnight or three weeks at the earliest she may be disposed to see friends. Certainly not at present."

"I may send here a message?" Duncombe asked.

The marquise nodded.

"Yes."

"And I may wait for an answer?"

"Yes. You can write it if you like."

Duncombe scribbled a few lines on the back of a visiting card. The marquise took it from him and rose.

"I will return," she said. "You shall be entirely satisfied."

She left him alone for nearly ten minutes. She had scarcely left the room when another visitor entered. The Vicomte de Bergillac, in a dark brown suit and an apple green tie, bowed to Duncombe and carefully selected the most comfortable chair in his vicinity.

"So you took my advice, monsieur," he remarked, helping himself to a cushion from another chair and plac-

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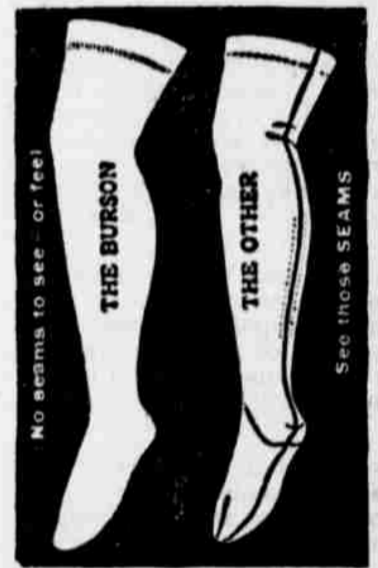
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