

# A MAKER OF HISTORY

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[CONTINUED.]

"Will you allow me the privilege of a few moments' conversation with you in private?" he said to the baron. "Your companions will perhaps excuse you for a moment."

The baron followed without remark. They stood facing one another upon the hearth rug. Duncombe leaned one elbow upon the mantelpiece and turned toward his companion.

"Look here," he said, "those papers seem genuine enough, and if you insist upon it I will go with you to Norwich. I shall take care not to let you out of my sight, and if when we get there I find that it is any part of one of your confounded conspiracies you will find that the penalties for this sort of thing in England are pretty severe. However, no doubt you are well aware of that. The question is this: What do you really want from me?"

M. Louis, who had lit a cigarette, withdrew it from his mouth and examined the lighted end for a moment in silence.

"The documents," he said, "are genuine. You are arraigned in perfectly legal fashion. Upon the affidavits there the magistrates must grant the extradition warrant without hesitation. We have nothing to fear in that direction. The evidence is remarkably convincing."

"Police concocted evidence," Duncombe remarked, "would necessarily be so. I admit that you hold a strong card against me. I don't believe, however, that you have gone to all this trouble without some ulterior motive. What is it? What can I offer you in exchange for these documents?"

M. Louis smiled. "You are a man of common sense, Sir George," he said. "I will speak to you without reserve. It is possible that you might be able to offer the government department of my country to which I am attached an inducement to interest themselves in your behalf. Mind, I am not sure, but if my information is correct there is certainly a possibility."

"The government department of your country to which you are attached," Duncombe repeated thoughtfully. "Let me understand you. You mean the secret service police?"

M. Louis glanced a little nervously over his shoulder.

"Never mind what I mean, Sir George," he said quickly. "There are things which we do not speak of openly. This much is sufficient. I represent a power which can influence and direct even the criminal courts of justice of France."

"What bribe have I to offer you?" Duncombe asked. "Information? You know more than I do. I am afraid you have been misled."

"I think not," M. Louis said quickly. "I will tell you what we want. A paper was left in your charge by Miss Phyllis Poynton at the time she was visiting at Runtou House."

"What of it?" Duncombe asked. The Frenchman's face was suddenly tense with excitement. He recovered himself almost at once, but his voice shook, and a new earnestness found its way into his manner.

"Miss Poynton and her brother are with us," he said. "It is we who have been their benefactors. You know a good deal of their peculiar circumstances. A sudden need has arisen for the production of that paper within twenty-four hours. Give it to me now, and I will run the greatest risk I have ever run in my career. I will tear those warrants through."

"Have you any authority from Miss Poynton?" Duncombe asked.

"There was no time to procure it," M. Louis explained. "Events march rapidly today. To be effective that paper must be in Paris tomorrow. The necessity for its production arose only a few hours ago."

"You ask me, then," Duncombe said slowly, "to hand over to you a paper which was placed in my charge by Miss Poynton?"

"In effect—yes!"

"I cannot do it!"

M. Louis shrugged his shoulders. "I do not insist," he remarked. "I may be permitted to remind you, however, that I have offered a great price."

"Perhaps!" Duncombe answered quietly.

M. Louis turned to his assistants.

"Sir George Duncombe will accompany us," he said. "I can give you ten minutes, Sir George," he added, "in case you care to change your clothes."

"And supposing I refuse to come?" Duncombe asked.

M. Louis smiled.

"You would scarcely be so foolish,"

send the policeman here to the nearest station with the warrants and a demand for help. Our documents are in perfect order and our case complete. You would scarcely be so foolish, I think, as to set yourself in direct opposition to the law."

Duncombe was silent for several moments. Then he rang the bell. M. Louis looked at him inquiringly, but before he could frame a question the butler was in the room.

"Pack my things for a week, Groves," Duncombe ordered. "I am going away tonight."

The man bowed and withdrew. M. Louis merely shrugged his shoulders.

"A week!" he remarked. "You will be fortunate if you ever see your home again. Come, Sir George, be reasonable! I give you my word of honor that it is altogether to the interest of Miss Poynton that those papers be immediately produced. If she were here herself, she would place them in my hands without a moment's hesitation."

"Possibly," Duncombe answered. "Suppositions, however, do not interest me. I undertook the charge of what she gave me, and I shall fulfill my trust."

M. Louis turned to the policeman. "Officer," he said, "this is Sir George Duncombe. Do your duty."

The man stepped forward and laid his hand upon Sir George's shoulder.

"Very sorry, sir," he said. "I am forced to arrest you on this warrant for the murder of Florence Mermillion on the night of the 7th of June. You will be brought before the magistrates at Norwich tomorrow."

Duncombe waved his hand toward the sideboard.

"If you gentlemen," he remarked, "would care for a little refreshment before you start?"

"It is against the rules, sir, thank you," the man answered. "I should be glad to get away as soon as possible."

Duncombe filled both his pockets with cigars and cigarettes. Then he turned toward the door.

"I am quite ready," he said. They followed him out. There was a few minutes' delay waiting for Duncombe's bag.

"Your address, Sir George?" Groves inquired as he brought it down.

"A little doubtful," Duncombe answered; "I will wire."

"In front, please, Sir George," M. Louis insisted.

So they drove off, Duncombe in the front seat, the other three behind. The car gathered speed rapidly. In less than an hour they were half way to Norwich. Then suddenly the driver took a sharp corner and turned down a long, desolate lane.

"You're off the main road," Duncombe explained. "You should have kept straight on for Norwich."

The man took no notice. He even increased his speed. Duncombe was in the act of turning round when he felt the sudden swish of a wet cloth upon his face. He tried to break away, but he was held from behind as in a vise. Then his head fell back, and he remembered no more.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

AT 3 o'clock in the morning Groves, in a discarded dressing gown of his master's, opened the front door and peered cautiously out into the darkness. M. Louis, who was standing upon the doorstep, pushed past him into the hall.

"Your master has sent me to fetch

some papers," he announced, displaying a bunch of keys. "I am sorry to disturb you like this, but the matter is important. Please bring me a cup of coffee into the library in half an hour."

Groves, who was sorely perplexed, stood with his back to the door which M. Louis had approached.

"Really, sir," he answered, "I scarcely know what to say. I am afraid that I cannot allow you to interfere with any of my master's property in his absence."

M. Louis held out the keys.

"Quite right," he said. "It is an awkward situation, of course. Your master did not tell you the reason of his sudden departure, I suppose."

"Not a word, sir."

"There can be no harm in telling you this much, at any rate," M. Louis continued smoothly. "Your master, through no fault of his own, got mixed up in a very unpleasant affair in Paris, and he will have to appear in the courts there. I am his friend and wish to do all that I can to help him. We have been talking the matter over, and

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