A MAKER OF HISTORY

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[CONTINUED.]

CHAPTER VI.

At precisely half past 9 on the following evening Duncombe alighted from his petit voiture in the courtyard of the Grand hotel and, making his way into the office, engaged a room. And then he asked the question which a hundred times on the way over he had imagined himself asking. A man to whom nervousness in any shape was almost unknown, he found himself only able to control his voice and manner with the greatest difficulty. In a few moments he might see her.

"You have a young English lady—Miss Poynton—staying here, I believe," he said. "Can you tell me if she is in now?"

The clerk looked at him with sudden interest.

"Miss Poynton is staying here, sir," he said. "I do not believe that she is in just now. Will you wait one moment?"

He disappeared rapidly and was absent for several minutes. When he returned he came out into the reception hall.

"The manager would be much obliged if you would step into his office for a moment, sir," he said confidentially. "Will you come this way?"

Duncombe followed him into a small room behind the counter. A gray haired man rose from his desk and saluted him courteously.

"Sir George Duncombe, I believe," he said. "Will you kindly take a seat?"

Duncombe did as he was asked. All the time he felt that the manager was scrutinizing him curiously.

"Your clerk," he said, "told me that you wished to speak to me."

"Exactly," the manager answered. "You inquired when you came in for Miss Poynton. May I ask, are you a friend of hers?"

"I am here on behalf of her friends," Duncombe answered. "I have letters to her."

The manager bowed gravely.

"I trust," he said, "that you will soon have an opportunity to deliver them. We are not, of course, responsible in any way for the conduct or doings of our clients here, but I am bound to say that both the young people of the name you mention have been the cause of much anxiety to us."

"What do you mean?" Duncombe asked quickly.

"Mr. Guy Poynton," the manager continued, "arrived here about three weeks ago and took a room for himself and one for his sister, who was to arrive on the following day. He went out that same evening and has never since returned. Of that fact you are no doubt aware."

Duncombe nodded impatiently.

"Yes," he said; "that is why I am here."

"His sister arrived on the following day and was naturally very distressed. We did all that we could for her. We put her in the way of communicating with the police and the embassy here, and we gave her every assistance that was possible. Four nights ago mademoiselle went out late. Since then we have seen nothing of her. Mademoiselle also has disappeared."

Duncombe sprang to his feet. He was suddenly pale.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "Four nights ago! She went out alone, you say?"

"How else? She had no friends here. Once or twice at my suggestion she has taken one of our guides with her, but she discontinued this as she fancied that it made her conspicuous. She was all the time going around to places making inquiries about her brother."

Duncombe felt himself suddenly precipitated into a new world—a nightmare of horrors. He was no stranger in the city, and grim possibilities unfolded themselves before his eyes. Four nights ago!

"You have sent—to the police?"

"Naturally, but in Paris—monsieur must excuse me if I speak plainly—a disappearance of this sort is never regarded seriously by them. You know the life here without doubt. Your accent proves that you are well acquainted with the city. No doubt their conclusions are based upon direct observation and in most cases are correct, but it is very certain that monsieur the superintendent regards such disappearances as these as due to one cause only."

Duncombe frowned, and something flashed in his eyes which made the manager very glad that he had not put forward this suggestion on his own account.

"With regard to the boy," he said, "this might be likely enough, but with regard to the young lady it is of course wildly preposterous. I will go to the police myself," he added, rising.

"One moment, Sir George," the manager continued. "The disappearance of the young lady was a source of much trouble to me, and I made all possible inquiries within the hotel. I found that on the day of her disappearance mademoiselle had been told by one of the attendants in the barber's shop, who had waited upon her brother on the night of his arrival, that he—M. Gay—had asked for the names of some cafes for supper and that he had recommended the Cafe Montmartre. Mademoiselle appears to have decided to go there herself to make inquiries. We have no doubt that when she left the hotel on the night of her disappearance it was to there that she went."

"You have told the police this?"

"Yes, I have told them," the manager answered dryly. "Here is their latest report, if you care to see it."

Duncombe took the little slip of paper and read it hastily:

Disappearance of Mlle. Poynton From England.—We regret to state no trace has been discovered of the missing young lady. JULES LEGARD, Superintendent.

"That was only issued a few hours ago," the manager said.

"And I thought," Duncombe said bitterly, "that the French police were the best in the world!"

The manager said nothing. Duncombe rose from his chair.

"I shall go myself to the Cafe Montmartre," he said.

The manager bowed.

"I shall be glad," he said, "to divest myself of any further responsibility in this matter. It has been a source of much anxiety to the directors as well as myself."

Duncombe walked out of the room and, putting on his coat again, called for a petit voiture. He gave the man an address in the Rue St. Honore and was driven to a block of flats there over some shops.

"Is M. Spencer in?" he asked the concierge.

He was directed to the first floor. An English manservant admitted him, and a few moments later he was shaking hands with a man who was seated before a table covered with loose sheets of paper.

"Duncombe, by all that's wonderful!" he exclaimed, holding out his hand. "Why, I thought that you had shaken the dust of the city from your feet forever and turned country squire. Sit down. What will you have?"

"First of all, am I disturbing you?"

Spencer shook his head.

"I've no press work tonight," he answered. "I've a clear hour to give you, at any rate. When did you come?"

"Two-twenty from Charing Cross," Duncombe answered. "I can't tell you how thankful I am to find you in, Spencer. I'm over on a very serious matter, and I want your advice."

Spencer touched the bell. Cigars and cigarettes, whisky and soda appeared as though by magic.

"Now help yourself and go ahead, old chap," he at once declared. "I'm a good listener."

He proved himself so, sitting with half closed eyes and an air of close attention until he had heard the whole story. He did not once interrupt, but when Duncombe had finished he asked a question.

"What did you say was the name of this cafe where the boy disappeared?"

"Cafe Montmartre."

Spencer sat up in his chair. His expression had changed.

"The devil!" he murmured softly.

"You know the place?"

"Very well. It has an extraordinary reputation. I am sorry to say it, Duncombe, but it is a very bad place for your young friend to have disappeared from."

"Why?"

"In the first place, it is the resort of a good many of the most dangerous people in Europe—people who play the game through to the end. It is a perfect hotbed of political intrigue, and it is under police protection."

"Police protection! A place like that!" Duncombe exclaimed.

"Not as you and I understand it perhaps," Spencer explained. "There is no Scotland Yard extending a protecting arm over the place and that sort of thing, but the place is haunted by spies, and there are intrigues carried on there in which the secret service police often take a hand. In return it is generally hard to get at the bottom of any disappearance or even robbery there through the usual channels. To

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