

A MAKER OF HISTORY

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[CONTINUED.]

CHAPTER XV.

DUNCOMBE leaned his gun up against a gate. A few yards away his host was talking to the servants who had brought down luncheon. The rest of the party were only just in sight a field or two off.

"Have a glass of sherry before lunch, George?" his host asked, strolling toward him.

"Nothing to drink, thanks. I'd like a cigarette if you have one."

Lord Runtun produced his case, and a servant brought them matches. They both leaned over the gate and watched the scattered little party slowly coming toward them.

"Who is your friend, Fielding?" Duncombe asked a little bluntly.

"Fellow from New York," Lord Runtun answered. "He's been very decent to my brother out there, and Archibald wrote and asked me to do all we could for them. The girl is very handsome. You'll see her at dinner tonight."

"Here for long?"

"No, unfortunately," Lord Runtun answered. "I had very hard work to get them to come at all. Cicely has written them three or four times, I think, but they've always had engagements. They're only staying till Monday, I think. Very quiet, inoffensive sort of chap, Fielding, but the girl's a ripper. Hello! Here they are. I'll introduce you."

A groom had thrown open the gate of the field across which they were looking, and Lady Runtun from the box seat of a small mail phaeton waved her whip. She drove straight across the furrows toward them a little recklessly, the groom running behind. By her side was a girl with coils of deep brown hair and a thick black veil worn after the fashion of the traveling American.

"Just in time, aren't we?" Lady Runtun remarked as she brought the horses to a standstill. "Help me down, Jack, and look after Miss Fielding, Sir George. By the bye, have you two met yet?"

Duncombe bowed—he was bareheaded—and held out his hands.

"I saw Miss Fielding for a moment last night," he said, "or, rather, I didn't see her. We were introduced, however. What do you think of our maligned English weather, Miss Fielding?" he asked.

She raised her veil and looked at him deliberately. He had been prepared for this meeting, and yet it was with difficulty that he refrained from a start. The likeness to the photograph, which even at that moment was in his pocket, was wonderful. She looked a little older perhaps. There were shadows in her face of which there were no traces in the picture. And yet the likeness was wonderful.

"Today at least is charming," she said. "But, then, I am quite used to your climate, you know. I have lived in Europe almost as much as in America."

She certainly had no trace of any accent. She spoke a little more slowly perhaps than most young Englishwomen, but there was nothing whatever in her words or in her pronunciation of them to suggest a transatlantic origin. She stood by his side, looking about her with an air of interest, and Duncombe began to wonder whether, after all, she was not more beautiful than the photograph which he had treasured so jealously. He became conscious of a desire to keep her by his side.

"Is your father shooting, Miss Fielding?"

She laughed softly.

"You don't know my father, Sir George," she answered. "He hates exercise, detests being out of doors, and his idea of paradise when he is away from business is to be in a large hotel where every one speaks English, where there are tapes and special editions and an American bar."

Duncombe laughed.

"Then I am afraid Mr. Fielding will find it rather hard to amuse himself down here," he remarked.

"Well, he's discovered the telephone," she said. "He's spending the morning ringing up people all over the country. He was talking to his bankers when we came out. Oh, here come the rest of them. How tired they look, poor things—especially the baron! Nature never meant him to tramp over plowed fields, I am sure. Baron, I was just saying how warm you look."

The baron took off his cap, gave up his gun to a keeper and turned a glowing face toward them.

"My dear young lady," he declared,

"I am warm. I admit it, but it is good for me—very good, indeed. I tried to make your father walk with us. He will be sure to suffer some day if he takes no exercise."

"Oh, father's never ill," the girl answered. "But, then, he eats nothing. Sir George, I hope you're going to devote yourself to me at luncheon. I'm terribly hungry."

"So we all are," Lady Runtun declared. "Come along, every one."

Luncheon was served in a large open barn pleasantly fragrant of dried hay and with a delightful view of the sea far away in the distance. Miss Fielding chattered to every one, was amusing and amused. The baron gave her as much of his attention as he was ever disposed to bestow upon any one at meal times, and Duncombe almost forgot that he had breakfasted at 8 o'clock.

"Charming young person, that!" said Lady Runtun's neighbor to her. "One of our future duchesses, I suppose?"

Lady Runtun smiled. "Lots of money, Teddy," she answered. "What a pity you haven't a title."

The young man—he was in the foreign office—sighed and shook his head.

"Such things are not for me," he declared sententiously. "My affections are engaged."

"That isn't the least reason why you shouldn't marry money," her ladyship declared, lighting a cigarette. "Go and talk to her!"

"Can't spoil sport!" he answered, shaking his head. "By Jove! Duncombe is making the running, though, isn't he?"

Her ladyship raised her glasses. Duncombe and Miss Fielding had strolled outside the barn. He was showing her his house, a very picturesque old place it looked, down in the valley.

"It's nothing but a farmhouse, of course," he said. "No pretensions at architecture or anything of that sort, of course, but it's rather a comfortable old place."

"I think it is perfectly charming," the girl said. "Do you live there all alone? You have sisters, perhaps?"

He shook his head.

"No such luck," he answered. "Mine is entirely a bachelor establishment. A great part of the time I am alone. Just now I have a pal staying with me—a awfully decent chap, from Devonshire."

She was certainly silent for a moment. He fancied, too, that there was a change in her face.

"From Devonshire?" she repeated, with a carelessness which, if it was not natural, was exceedingly well assumed. "I believe I knew some people once who came from there. What is your friend's name, Sir George?"

He turned slowly toward her.

"Andrew Pelham," he said quietly. "He comes from a place called Itaynesworth."

"He is staying here now—with you?"

"Yes," he answered gravely.

It was not his fancy this time; of that he felt sure. Her face for the moment had been the color of chalk; a little exclamation had been strangled upon her lips. She shot a quick glance at him. He met it steadily.

"You know the name?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"The name, yes," she answered, "but not the person. A very old friend of mine was called Andrew Pelham, but he was an American, and he has never been in England. It startled me, though, to hear the exact name again from you."

She was herself again. Her explanation was carelessly given. It sounded even convincing, but Duncombe himself was not convinced. He knew that she wanted him to be. He felt her eyes seeking his, studying his face. Perhaps she was only anxious that he should not misunderstand.

"George, are you ready?" his host called out. "We're going to take Smith's pastures."

"Quite!" Duncombe answered. "Until this evening, Miss Fielding."

"You are dining at Runtun Place?" she asked quietly.

"Yes," he answered. "Will you tell me all about your Andrew Pelham?"

She raised her eyes to his and smiled.

"Do you think that you would be interested?" she asked.

"You know that I should," he answered quietly.

For a time he shot badly; then he felt that his host's eye was upon him and pulled himself together. But he was never at his best. He felt that the whole world of his sensations had been suddenly disturbed. It was impossible

(Continued on Page Six.)

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