

# A MAKER OF HISTORY

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## CHAPTER XVII.

HERE was something strange about Andrew's manner as he moved up to Duncombe's side. The latter, who was in curiously high spirits, talked incessantly for several minutes. Then he came to a dead stop. He was aware that his friend was not listening.

"What is the matter with you, old chap?" he asked abruptly. "You are positively glum."

Andrew Pelham shook his head. "Nothing much!" he said. "Rubbish! What is it?"

Andrew dropped his voice almost to a whisper. The words came hoarsely. He seemed scarcely master of himself. "The girl's voice tortures me," he declared. "It doesn't seem possible that there can be two—so much alike. And then Spencer's telegram. What does it mean?"

"Be reasonable, old fellow," Duncombe answered. "You knew Phyllis Poynton well. Do you believe that she would be content to masquerade under a false name, invent a father, be received here—heaven knows how—and meet you, an old friend, as a stranger? The thing's absurd, isn't it?"

"Granted. But what about Spencer's telegram?"

"It is an enigma, of course. We can only wait for his solution. I have wired him the information he asked for. In the meantime—"

"Well, in the meantime?"

"There is nothing to be gained by framing absurd hypotheses. I don't mind telling you, Andrew, that I find Miss Fielding the most delightful girl I ever met in my life."

"Tell me exactly, George, how she compares with the photograph you have of Phyllis Poynton."

Duncombe sipped his wine slowly. "She is very like it," he said, "and yet there are differences. She is certainly a little thinner and taller. The features are similar, but the hair is quite differently arranged. I should say that Miss Fielding is two or three years older than Phyllis Poynton, and she has the air of having traveled and been about more."

"A few months of events," Andrew murmured, "might account for all those differences."

Duncombe laughed as he followed his host's lead and rose.

"Get that maggot out of your brain, Andrew," he exclaimed, "as quickly as possible. Will you take my arm? Mind the corner."

They found the drawing room almost deserted. Lord Runton raised his eyeglass and looked around.

"I bet those women have collared the billiard table," he remarked. "Come along, you fellows."

They recessed the hall and entered the billiard room. Lady Runton was playing with the lord lieutenant's wife,



Miss Fielding and the baron were still together.

the Countess of Appleton. The others were all sitting about either on the lounge or in the winter garden beyond. Miss Fielding was standing on the threshold, and Duncombe advanced eagerly toward her. On the way, however, he was buttonholed by an acquaintance; the master of the hounds had something to say to him afterward about one of his covers. When he was free Miss Fielding had disappeared. He made his way into the winter garden, only to find her sitting in a secluded corner with the baron. She

looked up at his entrance, but made no sign. Duncombe reluctantly re-entered the billiard room and was captured by his host for a rubber of bridge.

The rubber was a long one. Duncombe played badly and lost his money. Declining to cut in again, he returned to the winter garden. Miss Fielding and the baron were still together, only now they had pushed their chairs a little farther back and were apparently engaged in a very confidential conversation. Duncombe turned on his heel and re-entered the billiard room.

It was not until the party broke up that he found a chance of speaking to her. He was sensible at once of a change in her manner. She would have passed him with a little nod, but he barred the way.

"You have treated me shockingly," he declared, with a smile which was a little forced. "You promised to let me show you the winter garden."

"Did I?" she answered. "I am so sorry. I must have forgotten all about it. The baron has been entertaining me delightfully. Good night."

He half stood aside.

"I haven't by any chance offended you, have I?" he asked in a low tone. She raised her eyebrows.

"Certainly not," she answered. "Excuse me, won't you? I want to speak to Lady Runton before she goes upstairs."

Duncombe stood on one side and let her pass, with a stiff bow. As he raised his eyes he saw that Mr. Fielding was standing within a few feet of him, smoking a cigarette. He might almost have overheard their conversation.

"Good night, Mr. Fielding," he said, holding out his hand. "Are you staying down here for long?"

"For two days, I believe," Mr. Fielding answered. "My daughter makes our plans."

He spoke very slowly, but without any accent. Nothing in his appearance, except perhaps the fact that he wore a black evening tie, accorded with the popular ideas of the traveling American.

"If you have an hour to spare," Duncombe said, "it would give me a great deal of pleasure if you and your daughter would walk down and have a look over my place. Part of the hall is Elizabethan, and I have some relics which might interest Miss Fielding."

Mr. Fielding removed the cigarette from his mouth.

"I thank you very much, sir," he said. "We are Lord Runton's guests, and our stay is so short that we could scarcely make any arrangements to visit elsewhere. Glad to have had the pleasure of meeting you all the same."

Duncombe sought out his host.

"Runton, old chap," he said, "do me a favor. Bring that fellow Fielding and his daughter round to my place before they go."

Lord Runton laughed heartily.

"Is it a case?" he exclaimed. "And you, our show bachelor, too! Never mind my chaff, old chap. She's a ripping good looking girl, and money enough to buy the country."

"I don't mind your chaff," Duncombe answered. "But will you bring her?"

Lord Runton looked thoughtful.

"How the dickens can I?" he asked. "We are all shooting at the duke's tomorrow, and I believe they're off on Saturday. You're not in earnest by any chance, are you, George?"

"Damnably!" he answered.

Lord Runton whistled softly.

"Fielding doesn't shoot," he remarked, "but they're going with us to Beaumanor. Shall I drop him a hint? He might stay a day longer just to make a few inquiries about you on the spot, you know."

"Get him to stay a day longer if you can," Duncombe answered, "but don't give me away. The old chap's none too cordial as it is."

"I must talk to him," Runton said. "Your baronetcy is a thundering sight better than any of these mushroom peerages. He probably doesn't understand that sort of thing. But what about the girl? Old De Rothe has been making the running pretty strong, you know."

"We all have to take our chance in that sort of thing," Duncombe said quietly. "I am not afraid of De Rothe."

"I'll do what I can for you," Runton promised. "Good night."

Andrew, who had left an hour or so earlier, was sitting in the library smoking a pipe when his host returned. "Not gone to bed yet, then?" Dun-

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