

A MAKER OF HISTORY

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM,

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[CONTINUED.]

"Sir George," she said, "your warning, as you see, was barely in time. We are adventurer and adventures detected. I suppose you are a magistrate. Don't you think you ought to detain us?"

"What can I do to help you?" he asked simply.

She looked at him eagerly. There were mud spots all up her gown, even upon her face. Her hair was wildly disordered. She carried her hat in her hand.

"You mean it?" she cried.

"You know that I do."

She turned and looked up the road along which they had come. There was no soul in sight. She looked even up at the long line of windows which frowned down upon them from the back to the hall. They, too, were empty. She thrust a long envelope suddenly into his hand.

"Guard this for me," she whispered. "Don't let any one know that you have it. Don't speak of it to any one. Keep it until I can send for it."

He thrust it into his inner pocket and buttoned his coat.

"It is quite safe," he said simply.

Her eyes flashed her gratitude upon him. For the first time he saw something in her face, heard it in her tone, which made his heart beat. After all she was human.

"You are very good to me," she murmured. "Believe me, I am not quite so bad as I seem. Goodby."

He turned with her toward the car, and she gave a low cry. He, too, started. The car was a mile away, tearing up a hill and almost out of sight. In the lane behind they could hear the sound of galloping horses. He caught her by the wrist, dragged her through the gate and behind a great shrub on the lawn.

"Stay there!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "Don't move. I will come back."

Half a dozen horsemen were coming along the lane at steeplechase pace. Lord Runton, on his wonderful black horse, which no man before had ever seen him gallop save across the softest of country, pulled up outside the gate.

"Seen a motor go by, Duncombe?" he called out.

Duncombe nodded.

"Rather?" he answered. "Fielding and Miss Fielding in it. Going like mad!"

Runton waved his companions on and leaned down to Duncombe.

"Beastly unpleasant thing happened, Duncombe," he said. "Fielding and his daughter have bolted. Fielding seems to have half killed a messenger who came down from London to see De Rothe and stolen some papers. Fact of the matter is he's not Fielding at all, and as for the girl—Lord knows who she is! Sorry for you, Duncombe. Hope you weren't very hard hit."

He gathered up his reins.

"We've sent telegrams everywhere," he said, "but the beast has cut the telephone, and De Rothe blasphemous if we talk about the police. It's a queer business."

He rode off. Duncombe returned where the girl was standing. She was clutching at the branches of the shrub as though prostrate with fear, but at his return she straightened herself. How much had she heard, he wondered.

"Don't move," he said.

She nodded.

"Can any one see me?" she asked. "Not from the road."

"From the house?"

"They could," he admitted, "but it is the servants' dinner hour. Don't you notice how quiet the house is?"

"Yes."

She was very white. She seemed to find some difficulty in speaking. There was fear in her eyes.

"It would not be safe for you to leave here at present," he said. "I am going to take you into a little room leading out of my study. No one ever goes in it. You will be safe there for a time."

"If I could sit down—for a little while."

He took her arm and led her unwillingly toward the house. The library window was closed, but he opened it easily and helped her through. At the farther end of the room was an inner door, which he threw open.

"This is a room which no one except myself ever enters," he said. "I used to do a little painting here sometimes. Sit down, please, in that easy chair. I am going to get you a glass of wine."

They heard the library door suddenly opened. A voice, shaking with passion, called out his name.

"Duncombe, are you here? Duncombe!"

There was a dead silence. They could hear him moving about the room.

"Hiding, are you? Brute! Come out, or I'll—by heavens, I'll shoot you if you don't tell me the truth. I heard her voice in the lane. I'll swear to it."

Duncombe glanced quickly toward his companion. She lay back in the chair in a dead faint.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE three men were sitting at a small round dining table, from which everything except the dessert had been removed. Duncombe filled his own glass and passed around a decanter of port. Pelham and Spencer both helped themselves almost mechanically. A cloud of restraint had hung over the little party. Duncombe raised his glass and half emptied its contents. Then he set it down and leaned back in his chair.

"Well," he said, "I am ready for the inquisition. Go on, Andrew."

Pelham fingered his own glass nervously. He seemed to find his task ne easy one.

"George," he said, "we are old friends. I want you to remember it. I want you also to remember that I am in a hideous state of worry and nerves." He passed his hand over his forehead just above his eyes, as though they were hurting him. "I am not behaving to you as a guest should to his host. I admit it freely. I have lost my temper more than once during the last twenty-four hours. I am sorry. Forgive me if you can, George."

"Willingly, Andrew," Duncombe answered. "I shall think no more about it."

"At the same time," Pelham continued, "there is another point to be considered. Have you been quite fair to me, George? Remember that Phyllis Poynton is the one person whose existence reconciles me to life. You had never even heard her name before I sent for you. You went abroad, like the good fellow you are, to find her for me. You assure me that you have discovered—nothing. Let me put you upon your honor, George. Is this absolutely true?"

"I have discovered nothing about Phyllis Poynton," Duncombe declared quietly.

"About Miss Fielding, then?"

"Phyllis Poynton and Miss Fielding are two very different persons," Duncombe declared.

"That may be so," Pelham said, "although I find it hard to believe that God ever gave to two women voices so exactly similar. Yet if you are assured that this is so why not be altogether frank with me?"

"What have you to complain of?" Duncombe asked.

"Something has happened at Runton House, in which Mr. Fielding and his daughter are concerned," Pelham continued. "I have heard all manner of strange rumors. This afternoon I distinctly heard the girl's voice in the lane outside. She was crying out as though in fear. A few minutes later I heard you speaking to some one in the library. Yet when I entered the room you would not answer me."

"Supposing I grant everything that you say, Andrew," Duncombe answered. "Supposing I admit that strange things have happened with regard to Mr. Fielding and his daughter which have resulted in their leaving Runton House—even that she was there in the lane this afternoon—how does all this concern you?"

"Because," Pelham declared, striking the table with his fist, "I am not satisfied that the girl who has been staying at Runton House and calling herself Miss Fielding is not in reality Phyllis Poynton."

Duncombe lit a cigarette and passed them round.

"Do you know what they are saying tonight of Mr. Fielding and his daughter?" he asked quietly.

"They heard the library door suddenly opened. A voice, shaking with passion, called out his name.

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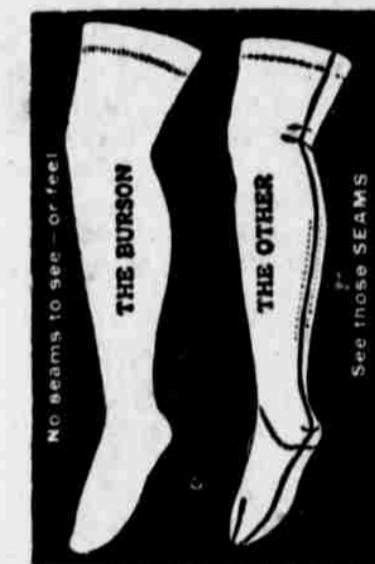
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