

# A MAKER OF HISTORY

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[CONTINUED.]

"I thought it best to let you know," he said, "that a carriage has stopped in the lane. If I can be of any assistance I shall be here—and ready."

Duncombe nodded and closed the door. The girl was sitting upright in her chair with the old look of fear in her eyes.

"Who was that?" she asked quietly.

"Spencer," he answered. "He discovered your presence here, but he is perfectly discreet. He knocked to tell me that a carriage has stopped in the lane outside."

She was white with fear, but he only laughed and, stooping down, would have taken her hands once more. But at that moment an unexpected sound intervened. The deep silence of the house was broken by the ringing of the front doorbell.

Duncombe started back. The girl half rose to her feet.

"The front door!" he exclaimed. "The servants will have gone to bed. I must answer it myself."

She clung to him with a sudden abandon. She was white to the lips.

"I am afraid," she moaned. "Don't leave me alone."

He glanced toward the window.

"By Jove, it may be a trap!" he exclaimed. "Let them ring. I'll stay here with you."

They stood hand in hand listening. His head was turned toward the door, but the gentle pressure of her fingers drew him round. Her face was upturned to his. Something of the fear had gone. There was an eager, almost desperate light in her softened eyes and a tinge of color in her cheeks. He caught her into his arms and their lips met. She disengaged herself almost immediately.

"I don't care," she said, with a little laugh. "That is the first kiss I have ever given to a man, and very likely it will be the last. You won't be able to say that I have gone away without paying my bill. Now go and open the front door, Sir George."

He hesitated for a moment.

"Say only the word, Phyllis, and no one in the world shall ever take you away."

She did not even answer him. He left her with a little sigh.

"Spencer," he said, "if you hear the slightest noise in that room go in and shout for me."

Spencer nodded. The front door bell rang again.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

DUNCOMBE unfastened the chain and bolts of the ponderous front door and looked out into the darkness. A carriage and pair of horses were drawn up outside. A man and a woman, both dressed in long traveling coats, were standing upon the doorstep.

"This is Duncombe Hall, I believe," the man said. "Is Sir George Duncombe at home?"

"I am Sir George Duncombe," he answered. "Will you come inside?"

They crossed the threshold at once. The man was tall and dark, and his voice and bearing were unmistakable. The woman was fair, petite and apparently very sleepy. She wore magnificent furs, and she had the air of being in a very bad temper.

"We really are heartily ashamed of ourselves for disturbing you at such an hour, Sir George," the man said, "but you will pardon us when you understand the position. I am the Marquis de St. Ethol, and this is my wife. I have a letter to you from my friend the Duke of Chestow, with whom we have been staying."

Duncombe concealed his astonishment as well as he was able. He bowed to the lady and led them toward the library. Spencer, who had heard them coming, had hastily concealed his revolver and was lounging in an easy chair reading the evening paper.

"I am afraid that my servants are all in bed," Duncombe said, "and I can only offer you a bachelor's hospitality. This is my friend, Mr. Spencer—the Marquis and Marquise de St. Ethol. Wheel that easy chair up, Spencer, will you?"

Spencer's brow had betrayed not the slightest sign of surprise, but Duncombe fancied that the marquis had glanced at him keenly. He was holding a note in his hand, which he offered to Duncombe.

"My errand is so unusual and the hour so extraordinary," he said, "that I thought it would be better for Chestow to write you a line or two. Will you please read it?"

Duncombe tore open the envelope.

Chestow, Wednesday Evening.

My Dear Duncombe—My friend De St.

Ethol tells me that he is obliged at great personal inconvenience to execute a commission for a friend which involves a somewhat unceremonious call upon you tonight. He desires me, therefore, to send you these few lines. The Marquis de St. Ethol and his wife are among my oldest friends. It gives me great pleasure to vouch for them both in every way. Yours sincerely, CHESTOW.

"The letter, I am afraid," the marquis said, smiling, "does little to satisfy your curiosity. Permit me to explain my errand in a few words."

"Certainly," Duncombe interrupted. "But won't you take something? I am glad to see that Spencer is looking after your wife."

The marquise had raised her veil and was leaning back in a chair, with a sandwich poised in the fingers of one hand and a glass of burgundy in the other. She was looking a little less bored and was chatting gayly to Spencer, whose French was equal to her own.

"I thank you very much," the marquis said. "I will not take anything to drink, but if you have cigarettes—Ah, thanks!"

He lit one and sat on the arm of an easy chair.

"The facts are these," he said. "I have a great friend in Paris who, knowing that I was at Chestow and returning to France tomorrow, has, I fear I must say, taken some advantage of my good nature. I am asked to call here and escort home to her friends a young lady who, I understand, is for the moment a guest under your roof. My friend, I must say, telegraphs in a most mysterious manner, but he is evidently very anxious that we should accede to his request. Our appearance here at this time of night I admit is most unjustifiable, but what were we to do? It is absolutely necessary for my wife to catch the 2:20 from Charing Cross tomorrow. I hope that my friend will some day appreciate my devotion. To come round by your house I have had to borrow a carriage from my friend Chestow. We shall have a drive to Norwich and catch a train from there to London in the small hours of the morning. I presume the young lady is here?"

"The young lady is here," Duncombe answered. "May I inquire the name of the friend to whom you are asked to take her?"

The marquis yawned slightly. He, too, seemed weary.

"My dear Sir George," he said, "I trust that you will appreciate my position in this matter. I do not even know the young lady's name. My eccentric friend in his telegram, which occupied four forms, most specially insisted that I should ask or answer no questions concerning her."

"You are not aware, then, of the circumstances which led to her coming here?" Duncombe asked.

"I am utterly ignorant of them," the marquis answered. "I am constrained to remain so."

"You no doubt have some message for her," Duncombe said. "Her position here is a little peculiar. She may desire some sort of information as to her destination."

The marquis knocked the ash off his cigarette.

"If you will produce the young lady," he said, "I think that you will find her prepared to come with us without asking any questions."

Duncombe threw open the door which led into the inner room. The girl stepped forward as far as the threshold and looked out upon them.

"This is the Marquis and the Marquise de St. Ethol," Duncombe said to her. "They have brought me a letter from the Duke of Chestow, and they have come to take you back to France."

The girl looked fixedly for a moment at the marquise. If any word or sign passed between them it escaped Duncombe. Phyllis was content, however, to ask no questions.

"I am quite ready," she said calmly.

The marquise rose.

"Your luggage can be sent on," she remarked.

Duncombe approached Phyllis and stood by her side.

"These people," he said, "will not tell me where they are taking you to. Are you content to go?"

"I must go," she answered simply.

"You wish me to give you?"

"If you please," she interrupted.

He turned toward the door.

"I have something belonging to Miss—to my guest," he said, "in my own room. If you will excuse me for a moment I will fetch it."

He returned with the sealed envelope which she had given him and which he placed in her hands. He carried also a fur coat and an armful of

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