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OFFICE AT
THE BANK OF ALAMANCE

A MAKER OF HISTORY

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM,
Author of "The Master Mummer," "A Prince of Sinners," "Mysterious Mr. Sabin," "Aims the Adventurers," Etc.

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"Old man," he said, "here's the truth; so far as a man can be said to have lost his heart without rhyme or reason, I've lost mine to the girl of that picture."

Andrew drew a quick breath. "Rubbish, George!" he exclaimed. "Why, you never saw her. You don't know her."

"It is quite true," Duncombe answered, "and yet I have seen her picture."

His friend laughed queerly. "You, George Duncombe, in love with a picture! Stouy hearted George we used to call you. I can't believe it. I can't take you seriously. It's all rot, you know, isn't it? It must be rot."

"It sounds like it," Duncombe answered quietly. "Put it this way, if you like: I have seen a picture of the woman whom if ever I meet I most surely shall love. What there is that speaks to me from that picture I do not know. You say that only life can bestow love. Then there is that in the picture which I think I fancy like these? Bah! We are playing with one another. Listen! For the sake of our friendship, George, I beg you to grant me this great favor—go to Paris tomorrow and help Phyllis!"

"You mean it?"

"God knows I do. If ever I took you seriously, George—if ever I feared to lose the woman I love—well, I should be a coward to rob her of help when she needs it so greatly for my own sake. Be her friend, George, and mine. For the rest of the story provide."

"The fates!" Duncombe answered. "Aye, it seems to me that they have been busy about my head tonight! It is settled then. I will go!"

CHAPTER VI
T precisely half past 9 on the following evening Duncombe alighted from his petit volture 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.

"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 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."

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 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 named in inquiries about her brother."

Duncombe felt himself suddenly replac-



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

combe murmured to himself. He was a newspaper correspondent, and he saw these things with the halo of melodrama around them. And yet—four nights ago! His face was white and haggard.

"The boy," he said, "could have been no more than an ordinary visitor. He had no great sum of money with him; he had no secrets; he did not even speak the language. Surely he would have been too small fry for the intrigues of such a place!"

"One would think so," Spencer answered musingly. "You are sure that he was only what you say?"

"He was barely twenty-one," Duncombe answered, "and he had never been out of England before."

"What about the girl?"

"She is two years older. It was her first visit to Paris."

Spencer nodded. "Look now, if the disappearance of the boy is, of course, the riddle," he remarked. "If you solve that, you arrive also at his sister's whereabouts. Upon my word, it is a poser. If it had been the boy alone—well, one could understand. The most beautiful ladies in Paris are at the Montmartre. No one is admitted who is not what they consider—chic! The great dancers and actresses are given handsome presents to show themselves there. Of a representative evening it is probably the most brilliant little roomful in Europe. The boy, of course, might have lost his head easily enough and then been ashamed to face his sister. But when you tell me of her disappearance, too, you confound me utterly. Is she good looking?"

"Very!"

"She would go there, of course, asking for her brother," Spencer continued thoughtfully. "An utterly absurd thing to do, but no doubt she did so. They would know who she was, and—look here, Duncombe, I tell you what I think. I have my own two news grabbers at hand and nothing particular for them to do this evening. I'll send them up to the Cafe Montmartre."

"It's awfully good of you, Spencer. I was going myself," Duncombe said a little doubtfully.

"You idiot!" his friend said cheerfully, yet with a certain emphasis. "English from your hair to your boots, you'd go in there and attempt to pump people who have been playing the game all their lives and who will give you up as fast as they can."

They'd know what you were there for the moment you opened your mouth. Honestly, what manner of good do you think that you could do? You'd learn what they chose to tell you. If there's really anything serious behind all this, do you suppose it would be the truth?"

"You're quite right, I suppose," Duncombe admitted, "but it seems desirable to be doing nothing."

"Better be doing nothing than doing harm," Spencer declared. "Look now, the other cafes and the boulevards and come here at 11 tomorrow morning. We'll breakfast together at Palliard's."

CHAPTER VII
SPENCER wrote out his luncheon with the extreme care of the man to whom eating has passed to its proper place among the arts and left to Duncombe the momentous question of red wine or white. Finally he leaned back in his chair and looked thoughtfully across at his companion.

"Sir George," he said, "you have placed me in a very peculiar position."

Duncombe glanced up from his hors d'oeuvre.

"What do you mean?"

"I will explain," Spencer continued. "You came to me last night with a story in which I hope that I showed a reasonable amount of interest, but in which, as a matter of fact, I was not interested at all. Girls and boys who come to Paris for the first time in their lives unattended and find their way to the Cafe Montmartre and such places generally end up in the same place if I had to add to your distress last night by talking like this, so I determined to put you in the way of finding out for yourself. I sent two of the most successful news scouts to that place last night, and I had not the slightest doubt as to the nature of the information which they would bring back. It turns out that I was mistaken."

"What did they discover?" Duncombe asked eagerly.

"Nothing."

Duncombe's face fell, but he looked a little puzzled.

"Nothing! I don't understand. They must have heard that they had been there, anyhow."

"They discovered nothing. You do not understand the significance of this. I do. It means that I was mistaken, more in it than the usual significance. Evil may have come to them, but not the ordinary sort of evil. Listen. You said that the police have disappeared in Paris today who if they entered 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 hampered by spies, and there are intrigues carried on there in which the secret service is generally hard to get at the bottom of any disappearance or even robbery, there through the usual channels. To the casual visitor, and of course it attracts thousands from its reputation, it presents no more dangers perhaps than the ordinary night cafe of its sort, but I could think of a dozen men in Paris today who if they entered it is under police protection. That is no longer extraordinary to me. The police or those who stand behind them

are interested in this case and in the withholding of information concerning it."

"You are talking riddles to me, Spencer," Duncombe declared. "Do you mean that the police in Paris may be the hired tools of malefactors?"

"Not altogether that," Spencer said, waving aside a dish presented before him by the head waiter himself with a little gesture of approval. "Not necessarily malefactors. But there are other powers to be taken into consideration, and most unaccountably your two young friends are in deeper water than your story led me to expect. Now, not another question, please, until you have tried that sauce. Absolute silence, if you please, for at least three or four minutes."

Duncombe obeyed with an ill grace. He had little curiosity as to all with the conversation in its present position. He waited for the stipulated time, however, and then leaned once more across the table.

"First I must have your judgment upon the sauce. Did you find enough material?"

"D— the sauce!" Duncombe answered. "Forgive me, Spencer, but this affair is, after all, a serious one to me. You say that your two scouts, as you call them, discovered nothing. Well, they only had one evening at it. Will they try again in other directions? Can I engage them to work for me? Money is absolutely no object."

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combe said coldly. "I am going to stuff my pockets with money tonight, and I shall bid high. I shall leave word at the hotel where I am tonight. If anything happens to me there—well, I don't think the Cafe Montmartre will flourish afterward."

"Duncombe!" his friend said gravely. "nothing will happen to you at the Cafe Montmartre. Nothing ever does happen to any one there—You remember poor Le Laurans?"

"Quite well," he was stammered by a girl in the Rue Pigalle.

"He was stammered in the Cafe Montmartre, but his body was found in the Rue Pigalle. Then there was the Vicomte de Savignac."

"He was found dead in his study—poisoned."

"He was found there, yes, but the poison was given to him in the Cafe Montmartre, and it was there that he died. I am behind the scenes in some of these matters, but I know enough to hold my tongue, or my London letter wouldn't be worth a pound a week. I am giving myself away to you now, Duncombe. I am risking a position which it has taken me twenty years to secure. I've got to tell you these things, and you must do as I tell you. Go back to London!"

Duncombe laughed as he rose to his feet.

"Not though the vicomte's fate is to be mine tonight," he answered. "The worse hell this place is the worse the crew it must shelter. I should never hold my head up again if I sneaked off home and left the girl in their hands. I don't see how you can even suggest it."

"Only because you can't do the least good," Spencer answered. "And, besides, don't run away with a false impression. The place is dangerous only for certain people. The authorities don't protect murderers or thieves except under special circumstances. The vicomte's murderer and Le Laurans's were brought to justice. Only they kept the name of the place out of it all ways. Tourists in shoals visit it and visit it in safety every evening. They pay fancy prices for what they have, but I think they get their money's worth. But for certain classes of people it is the decoy house of Europe. Foreign spies have babbled away their secrets there, and the greatest criminals of the world have whispered away their lives to some fair damsel of Judas at those tables. I, who am behind the scenes, tell you these things, Duncombe."

Duncombe smiled.

"Tomorrow," he said, "you may add another victim to your chamber of horrors!"

His Peers.

A distinguished lawyer of Indiana when a struggling young attorney had a client whose mental soundness was questioned. "There was a lunacy inquiry, and the client was adjudged insane. The lawyer asked the lawyer:

"Do you wish to appeal this case which has been decided by a jury of your client's peers?"

"No," replied the young lawyer. "Since your honor says that the juryman is his peer, I thank you will let it go at that."—New York Sun.

Cash Terms.

A.—You have called me a swindler, and I am not going to stand it. I shall go to law and make you smart for it.

B.—All right.

A.—You will have to pay a fine of at least 50 marks.

B.—You are quite at liberty to take any course you think proper.

A.—Look here to make. If you have a payment to make, if you will settle up at once I will allow you 5 per cent off!—Berlin Journal.

The Rival Hairdressers.

One of two hairdressers by way of advertising himself cuts his hair in the most faultless manner, according to the latest fashion plate. The other, on the contrary, cuts his in the most clumsy way imaginable. The first customer who entered his shop did not fail to take him to task about it. "How in the world, being yourself a barber, do you have your hair so badly cut?"

"Why, sir, the reason is simple enough. I cannot possibly cut my hair myself, but am obliged to have recourse to my colleague over the way, and he is such a duffer!"

"And I suppose you cut his in turn?"

"Of course. And you can judge for yourself whether he oughtn't to be satisfied."—Rome Journal.

There are some people who believe that the whole human race will be saved," said an old lady, "but for my part I hope for better things."

Illinois Farmers For Better Roadways