

The Evil Shepherd

By
E. Phillips Oppenheim
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CHAPTER XVIII—Continued.

"Dear child," he said, "if I could roll back the years, if from all my deeds of sin, as the world knows sin, I could cancel one, there is nothing in the world would make me happier than to ask you to come with me as my cherished companion to just whatever part of the world you cared for. But I have been playing pitch and toss with fortune all my life, since the great trouble came which changed me so much. Even at this moment, the coin is in the air which may decide my fate."

"You mean?" she ventured.
"I mean," he continued, "that after the event of which we spoke last night, nothing in life has been more than an incident, and I have striven to find distraction by means which none of you—not even you, Lady Cynthia, with all your breadth of outlook and all your craving after new things—would justify."

"Nothing that you may have done troubles me in the least," she assured him. "I do wish that you could put it all out of your mind and let me help you to make a fresh start."

"I may put the thing itself out of my mind," he answered sadly, "but the consequences remain."

"There is a consequence which threatens?" she asked.
He was silent for a moment. When he spoke again, he had recovered all his courage.

"There is the coin in the air of which I spoke," he replied. "Let us forget it for a moment. Of the minor things I will make you my judge. Ledsam and Margaret are coming to my party tomorrow night. You, too, shall be my guest. Such secrets as lie on the other side of that wall shall be yours. After that, if I survive your judgment of them, and if the coin which I have thrown into the air comes down to the tune I call—after that—I will remind you of something which happened last night—of something which, if I live for many years, I shall never forget."

She leaned towards him. Her eyes were heavy with longing. Her arms, sweet and white in the dusky twilight, stole hesitatingly out.

"Last night was so long ago. Won't you take a later memory?"
Once again she lay in his arms, still and content.

As they crossed the lawn, an hour or so later, they were confronted by Hedges—who hastened, in fact, to meet them.

"You are being asked for on the telephone, sir," he announced. "It is a trunk call. I have switched it through to the study."

"Any name?" Sir Timothy asked indifferently.
The man hesitated. His eyes sought his master's respectfully but charged with meaning.

"The person refuses to give his name, sir, but I fancied that I recognized his voice. I think it would be as well for you to speak, sir."

Lady Cynthia sank into a chair.
"You shall go and answer your telephone call," she said, "and leave Hedges to serve me with one of these strange drinks. I believe I see some of my favorite organgeade."

Sir Timothy made his way into the house and into the low, oak-beamed study with its dark furniture and lat-



"Last Night Was So Long Ago. Won't You Take a Later Memory?"

ticed windows. The telephone bell began to ring again as he entered. He took up the receiver.

"Sir Timothy?" a rather hoarse, strained voice asked.
"I am speaking," Sir Timothy replied. "Who is it?"

The man at the other end spoke as though he were out of breath. Nevertheless, what he said was distinct enough.

"I am John Walter."
"Well?"
"I am just ringing you up," the voice went on, "to give you what's called a sporting chance. There's a boat from Southampton midday tomorrow. If you're wise, you'll catch it. Or better still, get off on your own yacht. They carry a wireless now, these big steamers. Don't give a criminal much of a chance, does it?"

"I am to understand, then," Sir Tim

othy said calmly, "that you have laid your information?"

"I've parted with it and serve you right," was the bitter reply. "I'm not saying that you're not a brave man, Sir Timothy, but there's such a thing as being foolhardy, and that's what you are. I wasn't asking you for half your fortune, nor even a dab of it, but if your life wasn't worth a few hundred pounds—you, with all that money—well, it wasn't worth saving. So now you know. I've spent ninepence to give you a chance to hop it, because I met a gent who has been good to me. I've had a good dinner and I feel merciful. So there you are."

"Do I gather," Sir Timothy asked, in a perfectly level tone, "that the deed is already done?"

"It's already done and done thoroughly," was the uncompromising answer. "I'm not ringing up to ask you to change your mind. If you were to offer me five thousand now, or ten, I couldn't stop the bally thing. You've a sporting chance of getting away if you start at once. That's all there is to it."

"You have nothing more to say?"
"Nothing! Only I wish to God I'd never stepped into that Mayfair agency. I wish I'd never gone to Mrs. Hilditch's as a temporary butler. I wish I'd never seen any one of you! That's all. You can go to h—l which way you like, only, if you take my advice, you'll go by the way of South America. The scaffold isn't every man's fancy."

There was a burr of the instrument and then silence. Sir Timothy carefully replaced the receiver, paused on his way out of the room to smell a great bowl of lavender, and passed back into the garden.

"More applicants for invitations?" Lady Cynthia inquired lazily.
Her host smiled.

"Not exactly! Although," he added, "as a matter of fact my party would have been perhaps a little more complete with the presence of the person to whom I have been speaking."

Lady Cynthia pointed to the stream, down which the punt was slowly drifting. The moon had gone behind a cloud, and Francis' figure, as he stood there, was undefined and ghostly. A thought seemed to flash into her mind. She leaned forward.

"Once," she said, "he told me that he was your enemy."

"The term is a little melodramatic," Sir Timothy protested. "We look at certain things from opposite points of view. You see, my prospective son-in-law, if ever he becomes that, represents the law—the Law with a capital 'L'—which recognizes no human errors or weaknesses, and judges, crime out of the musty books of the law-givers of old. He makes of the law a mechanical thing which can neither bend nor give, and he judges humanity, from the same standpoint. Yet at heart he is a good fellow and I like him."

"And you?"
"My weakness lies the other way," he confessed, "and my sympathy is with those who do not fear to make their own laws."

She held out her hand, white and spectral in the momentary gloom. At the other end of the lawn, Francis and Margaret were disembarking from the punt.

"Does it sound too shockingly obvious," she murmured, "if I say that I want to make you my law?"

It would have puzzled anybody, except, perhaps, Lady Cynthia herself, to have detected the slightest alteration in Sir Timothy's demeanor during the following day, when he made fitful appearances at the Sanctuary, or at the dinner which was served a little earlier than usual, before his final departure for the scene of the festivities. Once he paused in the act of helping himself to some dish, and listened for a moment to the sound of voices in the hall, and when a taxicab drove up he set down his glass and again betrayed some interest.

"The maid with my frock, thank heavens!" Lady Cynthia announced, glancing out of the window. "My last anxiety is removed. I am looking forward now to a wonderful night."

"You may very easily be disappointed," her host warned her. "My entertainments appeal more, as a rule, to men."

"Why don't you be thoroughly original and issue no invitations to women at all?" Margaret inquired.

"For the same reason that you adorn your rooms and the dinner-table with flowers," he answered. "One needs them as a relief. Apart from that, I am really proud of my dancing-room, and there again, you see, your sex is necessary."

"We are flattered," Margaret declared, with a little bow. "It does seem queer to think that you should own what Cynthia's cousin, Davy Hinton, once told me was the best floor in London, and that I have never danced on it."

"Nor I," Lady Cynthia put in. "There might have been some excuse for not asking you, Margaret, but why an ultra-bohemian like myself has had to beg and plead for an invitation, I really cannot imagine."

"You might find," Sir Timothy said, "you may even now—that some of my men guests are not altogether to your liking."

"Quite content to take my risk," Lady

Cynthia declared cheerfully. "The man with the best manners I ever met—it was at one of Maggie's studio dances, too—was a bookmaker. And a retired prize-fighter brought me home once from an Albert Hall dance."

"How did he behave?" Francis asked.
"He was wisful but restrained," Lady Cynthia replied, "quite the gentleman, in fact."

"You encourage me to hope for the best," Sir Timothy said, rising to his feet. "You will excuse me now? I have a few final preparations to make."

"Are we to be allowed," Margaret inquired, "to come across the park?"
"You would not find it convenient," her father assured her. "You had better order a car, say for ten o'clock. Don't forget to bring your cards of invitation, and find me immediately you arrive. I wish to direct your proceedings to some extent."

Lady Cynthia strolled across with him to the postern-gate and stood by his side after he had opened it. Several of the animals, grazing in different parts of the park, pricked up their ears at the sound. An old mare came hobbling towards him; a flea-bitten grey came trotting down the field, his head in the air, neighing loudly.

"You waste a great deal of tenderness upon your animal friends, dear host," she murmured.

At the entrance to the great gates of the Walled House, two men in livery were standing. One of them examined with care the red cards of invitation, and as soon as he was satisfied the gates were opened by some unseen agency. The moment the car had passed through, they were closed again.

"Father seems thoroughly medieval over this business," Margaret remarked, looking about her with interest. "What a quaint courtyard, too! It really is quite Italian."

"It seems almost incredible that you have never been here!" Lady Cynthia exclaimed. "Curiosity would have brought me if I had had to climb over the wall!"

"It does seem absurd in one way," Margaret agreed, "but, as a matter of fact, my father's attitude about the place has always rather set me against it. I didn't feel that there was any pleasure to be gained by coming here. I won't tell you really what I did think. We must keep to our bargain. We are not to anticipate."

At the front entrance, under the covered portico, the white tickets which they had received in exchange for their tickets of invitation, were carefully collected by another man, who stopped the car a few yards from the broad, curving steps. After that, there was no more suggestion of inhospitality. The front doors, which were of enormous size and height, seemed to have been removed, and in the great domed hall beyond Sir Timothy was already receiving guests. Being without wraps, the little party made an immediate entrance. Sir Timothy, who was talking to one of the best-known of the foreign ambassadors, took a step forward to meet them.

"Welcome," he said, "you, the most unique party, at least, amongst my guests. Prince, may I present you to my daughter, Mrs. Hilditch? Lady Cynthia Milton and Mr. Ledsam you know, I believe."

Sir Timothy, later, in a moment's respite from the inflowing stream of guests, came once more across to them.

"I am going to leave you, my honored guests from the Sanctuary," he said, with a faint smile, "to yourselves for a short time. In the room to your left, supper is being served. I want you to meet me in a room which I will show you, at a quarter to twelve."

He led them down one of the corridors which opened from the hall. Before the first door on the right a manservant was standing as though on sentry duty. Sir Timothy tapped the panel of the door with his forefinger.

"This is my sanctum," he announced. "I allow no one in here without special permission. I find it useful to have a place to which one can come and rest quite quietly sometimes. Williams here has no other duty except to guard the entrance. Williams, you will allow this gentleman and these two ladies to pass in at a quarter to twelve."

The man looked at them searchingly. "Certainly, sir," he said. "No one else?"

"No one, under any pretext," Sir Timothy hurried back to the hall, and the others followed him in more leisurely fashion. They were all three full of curiosity.

"I never dreamed," Margaret declared, as she looked around her, "that I should ever find myself inside this house. It has always seemed to me like one great bluebeard's chamber. If ever my father spoke of it at all, it was as of a place which he intended to convert into a sort of miniature Hell."

Sir Timothy leaned back to speak to them as they passed.
"You will find a friend over there, Ledsam," he said.

Wilmore turned around and faced them. The two men exchanged somewhat surprised greetings.

"No idea that I was coming until this afternoon," Wilmore explained. "I got my card at five o'clock, with a note from Sir Timothy's secretary. I

am racking my brains to imagine what it can mean."

"We're all a little addled," Francis confessed. "Come and join our tour of exploration. You know Lady Cynthia. Let me present you to Mrs. Hilditch."

The introduction was effected and they all strolled on together. Margaret and Lady Cynthia led the way into the winter-garden, a palace of glass, tall palms, banks of exotics, flowering shrubs of every description, and a fountain, with wonderfully carved water nymphs, brought with its basin from Italy. Hidden in the foliage, a small orchestra was playing very softly. The atmosphere of the place was languorous and delicious.

"Leave us here," Margaret insisted, with a little exclamation of content. "Neither Cynthia nor I want to go any further. Come back and fetch us in time for our appointment."

After a time the men rejoined Margaret and Cynthia and then came suddenly face to face with Sir Timothy, who had escorted a little party of his guests to see the fountain, and was now returning alone.

"You have been visiting, I am glad to see," the latter observed. "I trust that you are amusing yourselves?"
"Excellently, thank you," Francis replied.

"And so far," Sir Timothy went on, with a faint smile, "you find my entertainment normal? You have no question yet which you would like to ask?"

"Only one—what do you do with your launch up the river on moonless nights, Sir Timothy?"

Sir Timothy's momentary silence was full of ominous significance.
"Mr. Ledsam," he said, after a brief pause, "I have given you almost carte

blanche to explore my domains here. Concerning the launch, however, I think that you had better ask no questions at present."

"You are using it tonight?" Francis persisted.
"Will you come and see, my venturesome guest?"

"With great pleasure," was the prompt reply.
Sir Timothy glanced at his watch.

"That," he said, "is one of the matters of which we will speak at a quarter to twelve. Meanwhile, let me show you something. It may amuse you as it has done me."

The three moved back towards one of the arched openings which led into the ballroom.

"Observe, if you please," their host continued, "the third couple who pass us. The girl is wearing green—the very little that she does wear. Watch the man, and see if he reminds you of any one."

Francis did as he was bidden. The girl was a well-known member of the chorus of one of the principal musical comedies, and she seemed to be thoroughly enjoying both the dance and her partner. The latter appeared to be of a somewhat ordinary type, salow, with rather puffy cheeks, and eyes almost unnaturally dark. He danced vigorously and he talked all the time. Something about him was vaguely familiar to Francis, but he failed to place him.

"Notwithstanding all my precautions," Sir Timothy continued, "there, fondly believing himself to be unnoticed, is an emissary of Scotland Yard. Really, of all the obvious, the dry-as-dust, hunt-your-criminal-by-rule-of-three kind of people I ever met, the class of detective to which this man belongs can produce the most blatant examples."

"What are you going to do about him?" Francis asked.
Sir Timothy shrugged his shoulders. "I have not yet made up my mind," he said. "I happen to know that he has been laying his plans for weeks to get here, frequenting Soto's and other restaurants, and scraping acquaintances with some of my friends. The duke of Tadchester brought him—won a few hundreds from him at baccarat, I suppose. His grace will never again find these doors open to him."

Francis' attention had wandered. He was gazing fixedly at the man whom Sir Timothy had pointed out.

"You still do not fully recognize our friend," the latter observed carelessly. "He calls himself Manuel Loto, and he professes to be a Cuban. His real name I understood, when you introduced us, to be Shopland."

"Great heavens, so it is!" Francis exclaimed.
"Let us leave him to his precarious pleasures," Sir Timothy suggested. "I

am free for a few moments. We will wander round together."

They found Lady Cynthia and Wilmore, and looked in at the supper-room, where people were waiting now for tables, a babel of sound and gaiety. The grounds and winter-gardens were crowded. Their guide led the way to a large apartment on the other side of the hall, from which the sound of music was proceeding.

"My theater," he said. "I wonder what is going on."

They passed inside. There was a small stage with steps leading down to the floor, easy-chairs and round tables everywhere, and waiters serving refreshments. A girl was dancing. Sir Timothy watched her approvingly.

"Nadia Ellistoff," he told them. "She was in the last Russian ballet, and she is waiting now for the rest of the company to start again at Covent Garden. You see, it is Metzger who plays there. They improvise. Rather a wonderful performance, I think."

They watched her breathlessly, a spirit in gray tulle, with great black eyes now and then half closed.

"It is 'Wind Before Dawn,'" Lady Cynthia whispered. "I heard him play it two days after he composed it, only there are variations now. She is the soul of the south wind."

The curtain went down amidst rapturous applause. The dancer had left the stage, floating away into some sort of wonderfully-contrived nebulous background. Within a few moments, the principal comedian of the day was telling stories. Sir Timothy led them away.

"But how on earth do you get all these people?" Lady Cynthia asked.
"It is arranged for me," Sir Timothy replied. "I have an agent who sees to it all. Every man or woman who is asked to perform, has a credit at Cartier's for a hundred guineas. I pay no fees. They select some little keepsake."

Margaret laughed softly.
"No wonder they call this place a sort of Arabian Nights!" she declared.

"Well, there isn't much else for you to see," Sir Timothy said thoughtfully. "My gymnasium, which is one of the principal features here, is closed just now for a special performance, of which I will speak in a moment. The concert hall I see they are using for an overflow dance-room. What you have seen, with the grounds and the winter-garden, comprises almost everything."

They moved back through the hall with difficulty. People were now crowding in. Lady Cynthia laughed softly.

"Why, it is like a gala night at the opera, Sir Timothy!" she exclaimed. "How dare you pretend that this is Bohemia!"

"It has never been I who have described my entertainments," he reminded her. "They have been called everything—orgies, debauches—everything you can think of. I have never ventured myself to describe them."

Their passage was difficult. Every now and then Sir Timothy was compelled to shake hands with some of his newly-arriving guests. At last, however, they reached the little sitting-room. Sir Timothy turned back to Wilmore, who hesitated.

"You had better come in, too, Mr. Wilmore, if you will," he invited. "You were with Ledsam, the first day we met, and something which I have to say now may interest you."

"If I am not intruding," Wilmore murmured.

They entered the room, still jealously guarded. Sir Timothy closed the door behind them.

CHAPTER XIX

The apartment was one belonging to the older portion of the house, and had been, in fact, an annex to the great library. The walls were oak-paneled, and hung with a collection of old prints. There were some easy-chairs, a writing-table, and some well-laden bookcases. There were one or two bronze statues of gladiators, a wonderful study of two wrestlers, no minor ornaments. Sir Timothy plunged at once into what he had to say.

"I promised you, Lady Cynthia, and you, Ledsam," he said, "to divulge exactly the truth as regards these much-talked-of entertainments here. You, Margaret, under present circumstances, are equally interested. You, Wilmore, are Ledsam's friend, and you happen to have an interest in this particular party. Therefore, I am glad to have you all here together. The superficial part of my entertainments you have seen. The part which renders it necessary for me to keep closed doors, I shall now explain. I give prizes here of considerable value for boxing tests which are conducted under rules of our own. One is due to take place in a very few minutes. The contests vary in character, but I may say that the chief officials of the National Sporting Club are usually to be found here, only, of course, in an unofficial capacity. The difference between the contests arranged by me, and others, is that my men are here to fight. They use sometimes an illegal weight of glove and they sometimes hurt one another. If any two of the boxing fraternity have a grudge against one another, and that often happens, they are permitted here to fight it out, under the strictest control as regards fairness, but practically without gloves at all. You heard of the accident, for instance, to Norris? That happened in my gymnasium. He was knocked out by Burgin. It was a wonderful fight."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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The Complaint
In many parts of Mexico hot springs and cold springs are found side by side. One can see native women bathing clothes in a hot spring, rubbing them on a flat rock, and rinsing them in a clear cold spring.
A visitor watched this process for some time and then said:
"I suppose the natives think old Mother Nature is pretty generous, eh?"
"No, señor," replied his host. "There is much grumbling because she supplies no soap."

Diplomatic Courtier
Once during the time of Suleiman the Magnificent, his son visited Adrianople and the ambassadors from the courts of Europe and Asia came to pay their respects. The last diplomatic representative to arrive in the city was the Persian, who was astonished and angered by the fact that the Europeans took off their hats to him. It is a serious breach of etiquette for a Mohammedan to uncover his head in public, so he demanded an explanation. The master of ceremonies poured oil on the troubled waters by telling him the Christians thereby indicated their willingness to lay their heads at the feet of the Persian ruler.—National Geographic Magazine.

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