

# THE ADVENTURES OF MR. PETER RUFF

## BY E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

### II--THE AMBASSADOR'S WIFE

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Editorial note--Mr. Peter Ruff made one big mistake in his career--if he ever made one--he was to retire--he joined the Double Four. Now, however, he comes out in a new guise. His field of activity lies in a different sphere, but he is still Peter Ruff--the same--still the most delightful scamp that has been given to recent fiction, and not altogether a scamp at that.

His adventures are told by the master of all tellers of mystery tales--There will be ten stories--each complete in itself.

Here is the first, entitled "The Man from the Old Testament," will appear next Saturday.

Alone in his study, with fast-locked door, Peter, Baron de Grost, sat reading, word by word, with steady gaze, the despatch from Paris which had just been delivered into his hands. From the splendid suite of reception rooms which occupied the whole of the left-hand side of the house, came the faint sound of music. The street outside was filled with automobiles and carriages setting down their guests. Madame was receiving tonight a gathering of very distinguished men and women, and it was only for a few minutes that he was on very urgent business indeed, that he had dared to leave her side.

The room in which he was in darkness except for the single heavily shaded electric lamp which cast its shadow. Nevertheless, there was sufficient illumination to show that Peter had achieved one, at least, of his ambitions. He was wearing a court dress, with immaculate black silk stockings and diamond buckles upon his shoes. A red ribbon was in his buttonhole and a French order hung from his neck. His passion for clothes was certainly amply ministered to by the exigencies of his new position. Once more he read those last few words of this unexpectedly received despatch, read them with a frown upon his forehead and the light of trouble in his eyes. For three months he had done nothing but live the life of an ordinary man of fashion and wealth. His first task, for which, to tell the truth, he had been anxiously waiting, was here before him, and he found it little to his liking. Again, he read slowly to himself the last paragraph of Sogrange's letter.

"As ever, dear friend, one of the greatest sayings which the men of my race have ever perpetrated once more justifies itself. 'Cheer up, Monsieur! Of Monsieur we have no manner of doubt, we have tested him in every way. And to all appearance Madame should also be above suspicion. Yet those things of which I have spoken have happened. For two hours this morning I was closeted with Pion here. Very reluctantly he has placed the matter in my hands. I put it on to you. It is your first undertaking, cher Baron, and I wait upon you for fortune. A man of gallantry, as I know you are, you may regret that it should be a woman, and a beautiful woman, too, against whom the finger must be pointed. Yet, after all, the fates are strong and the task is yours."

"Sogrange."

The music from the reception rooms grew louder and more distinct. Peter rose to his feet, and moving to the fireplace, struck a match and carefully destroyed the letter which he had been reading. Then he straightened himself, glanced for a moment at the mirror, and left the room to join his guests.

"Monsieur le Baron jeta," the lady murmured.

The Baron de Grost shook his head.

"Indeed, no," Mrs. de Grost answered earnestly. "France has offered us nothing more delightful in the whole history of our entente than the loan of yourself and your brilliant husband. Monsieur de Lamborne makes history amongst us politically, while Madame--"

The Baron sighed, and his companion leaned a little towards him. Her dark eyes were full of sentimental regard.

"Yes," she murmured. "Continue. It is my wish."

"I am the good friend of Monsieur de Lamborne," the Baron said, and in his tone there seemed to lurk some faraway touch of regret. "My Madame knows that her conquests have been many."

The ambassador's wife handed herself and remained silent for a moment. A faint smile playing at the corners of her full, curving lips. She moved to the door, and soft, eyes trained to her service, whose flash was an inspiration, whose very droop had set beating the hearts of men, she was susceptible than the Baron de Grost. Her gown was magnificent, of amber satin, a color daring and splendid; the outline of her figure, as she leaned slightly back in her seat, might have been the work of the inspired finger of some great sculptor. De Grost, whose reputation as a man of gallantry was well established, felt the whole charm of her presence--felt, too, the subtle indication of preference which she seemed inclined to accord to him. There was nothing which eyes could say

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