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WHITE

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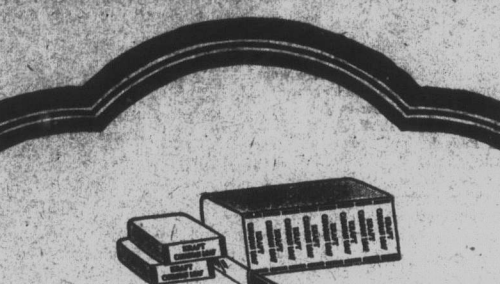
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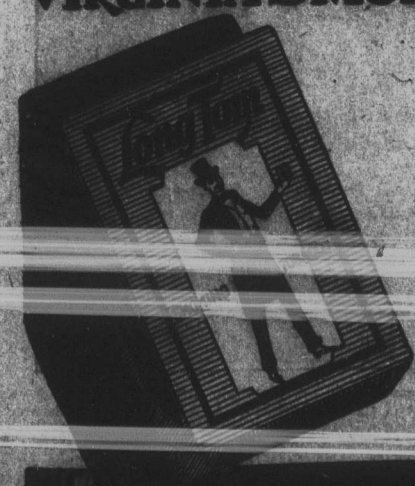
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A stirring story of love and adventure.
By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM
Published by arrangement with The British & Colonial Press Limited.

(continued from last week)

She gave a little hysterical sob.

"Wait," she begged. "I shall answer you in a moment. Give me your hand."

He opened the fingers which he had clenched together, and he felt the hot grip of her hand, holding his passionately drawing it towards her until the fingers of her hand, too, fell upon it. So she sat for several moments.

"Leopold," she continued presently, "I understand you are afraid that I shall betray our love. You have reason. I am full of jealousy and passion, as you know, but I have restraint. What we are to one another when we are alone, no soul in this world need know. I will be careful. I swear it! I will never even look at you as though my heart ached for your notice, when we are in the presence of other people. You shall come and see me as seldom as you wish. I will receive you alone only as often as you say. But don't treat me like this. Tell me you have come back. Throw off this hideous mask, if it be only for a moment."

He sat quite still, although her hands were tearing at his lips and her eyes beseeching him.

"Whatever may come afterwards," he pronounced inexorably, "until the time arrives I am Edward Dominey. I cannot take advantage of your feelings for Leopold von Ragnstein. He is not here. He is in Africa. Perhaps some day he will come back to you and be all that you wish."

She flung his hands away. He felt her eyes burning into his, this time with something more like furious curiosity.

"Let me look at you," she cried.

"Let me be sure. Is this some gaudy change, or are you an impostor? My heart is growing chilled. Are you the man I have waited for all these years? Are you the man to whom I have given my lips, for whose sake I offered up my reputation as a sacrifice, the man who slew my husband and left me?"

"I was excited," he reminded her, his own voice shaking with emotion. "You know that. So far as other things are concerned, I am excited now. I am working out my expiation."

She leaned back in her seat with an air of exhaustion. Her eyes closed. Then the car drove in through some iron gates and stopped in front of her door, which was immediately opened. A footman hurried out. She turned to Dominey.

"You will not enter," she pleaded, "for a short time?"

"If you will permit me to pay you a visit, it will give me great pleasure, he answered formally. "I will call, if I may, on my return from Norfolk."

She gave him her hand with a set smile.

Let my people take you wherever you want to go," she invited "and remember," she added, dropping her voice, "do not admit defeat. This is not the last word between us."

She disappeared in some state, escorted through the great front door of one of London's few palaces by an attractive major-domo and footman in the livery of her House. Dominey drove back to the Carlton, where in the lounge he found the band playing, crowds still sitting around, amongst whom Seaman was conspicuous, in his neat dinner clothes and with his cherubic air of inviting attention from prospective new acquaintances. He

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greeted Dominey enthusiastically.

"Come," he exclaimed, "I am weary of solitude! I have seen scarcely a face that I recognise. My tongue is parched with inaction. I like to talk and there has been no one to talk to. I might as well have opened up my little house in Forest Hill."

"I'll talk to you if you like," Dominey promised a little grimly, glancing at the clock and hastily ordering a whiskey and soda. "I will begin by telling you this," he added, lowering his tone. "I have discovered the greatest danger I shall have to face during my enterprise."

"What is that?"

"A woman—the Princess Eiderstrom."

"A woman—the Princess Eiderstrom?"

Seaman lit one of his inevitable cigars and threw one of his short, fat legs over the other. He gazed for a moment with an air of satisfaction at his small foot, neatly encased in court shoes.

You surprise me," he confessed. "I will consider the matter. I cannot see any great difficulty."

"Then you must be closing your eyes to it willfully," Dominey retorted, or else you are a wholly ignorant of the Princess's temperament and disposition."

"I believe I appreciate both," Seaman replied, "but still do not see any peculiar difficulty in the situation. As an English nobleman you have a perfect right to enjoy the friendship of the Princess Eiderstrom."

"And I thought you were a man of sentiment!" Dominey scoffed. "I thought you understood a little of human nature. Stephanie Eiderstrom is Hungarian born and bred. Even race has never taught her self-restraint. You don't seriously suppose that after all these years, after all she has suffered—and she has suffered—she is going to be content with an emasculated form of friendship? I talk to you without reserve, Seaman. She has made it very plain to-night that she is going to be content with nothing of the sort."

"What takes place between you in private," Seaman began—

"Rubbish!" his companion interrupted. "The Princess is an impulsive, a passionate, a distinctly primitive woman, with a good deal of wild animal in her still. Plots or political necessities are not likely to count a snap of the fingers with her."

"But surely," Seaman protested, "she must understand that your country has claimed you for a great work?"

Dominey shook his head.

"She is not a German," he pointed out. "On the contrary, like a great many other Hungarians, I think she rather dislikes Germany and Germans. Her only concern is the personal question between us. She considers that every moment of the rest of my life should be devoted to her."

"Perhaps it is as well," Seaman replied, "that you have arranged to go down to-morrow to Dominey. I will think out some. Something must be done to pacify her."

The lights were being put out. The two men rose a little unwillingly. Dominey felt singularly indisposed for sleep, but anxious at the same time to get rid of his companion. They strolled into the darkened hall of the hotel together.

"I will deal with this matter for you as well as I can," Seaman promised. "To my mind, your greatest difficulty will be encountered to-morrow. You know what you have to deal with at Dominey."

Dominey's face was very set and grave.

"I am prepared," he said.

Seaman still hesitated.

"Do you remember," he asked, "that when we talked our plans at Cape Town, you showed me a picture of—of Lady Dominey?"

"I remember."

"May I have one more look at it?" Dominey with his fingers that trembled a little, drew from the breast-pocket of his coat a leather case, and from that a worn picture. The two men looked at it side by side beneath one of the electric standards which had been left burning. The face was the face of a girl, almost a child and the great eyes seemed filled with a queer, appealing light. There was something of the same suggestion to be found in the lips, a certain helplessness, an appeal for love and protection to some stronger being.

Seaman turned away with a little grunt, and commented:

"Permitting myself to reassume for a moment or two the ordinary sentiments of ordinary human being, I would sooner have a dozen of your Princesses to deal with than the original of that picture."

CHAPTER VIII

"Your ancestral home," Mr. Mangan observed, as the car turned to the first bend in the grassy-green avenue and the little Hall came into sight. "Darned fine house, too!"

Storm had come up during the last few minutes, and as though he felt the cold, he had dugged his hat over his eyes and turned his coat collar up to his ears. The house, with its green double front, was now clearly visible—the throned, Elizabethan, red brick outline that faced the park southwards, and the stone-supported, grim and weather-stained back which

Mr. Mangan continued to make amiable conversation.

"We have kept the old place weather-tight, somehow or other," he said, "and I don't think you will miss the timber much. We've taken it as far as possible from the outlying woods."

"Any from the Black Wood?" Dominey asked, without turning his head.

Mr. Mangan shook his head.

"Not a stump," he replied, "and for a very excellent reason. Not one of the woodmen would ever go near the place."

"The superstition remains, then?"

"The villagers are absolutely rabid about it. There are at least a dozen who declare that they have seen the ghost of Roger Unthank, and a score or more who will swear by all that is holy that they have heard his call at night."

"Does he still select the park and the terrace outside the house for his midnight perambulations?" Dominey enquired.

"The idea is, I believe," he said, "that the ghost makes his way out from the wood and sits on the terrace underneath Lady Dominey's window. All bunkum, of course, but I can assure you that every servant and caretaker we've had there has given notice within a month. That is the sole reason why I haven't ventured to recommend long ago that you should get rid of Mrs. Unthank."

"She is still in attendance upon Lady Dominey, then?"

"Simply because we couldn't get any one else to stay there," the lawyer explained, "and her ladyship positively declines to leave the Hall. Between ourselves, I think it's time a change was made. We'll have a chat after dinner, if you've no objection. You see, she's a good deal of a nuisance."

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