

# THE DESPERATE LOVER

BY E. D. Phillips  
Oppenheim

**WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE:**

Palermo is the scene. There an exile, Leonardo di Marioni, has come for love of Adrienne Cartuccio, who spurns him. He meets an Englishman, Lord St. Maurice, who falls in love with Adrienne on sight. Leonardo sees his sister Margarita, who tells him his love for Adrienne is hopeless. But he pleads with her to arrange an accidental meeting, to say farewell, between Adrienne and him.

She consents. That night the Englishman is informed of an attempt being made to carry off Signorina Cartuccio and Margarita, who are walking, by bigrands employed by a rejected suitor, on a lonely road. He rushes to the scene, and proves able to rescue the ladies.

**NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY—**

The two ladies looked at their preserver standing in the middle of the road—fair and straight and tall, like a Greek god, but with a terrible fury blazing in his dark blue eyes.

"You are not hurt, I trust?" he asked, his breath coming quickly, for he was in a towering passion. He was not speaking to the darker of the two girls at all; in fact, he was unconscious of her presence. He was standing by Adrienne Cartuccio's side, watching the faint color steal again into her cheeks, and the terror dying out of her eyes, to be replaced by a far softer light. Her black lace wrap, which she had been wearing in Spanish fashion, had fallen a little back from her head, and the moonlight was gleaming upon her ruddy golden hair, all wavy and disarranged, throwing into soft relief the outline of her slim, girlish figure, her heaving bosom, and the exquisite transparency of her complexion. She stood there like an offended young queen, passionately wrathful with the men who had dared to lay their coarse hands upon her, yet feeling all a woman's gratitude to their preserver. Her eyes were flashing like stars, and her brows were bent, but as she looked into his face her expression softened. Of the two sensations gratitude was the stronger.

"You are not hurt?" he repeated. "I am sorry that I did not get here sooner, before that fellow touched you."

She held out her hand to him with a little impetuous movement.

"Thanks to you. No Signor," she said, her eyes suddenly filling with tears. "Oh, how grateful we are, are we not, Margarita?"

"Indeed, indeed we are. The Signor had saved us from a terrible danger."

"It is nothing. The fellows were arrant cowards. But what was the carriage doing here?"

He pointed along the road. Already the clumsy vehicle had become a black speck in the distance, swaying heavily from side to side from the pace at which it was being driven, and almost enveloped in a cloud of dust.

Adrienne shook her head. Margarita had turned away, with her face buried in her hands.

"I cannot imagine. Perhaps they were bigrands, and intended to carry us off for a ransom."

The Englishman shrugged his shoulders.

"Odd sort of bandits," he remarked. "Why, they hadn't the pluck of a chicken between them, especially this one."

He touched the prostrate figure with his foot, and the two girls shuddered. "He is—is not dead, is he?" Margarita asked.

"Not he. I shouldn't say that he was very badly hurt either," the Englishman declared, bending down and listening to his breathing. "More frightened than anything. He'll get up and be off directly we leave. You will let me see you home?" he continued, speaking to Adrienne.

She looked up at him with a gleam of humor in her wet eyes.

relief or thankfulness for her escape in her expression. The Englishman was no physiognomist, but he was a little puzzled.

"There is no danger now, Signorina," he said reassuringly. "Tomorrow I will go to the police, and I dare say that we shall get to the bottom of the whole affair."

She shuddered, but made no reply, walking on by their side, but a little distance apart. As for the Englishman, he was in paradise. To all intents and purposes, he was alone with Adrienne Cartuccio, listening to her low voice, and every now and then stealing a glance downward into those wonderful eyes, just then soft and sweet. That walk through the scented darkness, with a far-off murmur of the sea always in their ears, was like the dawning of a new era in his life.

It was she who talked most, and he who listened. Yet he was very happy; and when they reached her villa, and he left them at the door, she gave him a white flower which he had found courage to beg for.

"May I call on you to-morrow?" he asked, trembling for the answer.

"If you would like to, yes," she answered readily. "Come early if you have nothing to do, and we will give you afternoon tea a l'Anglaise. By the bye," she added, a little shyly, "is there not something which you have forgotten?"

He divined her meaning at once.

"Of course, I ought to have told you my name!" he exclaimed hastily.

"How stupid of me. It is St. Maurice—Lord St. Maurice."

"Lord St. Maurice! Then are you not the fortunate possessor of that delightful little yacht in the harbor?"

"Yes, if you mean the Pandora, she's mine. Do you like sailing? Will you come for a sail?" he asked eagerly.

"We'll talk about it to-morrow," she laughed, holding out her hand. "Good night."

He let her hand go. If he held it a moment longer, and a little more firmly than was absolutely necessary, was he much to blame?

"Good-night," he said. "Goodnight, Signorina," he added, bowing to Margarita. "I shall come to-morrow afternoon."

Then he turned away, and walked

with long swinging steps back to the hotel.

"Margarita!" She had found her way into a lonely corner of the villa grounds, and, with her head resting upon her hands, she was gazing across the blue sunlit waters of the bay. Below, hidden by the thickly-growing shrubs, was the white, dusty road, and the voice which disturbed her thoughts seemed to come from it. She pushed the white flowering rhododendrons on one side, and peered through.

"Leonardo!" she exclaimed. "Leonardo!"

"Are you alone?" he asked.

"Yes. Adrienne is in the house, I believe."

"Then I am coming in."

She looked troubled, but she could not send him away. He clambered over the low paling, and, pushing back the boughs of the shrubs which grew between them, made his way up the bank to her side.

"Have you been away?" she asked.

"Yes, I have been home. Home," he repeated bitterly. "I have wandered through the woods, and I have climbed the hills where we spent our childhood. I have looked upon the old sienes, and my heart is broken."

Her eyes filled with tears. For a moment her thoughts, too, went back to the days when they had been children together, and he had been her hero brother. How time had changed them both, and how far apart they had drifted. They could never be the same again. She knew it quite well. There had grown up a great barrier between them. She could not even pretend to sympathize with him, although her heart was still full of pity.

"Leonardo, I am sorry," she whispered. "How is it, I wonder, that all through life you seem to have set your heart upon things which are impossible."

"It is fate."

"Fate! But you are a man, and man should control fate."

"Have I not tried?" he answered bitterly. "Tell me, do I so easily relinquish my great desire? Why am I here? Because I have said to myself that I will not be denied. Adrienne shall be mine!"

She looked at him steadily.

"We have not met, Leonardo, since the night after the concert. Do you know that we had an adventure on the way home?"

"Tell me about it," he answered, looking away.

"Is there any need, Leonardo?"

A faint tinge of color stole into his olive cheek.

"You guessed then," he said. "Tell me, does she know? Has she any idea?"

"None."

"She does not suspect me at all?"

"No; she thinks that it was an ordinary attack of robbers, and that the carriage was to take up a little way into the interior, so that they might hold us and demand a ransom. It was her own idea; I said nothing. I feel as though I were deceiving her, but I cannot tell her. She would never look upon your face again, Leonardo."

"You must not tell her," he muttered. "Swear that you will not!"

She shook her head.

"There is no need. I am not anxious to denounce my own brother as a would-be abductor."

"Margarita, I was desperate," he cried passionately. "And that cursed Englishman, has become my evil genius. It was a miserable chance that enabled him to become your preserver."

"It was a very fortunate one for you, Leonardo."

for her. Let me hear the whole truth, so that I may know how to act."

"Leonardo," she whispered, "remember our watchword, 'Endurance.' I will tell you everything. Lord St. Maurice came on the day after our adventure. He stayed till evening, and we walked with him on the Marina. The next day we went yachting with him. Yesterday and to-day he has spent nearly the whole of his time here. I believe that he is in love with Adrienne, and as for her, if she does not love him already, I believe that she soon will. You have asked for the truth, my brother, and it is best that you should have it. Forgive me for the pain it must cause you."

The Englishman sat quite still, holding in his hand a long, curiously-shaped dagger, which the first gleam of moonlight had shown him laying at his feet.

He was no coward, but he gave a little shudder as he examined the thing, and felt its bluish steel edge with his finger. It was by no means a toy weapon; it had been fashioned and meant for use. What use? Somehow he felt that he had escaped a very great danger, as he put the thing thoughtfully into his pocket, and lean-

ed back in his chair. The shrill voices and clatter of glasses around him sounded curiously unreal in his ears.

By degrees he came to himself, and leaning forward took a match from the little marble table, and re-lit his cigar. Then for the first time, he noticed with a start that the chair opposite to him was occupied, too, by a figure which was perfectly familiar. It was a Sicilian who sat there, quietly smoking a long cigarette, and with his face shaded by the open palm of his hand.

Lord St. Maurice made no sign of recognition. On the contrary, he turned his head away, performing not to be seen. His nerves were already highly strung, and there seemed to him to be something ominous in this second meeting with the Sicilian. If he could have been sure of being able to do so unnoticed, he would have got up and gone into the hotel.

"Good-evening, Signor!"

Lord St. Maurice turned and looked into the white, corpse-like face of the Sicilian. It told its own story. There was trouble to come.

"Good-evening, Signor," he answered quietly.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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