

THE DESPERATE LOVER

By E. Phillips Oppenheim
ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK B. DRUEN

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 Margharita, 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 Margharita, who are walking, by brigands employed by a rejected suitor, on a lonely road. He rushes to the scene, and proves able to rescue the ladies. Inflamed by the failure of his scheme, Leonardo sees Margharita, who shows him she knows that he was instigator of the attempted attack. The Englishman, now sees Adrienne often. The Englishman, sitting in the hotel, finds a dagger at his feet. Looking up, he sees the Sicilian, and scents trouble. "We sat here a week ago," recalls Leonardo. Lord St. Maurice nods. Leonardo and the Englishman quarrel. The Englishman at first refused to accept a challenge to duel, then when the Italian slaps him consents. The two men face each other ready to fight to the death. Margharita stops the duel by coming just in the nick of time to save the Englishman from his fate, with two officers who arrest the exile Leonardo. Leonardo vows vengeance. After 25 years in jail he is again at his hotel, an old, broken man with only memories left to him. At his hotel the proprietor, worried about him, advertises for his friends and Leonardo is first visited by the woman he had loved, whom he shoots out of his sight. Then he comes to him the daughter of his sister, whom he greets in great surprise. He learns that his sister is dead. Count Leonardo tells his niece the story of his love for Margharita. She is sympathetic.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

"Yes."
"Lumley, twenty-five years have passed away, and he is free."
"But, Miss Briscoe?" he asked, bewildered. "How does all this concern her?"
"She is his niece."
"His niece! his niece!"
Lord Lumley could say nothing. With all the swift selfishness of a man his thoughts were centered round one point. Would this new development hinder his purpose, or was it favorable to him?
"Leonardo's sister, Lumley, was my dear friend. She married a man named Briscoe, and died very soon afterward. Margharita is their daughter, and, Lumley, there is no English blood in her veins. She is a Marioni! I can see his eyes and his forehead every time I look at her. They seem to tell me that that wild oath still lives; that some day he will stretch out his hand and redeem that murderous threat. Lumley, there have been times when it has terrified me to look at that girl."
His face was clearing. A smile even began to dawn upon his lips.
"Why, mother, don't you see that so far as Miss Briscoe is concerned that is all fancy," he said. "You feel in that way toward her simply because she happens to resemble the Count di Marioni. Isn't that a little unfair to her? What can she know of an oath which was sworn five-and-twenty years ago, long before she was born. Why, I don't suppose that she ever heard of it."
She smiled a little sadly.
"Lumley, I do not attempt to defend my feeling. Of course it is absurd to connect her with it, really."
"I was sure that you would say so, mother."
"But, Lumley, although I cannot defend it the feeling remains. Listen. No woman has known greater happiness than I have. My life has been sometimes almost too perfect, and yet I never altogether forgot those passionate words of Leonardo's. They may like a shadow across my life, darkening and growing broader as the years of his confinement passed away. The time of his release came at last—only a few months ago, Lumley, I saw him."
"You saw him! Where?"
"In London, Lumley! Why did he come, almost on the day of his release, here to England? It was a country which he hated in his younger days, and yet, instead of visiting his old home, his love for which was almost a passion, instead of lingering in those sunny southern towns where many friends still remained who would have received him with open arms, he came straight to London alone. I found him at a hotel there, broken down, and almost, as it were, on the threshold of death! Yet, when he saw me, when he heard my voice, the old passion blazed out. Lumley, I prayed to him for forgiveness, and he scorned me. He had never forgotten! He would never forgive! He pointed to his person, his white hairs, to all the terrible evidences of his long imprisonment, and once more, with the same passion which had trembled in his tone twenty-five years ago, he cursed me! It was horrible! I fled from that place like a haunted woman, and since then, Lumley, I have been haunted. Every feature in the girl's magnificent face, and every movement of her figure, reminds me that she is a Marioni!"
She had risen and was standing by his side, a beautiful, but a suffering woman. He took her into his arms and kissed her forehead.
"Mother, you have too much imagination," he said gently. "Look at the matter seriously. Granted that this old man still harbors a senseless resentment against you. Yet what could he do? He forgets that days in which he lives, and the country to which you belong! Vendettas and romantic vengeance such as he may have dreamt of five-and-twenty years ago, are extinct even in his own land; here, they

cannot be taken seriously at all!"
She shivered a little, and looked into his face as though comforted in some measure.
"That is what I say to myself, Lumley," she said; "but there are times when the old dread is too strong for me wholly to crush it. I am not an Englishwoman, you know; I come of a more superstitious race!"
"I am sorry that Miss Briscoe should be the means of bringing these unpleasant thoughts to you," he remarked thoughtfully. "Mother!"
"Yes, Lumley."
"Would it be a great trouble to you if—some day—I asked you to receive her as a daughter?"
She stood quite still and shivered. Her face was suddenly of a marble pallor.
"You—you mean this, Lumley?"
"I mean that I care for her, mother."
"You have not—spoken to her?"
"No. I should not have said anything to you yet, only it pained me to think that there was anything between you—an aversion, I mean. I thought that if you knew, you would try and overcome it."
"I cannot!"
"Mother!"
"Lumley, I cannot! She looks at me out of his eyes; she speaks to me with his voice; something tells me that she bears in her heart his hate toward me. You do not know these Marionis! They are one in hate and one in love; unchanging and hard as the rocks on which their castle frowns. Even Margharita herself, in the old days, never forgave me for sending Leonardo to prison, although I saved her lover's life as well as mine. Lumley, you have said nothing to her?"
"Not yet."
"She would not marry you! I tell you that in her heart she hates us all! Sometimes I fancy that she is here—only—"
"Mother!"
He laid his hand firmly upon her white trembling arm. She looked around, following his eyes. Margharita, pale and proud, was standing upon the threshold, with a great bunch of white hyacinths in the bosom of her black dress.
"Am I intruding?" she asked quietly. "I will come down some other evening."
Lord Lumley sprang forward to stop her; but his mother was the first to recover herself.
"Pray don't go away, Margharita," she said, with perfect self-possession. "Only a few minutes ago we were complaining that you came down so seldom. Lumley, open the piano, and get Miss Briscoe's songs."
He was by her side in a moment, but he found time for an admiring glance toward his mother. She had taken up a paper knife, and was cutting the pages of her book. It was the *savoir-faire* of a great lady.

and peace. I have no other desire."
"For yourself, Margharita, have no fear. I have made your fortune my care, and God grant that it may be a happy one. Honest men have made a good profit out of my lands during my imprisonment. I have wealth to leave and it is yours. The Castle of the Marionis will be yours, and well I know you will raise once more and uphold the mighty, tho fallen, traditions of our race. I leave all fearlessly in your hands, at your entire disposal. Only one thing I beg of you, and that without fear of refusal. Marry not an Englishman. Marry one of the nobility of our own island, if you can find one worthy of you; if not, there are nobles of Italy with honor, and also a profit. You will be rich as you are beautiful; and the first lady in Italy, our distant kinswoman, Angela di Carloti, will be your guardian and your friend. May you be very, very happy, dearest; and all that comes to you you will deserve, for you have lightened the heart of a weary old man, whose blessing is yours, now and for ever."
"Leonardo di Marioni!"
(To be continued.)

ence with so much difficulty. The house was shut up. From inquiries made with caution among the neighbors I learned that Andrea Paschull had left a few months before for Rome. Thither I go in search of him.
"The delay is irksome, but it is necessary. Although my desire for the day of my vengeance to come is as strong as ever, I would not have the shadow of a suspicion rest upon you. Truly, yours will be no crime, but the world and the courts of justice would have it otherwise. You will, in verity, be but the instrument. Upon my head be the guilt, as mine will be the exceeding joy, when the thing for which I crave is accomplished. Bless you my child, that you have elected to aid me in carrying out this most just requital! Bless you, my child, that you have chosen to bring peace into the heart of one who has known great suffering!"
"Your last letter was short, yet I do not wonder at it. What is there you can find to say to me, while our great purpose remains thus in abeyance? My health continues good, I am thankful to say, yet, were it otherwise, I know that my strength would linger with me till my oath is accomplished. Till that day shall come even though its shadow lay across my path I could still defy it. Think not that I am blaspheming, Margharita, or that I believe in no God. I believe in a God of Justice, and he will award me my right. Oh, that the time may be short, for I am growing weary. Life is very burdensome, save only for its end."
"Sometimes, my beloved Margharita, you have sought to lighten the deep gloom through which I struggle, by picturing the happy days we may yet spend together in some far-distant country, where the shadows of this great selfish world barely reach, and its mighty roar and tumult sound but as a faint, low murmur. I have listened, but I have answered not; for in my heart I know that it will never be. Those days will never come. I have shrunk from throwing a chill upon your warm, generous heart; but of late I have wondered whether I do in thus silently deceiving you. For, Margharita, there is no such time of peaceful happiness in store for me. I am dying! Nay, do not start! Do not pity me! Do not fear! I know it so well, and I feel no pang, no sorrow. The limit of my days is fixed—not in actual days or weeks, but by events. I shall live to see my desire accomplished, and then I shall die. The light may flicker, but, till then, it will not go out. You will ask me: Who am I that I dare to fix a limit to an existence which God alone controls? I cannot tell you, Margharita, why I know, or how, yet it is surely so. The day which sees me free of my vow will also be the day of my death."

"Trouble not, my child, at this thought, nor wonder why I can write of the end of my days so calmly. Ask yourself rather what further life could mean for me. There is no joy which I desire; my worn-out frame could find no pleasure in dragging out a tasteless and profitless existence. I look for death as one looks for his couch who has toiled and labored through the heat of the day. I shall find there rest

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