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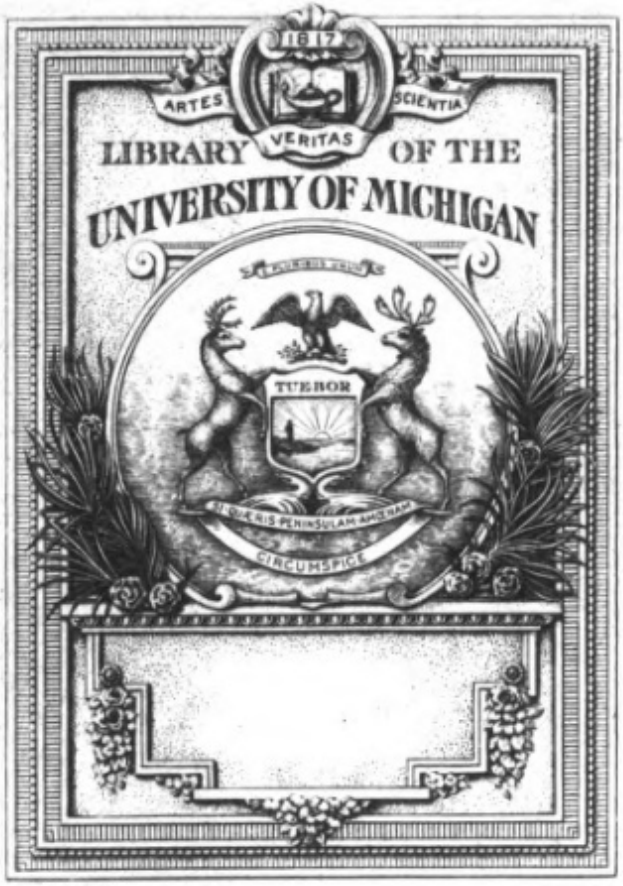

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"Ah, but you will not scold me?" she begged. "It is the storm which terrifies me." FRONTISPIECE. *See page 135.*

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"It is the

See page 135.

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THE GREAT IMPERSONATION

BY

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

NANA FRENCH BICKFORD

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, & COMPANY
1920

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

"Ah, but you will not scold me?" she begged.
"It is the storm which terrifies me" *Frontispiece*

"To-night I break what has become a rule with me. I shall drink to the new things that may yet come to both of us" . . PAGE 18

He swung around to find Seaman standing upon the threshold . . . . . " 182

Into the open there came a dark shape, the irregularity of its movements swiftly explained " 303

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THE GREAT IMPERSONATION

CHAPTER I

The trouble from which great events were to come began when Everard Dominey, who had been fighting his way through the scrub for the last three quarters of an hour towards those thin, spiral wisps of smoke, urged his pony to a last despairing effort and came crashing through the great oleander shrub to pitch forward on his head in the little clearing. It developed the next morning, when he found himself for the first time for many months on a truckle bed, between linen sheets, with a cool, bamboo-twisted roof between him and the relentless sun. He raised himself a little in the bed.

"Where the mischief am I?" he demanded.

A black boy, seated cross-legged in the entrance of the banda, rose to his feet, mumbled something and disappeared. In a few moments the tall, slim figure of a European, in spotless white riding clothes, stooped down and came over to Dominey's side.

"You are better?" he enquired politely.

"Yes, I am," was the somewhat brusque rejoinder. "Where the mischief am I, and who are you?"

The newcomer's manner stiffened. He was a person of dignified carriage, and his tone conveyed some measure of rebuke.

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"You are within half a mile of the Iriwarri River, if you know where that is," he replied,—"about seventy-two miles southeast of the Darawaga Settlement."

"The devil! Then I am in German East Africa?"

"Without a doubt."

"And you are German?"

"I have that honour."

Dominey whistled softly.

"Awfully sorry to have intruded," he said. "I left Marlinstein two and a half months ago, with twenty boys and plenty of stores. We were doing a big trek after lions. I took some new Askaris in and they made trouble,—looted the stores one night and there was the devil to pay. I was obliged to shoot one or two, and the rest deserted. They took my compass, damn them, and I'm nearly a hundred miles out of my bearings. You couldn't give me a drink, could you?"

"With pleasure, if the doctor approves," was the courteous answer. "Here, Jan!"

The boy sprang up, listened to a word or two of brief command in his own language, and disappeared through the hanging grass which led into another hut. The two men exchanged glances of rather more than ordinary interest. Then Dominey laughed.

"I know what you're thinking," he said. "It gave me quite a start when you came in. We're devilishly alike, aren't we?"

"There is a very strong likeness between us," the other admitted.

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Dominey leaned his head upon his hand and studied his host. The likeness was clear enough, although the advantage was all in favour of the man who stood by the side of the camp bedstead with folded arms. Everard Dominey, for the first twenty-six years of his life, had lived as an ordinary young Englishman of his position,— Eton, Oxford, a few years in the Army, a few years about town, during which he had succeeded in making a still more hopeless muddle of his already encumbered estates: a few months of tragedy, and then a blank. Afterwards ten years — at first in the cities, then in the dark places of Africa — years of which no man knew anything. The Everard Dominey of ten years ago had been, without a doubt, good-looking. The finely shaped features remained, but the eyes had lost their lustre, his figure its elasticity, his mouth its firmness. He had the look of a man run prematurely to seed, wasted by fevers and dissipation. Not so his present companion. His features were as finely shaped, cast in an even stronger though similar mould. His eyes were bright and full of fire, his mouth and chin firm, bespeaking a man of deeds, his tall figure lithe and supple. He had the air of being in perfect health, in perfect mental and physical condition, a man who lived with dignity and some measure of content, notwithstanding the slight gravity of his expression.

"Yes," the Englishman muttered, "there's no doubt about the likeness, though I suppose I should look more like you than I do if I'd taken care of myself. But I haven't. That's the devil of it. I've

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gone the other way; tried to chuck my life away and pretty nearly succeeded, too."

The dried grasses were thrust on one side, and the doctor entered,— a little round man, also clad in immaculate white, with yellow-gold hair and thick spectacles. His countryman pointed towards the bed.

"Will you examine our patient, Herr Doctor, and prescribe for him what is necessary? He has asked for drink. Let him have wine, or whatever is good for him. If he is well enough, he will join our evening meal. I present my excuses. I have a despatch to write."

The man on the couch turned his head and watched the departing figure with a shade of envy in his eyes.

"What is my preserver's name?" he asked the doctor.

The latter looked as though the question were irreverent.

"It is His Excellency the Major-General Baron Leopold von Ragastein."

"All that!" Dominey muttered. "Is he the Governor, or something of that sort?"

"He is Military Commandant of the Colony," the doctor replied. "He has also a special mission here."

"Damned fine-looking fellow for a German," Dominey remarked, with unthinking insolence.

The doctor was unmoved. He was feeling his patient's pulse. He concluded his examination a few minutes later.

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"You have drunk much whisky lately, so?" he asked.

"I don't know what the devil it's got to do with you," was the curt reply, "but I drink whisky whenever I can get it. Who wouldn't in this pestilential climate!"

The doctor shook his head.

"The climate is good as he is treated," he declared. "His Excellency drinks nothing but light wine and seltzer water. He has been here for five years, not only here but in the swamps, and he has not been ill one day."

"Well, I have been at death's door a dozen times," the Englishman rejoined a little recklessly, "and I don't much mind when I hand in my checks, but until that time comes I shall drink whisky whenever I can get it."

"The cook is preparing you some luncheon," the doctor announced, "which it will do you good to eat. I cannot give you whisky at this moment, but you can have some hock and seltzer with bay leaves."

"Send it along," was the enthusiastic reply. "What a constitution I must have, doctor! The smell of that cooking outside is making me ravenous."

"Your constitution is still sound if you would only respect it," was the comforting assurance.

"Anything been heard of the rest of my party?" Dominey enquired.

"Some bodies of Askaris have been washed up from the river," the doctor informed him, "and two of your ponies have been eaten by lions. You will

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excuse. I have the wounds of a native to dress, who was bitten last night by a jaguar."

The traveller, left alone, lay still in the hut, and his thoughts wandered backwards. He looked out over the bare, scrubby stretch of land which had been cleared for this encampment to the mass of bush and flowering shrubs beyond, mysterious and impenetrable save for that rough elephant track along which he had travelled; to the broad-bosomed river, blue as the sky above, and to the mountains fading into mist beyond. The face of his host had carried him back into the past. Puzzled reminiscence tugged at the strings of memory. It came to him later on at dinner time, when they three, the Commandant, the doctor and himself, sat at a little table arranged just outside the hut, that they might catch the faint breeze from the mountains, herald of the swift-falling darkness. Native servants beat the air around them with bamboo fans to keep off the insects, and the air was faint almost to noxiousness with the perfume of some sickly, exotic shrub.

"Why, you're Devinter!" he exclaimed suddenly, —"Sigismund Devinter! You were at Eton with me — Horrock's House — semi-final in the racquets."

"And Magdalen afterwards, number five in the boat."

"And why the devil did the doctor here tell me that your name was Von Ragastein?"

"Because it happens to be the truth," was the somewhat measured reply. "Devinter is my family name, and the one by which I was known when in England. When I succeeded to the barony and es-

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tates at my uncle's death, however, I was compelled to also take the title."

"Well, it's a small world!" Dominey exclaimed. "What brought you out here really — lions or elephants?"

"Neither."

"You mean to say that you've taken up this sort of political business just for its own sake, not for sport?"

"Entirely so. I do not use a sporting rifle once a month, except for necessity. I came to Africa for different reasons."

Dominey drank deep of his hock and seltzer and leaned back, watching the fireflies rise above the tall-bladed grass, above the stumpy clumps of shrub, and hang like miniature stars in the clear, violet air.

"What a world!" he soliloquised. "Siggy Devinter, Baron von Ragastein, out here, slaving for God knows what, drilling niggers to fight God knows whom, a political machine, I suppose, future Governor-General of German Africa, eh? You were always proud of your country, Devinter."

"My country is a country to be proud of," was the solemn reply.

"Well, you're in earnest, anyhow," Dominey continued, "in earnest about something. And I — well, it's finished with me. It would have been finished last night if I hadn't seen the smoke from your fires, and I don't much care — that's the trouble. I go blundering on. I suppose the end will come somehow, sometime.— Can I have some rum or whisky, Devinter — I mean Von Ragastein — Your

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Excellency — or whatever I ought to say? You see those wreaths of mist down by the river? They'll mean malaria for me unless I have spirits."

"I have something better than either," Von Ragastein replied. "You shall give me your opinion of this."

The orderly who stood behind his master's chair, received a whispered order, disappeared into the commissariat hut and came back presently with a bottle at the sight of which the Englishman gasped.

"Napoleon!" he exclaimed.

"Just a few bottles I had sent to me," his host explained. "I am delighted to offer it to some one who will appreciate it."

"By Jove, there's no mistake about that!" Dominey declared, rolling it around in his glass. "What a world! I hadn't eaten for thirty hours when I rolled up here last night, and drunk nothing but filthy water for days. To-night, fricassee of chicken, white bread, cabinet hock and Napoleon brandy. And to-morrow again — well, who knows? When do you move on, Von Ragastein?"

"Not for several days."

"What the mischief do you find to do so far from headquarters, if you don't shoot lions or elephants?" his guest asked curiously.

"If you really wish to know," Von Ragastein replied, "I am annoying your political agents immensely by moving from place to place, collecting natives for drill."

"But what do you want to drill them for?" Dominey persisted. "I heard some time ago that you

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have four times as many natives under arms as we have. You don't want an army here. You're not likely to quarrel with us or the Portuguese."

"It is our custom," Von Ragastein declared a little didactically, "in Germany and wherever we Germans go, to be prepared not only for what is likely to happen but for what might possibly happen."

"A war in my younger days, when I was in the Army," Dominey mused, "might have made a man of me."

"Surely you had your chance out here?"

Dominey shook his head.

"My battalion never left the country," he said. "We were shut up in Ireland all the time. That was the reason I chucked the army when I was really only a boy."

Later on they dragged their chairs a little farther out into the darkness, smoking cigars and drinking some rather wonderful coffee. The doctor had gone off to see a patient, and Von Ragastein was thoughtful. Their guest, on the other hand, continued to be reminiscently discursive.

"Our meeting," he observed, lazily stretching out his hand for his glass, "should be full of interest to the psychologist. Here we are, brought together by some miraculous chance to spend one night of our lives in an African jungle, two human beings of the same age, brought up together thousands of miles away, jogging on towards the eternal blackness along lines as far apart as the mind can conceive."

"Your eyes are fixed," Von Ragastein murmured,

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"upon that very blackness behind which the sun will rise at dawn. You will see it come up from behind the mountains in that precise spot, like a new and blazing world."

"Don't put me off with allegories," his companion objected petulantly. "The eternal blackness exists surely enough, even if my metaphor is faulty. I am disposed to be philosophical. Let me ramble on. Here am I, an idler in my boyhood, a harmless pleasure-seeker in my youth till I ran up against tragedy, and since then a drifter, a drifter with a slowly growing vice, lolling through life with no definite purpose, with no definite hope or wish, except," he went on a little drowsily, "that I think I'd like to be buried somewhere near the base of those mountains, on the other side of the river, from behind which you say the sun comes up every morning like a world on fire."

"You talk foolishly," Von Ragastein protested. "If there has been tragedy in your life, you have time to get over it. You are not yet forty years old."

"Then I turn and consider you," Dominey continued, ignoring altogether his friend's remark. "You are only my age, and you look ten years younger. Your muscles are hard, your eyes are as bright as they were in your school days. You carry yourself like a man with a purpose. You rise at five every morning, the doctor tells me, and you return here, worn out, at dusk. You spend every moment of your time drilling those filthy blacks. When you are not doing that, you are prospecting, super-

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vising reports home, trying to make the best of your few millions of acres of fever swamps. The doctor worships you but who else knows? What do you do it for, my friend?"

"Because it is my duty," was the calm reply.

"Duty! But why can't you do your duty in your own country, and live a man's life, and hold the hands of white men, and look into the eyes of white women?"

"I go where I am needed most," Von Ragastein answered. "I do not enjoy drilling natives, I do not enjoy passing the years as an outcast from the ordinary joys of human life. But I follow my star."

"And I my will-o'-the-wisp," Dominey laughed mockingly. "The whole thing's as plain as a pike-staff. You may be a dull dog — you always were on the serious side — but you're a man of principle. I'm a slacker."

"The difference between us," Von Ragastein pronounced, "is something which is inculcated into the youth of our country and which is not inculcated into yours. In England, with a little money, a little birth, your young men expect to find the world a playground for sport, a garden for loves. The mightiest German noble who ever lived has his work to do. It is work which makes fibre, which gives balance to life."

Dominey sighed. His cigar, dearly prized though it had been, was cold between his fingers. In that perfumed darkness, illuminated only by the faint gleam of the shaded lamp behind, his face seemed suddenly white and old. His host leaned towards

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him and spoke for the first time in the kindlier tones of their youth.

"You hinted at tragedy, my friend. You are not alone. Tragedy also has entered my life. Perhaps if things had been otherwise, I should have found work in more joyous places, but sorrow came to me, and I am here."

A quick flash of sympathy lit up Dominey's face.

"We met trouble in a different fashion," he groaned.

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CHAPTER II

Dominey slept till late the following morning, and when he woke at last from a long, dreamless slumber, he was conscious of a curious quietness in the camp. The doctor, who came in to see him, explained it immediately after his morning greeting.

"His Excellency," he announced, "has received important despatches from home. He has gone to meet an envoy from Dar-es-Salaam. He will be away for three days. He desired that you would remain his guest until his return."

"Very good of him," Dominey murmured. "Is there any European news?"

"I do not know," was the stolid reply. "His Excellency desired me to inform you that if you cared for a short trip along the banks of the river, southward, there are a dozen boys left and some ponies. There are plenty of lion, and rhino may be met with at one or two places which the natives know of."

Dominey bathed and dressed, sipped his excellent coffee, and lounged about the place in uncertain mood. He unburdened himself to the doctor as they drank tea together late in the afternoon.

"I am not in the least keen on hunting," he confessed, "and I feel like a horrible sponge, but all the same I have a queer sort of feeling that I'd like to see Von Ragastein again. Your silent chief rather

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fascinates me, Herr Doctor. He is a man. He has something which I have lost."

"He is a great man," the doctor declared enthusiastically. "What he sets his mind to do, he does."

"I suppose I might have been like that," Dominey sighed, "if I had had an incentive. Have you noticed the likeness between us, Herr Doctor?"

The latter nodded.

"I noticed it from the first moment of your arrival," he assented. "You are very much alike yet very different. The resemblance must have been still more remarkable in your youth. Time has dealt with your features according to your deserts."

"Well, you needn't rub it in," Dominey protested irritably.

"I am rubbing nothing in," the doctor replied with unruffled calm. "I speak the truth. If you had been possessed of the same moral stamina as His Excellency, you might have preserved your health and the things that count. You might have been as useful to your country as he is to his."

"I suppose I am pretty rocky, eh?"

"Your constitution has been abused. You still, however, have much vitality. If you cared to exercise self-control for a few months, you would be a different man.— You must excuse. I have work."

Dominey spent three restless days. Even the sight of a herd of elephants in the river and that strange, fierce chorus of night sounds, as beasts of prey crept noiselessly around the camp, failed to move him. For the moment his love of sport, his last hold upon

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the world of real things, seemed dead. What did it matter, the killing of an animal more or less? His mind was fixed uneasily upon the past, searching always for something which he failed to discover. At dawn he watched for that strangely wonderful, transforming birth of the day, and at night he sat outside the banda, waiting till the mountains on the other side of the river had lost shape and faded into the violet darkness. His conversation with Von Ragastein had unsettled him. Without knowing definitely why, he wanted him back again. Memories that had long since ceased to torture were finding their way once more into his brain. On the first day he had striven to rid himself of them in the usual fashion.

"Doctor, you've got some whisky, haven't you?" he asked.

The doctor nodded.

"There is a case somewhere to be found," he admitted. "His Excellency told me that I was to refuse you nothing, but he advises you to drink only the white wine until his return."

"He really left that message?"

"Precisely as I have delivered it."

The desire for whisky passed, came again but was beaten back, returned in the night so that he sat up with the sweat pouring down his face and his tongue parched. He drank lithia water instead. Late in the afternoon of the third day, Von Ragastein rode into the camp. His clothes were torn and drenched with the black mud of the swamps, dust and dirt were thick upon his face. His pony almost

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collapsed as he swung himself off. Nevertheless, he paused to greet his guest with punctilious courtesy, and there was a gleam of real satisfaction in his eyes as the two men shook hands.

"I am glad that you are still here," he said heartily. "Excuse me while I bathe and change. We will dine a little earlier. So far I have not eaten today."

"A long trek?" Dominey asked curiously.

"I have trekked far," was the quiet reply.

At dinner time, Von Ragastein was once more himself, immaculate in white duck, with clean linen, shaved, and with little left of his fatigue. There was something different in his manner, however, some change which puzzled Dominey. He was at once more attentive to his guest, yet further removed from him in spirit and sympathy. He kept the conversation with curious insistence upon incidents of their school and college days, upon the subject of Dominey's friends and relations, and the later episodes of his life. Dominey felt himself all the time encouraged to talk about his earlier life, and all the time he was conscious that for some reason or other his host's closest and most minute attention was being given to his slightest word. Champagne had been served and served freely, and Dominey, up to the very gates of that one secret chamber, talked volubly and without reserve. After the meal was over, their chairs were dragged as before into the open. The silent orderly produced even larger cigars, and Dominey found his glass filled once more with the wonderful brandy. The doctor had left

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them to visit the native camp nearly a quarter of a mile away, and the orderly was busy inside, clearing the table. Only the black shapes of the servants were dimly visible as they twirled their fans,—and overhead the leaning stars. They were alone.

"I've been talking an awful lot of rot about myself," Dominey said. "Tell me a little about your career now and your life in Germany before you came out here?"

Von Ragastein made no immediate reply, and a curious silence ebbed and flowed between the two men. Every now and then a star shot across the sky. The red rim of the moon rose a little higher from behind the mountains. The bush stillness, always the most mysterious of silences, seemed gradually to become charged with unvoiced passion. Soon the animals began to call around them, creeping nearer and nearer to the fire which burned at the end of the open space.

"My friend," Von Ragastein said at last, speaking with the air of a man who has spent much time in deliberation, "you speak to me of Germany, of my homeland. Perhaps you have guessed that it is not duty alone which has brought me here to these wild places. I, too, left behind me a tragedy."

Dominey's quick impulse of sympathy was smothered by the stern, almost harsh repression of the other's manner. The words seemed to have been torn from his throat. There was no spark of tenderness or regret in his set face.

"Since the day of my banishment," he went on,

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"no word of this matter has passed my lips. To-night it is not weakness which assails me, but a desire to yield to the strange arm of coincidence. You and I, schoolmates and college friends, though sons of a different country, meet here in the wilderness, each with the iron in our souls. I shall tell you the thing which happened to me, and you shall speak to me of your own curse."

"I cannot!" Dominey groaned.

"But you will," was the stern reply. "Listen."

An hour passed, and the voices of the two men had ceased. The howling of the animals had lessened with the paling of the fires, and a slow, melancholy ripple of breeze was passing through the bush and lapping the surface of the river. It was Von Ragastein who broke through what might almost have seemed a trance. He rose to his feet, vanished inside the banda, and reappeared a moment or two later with two tumblers. One he set down in the space provided for it in the arm of his guest's chair.

"To-night I break what has become a rule with me," he announced. "I shall drink a whisky and soda. I shall drink to the new things that may yet come to both of us."

"You are giving up your work here?" Dominey asked curiously.

"I am part of a great machine," was the somewhat evasive reply. "I have nothing to do but obey."

A flicker of passion distorted Dominey's face, flamed for a moment in his tone.

"Are you content to live and die like this?" he

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"To-night I break what has become a rule with me. I shall drink to the new things that may yet come to both of us."
Page 18.

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demanded. "Don't you want to get back to where a different sort of sun will warm your heart and fill your pulses? This primitive world is in its way colossal, but it isn't human, it isn't a life for humans. We want the streets, Von Ragastein, you and I. We want the tide of people flowing around us, the roar of wheels and the hum of human voices. Curse these animals! If I live in this country much longer, I shall go on all fours."

"You yield too much to environment," his companion observed. "In the life of the cities you would be a sentimentalist."

"No city nor any civilised country will ever claim me again," Dominey sighed. "I should never have the courage to face what might come."

Von Ragastein rose to his feet. The dim outline of his erect form was in a way majestic. He seemed to tower over the man who lounged in the chair below him.

"Finish your whisky and soda to our next meeting, friend of my school days," he begged. "To-morrow, before you awake, I shall be gone."

"So soon?"

"By to-morrow night," Von Ragastein replied, "I must be on the other side of those mountains. This must be our farewell."

Dominey was querulous, almost pathetic. He had a sudden hatred of solitude.

"I must trek westward myself directly," he protested, "or eastward, or northward — it doesn't so much matter. Can't we travel together?"

Von Ragastein shook his head.

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"I travel officially, and I must travel alone," he replied. "As for yourself, they will be breaking up here to-morrow, but they will lend you an escort and put you in the direction you wish to take. This, alas, is as much as I can do for you. For us it must be farewell."

"Well, I can't force myself upon you," Dominey said a little wistfully. "It seems strange, though, to meet right out here, far away even from the by-ways of life, just to shake hands and pass on. I am sick to death of niggers and animals."

"It is Fate," Von Ragastein decided. "Where I go, I must go alone. Farewell, dear friend! We will drink the toast we drank our last night in your rooms at Magdalen. That Sanscrit man translated it for us: 'May each find what he seeks!' We must follow our star."

Dominey laughed a little bitterly. He pointed to a light glowing fitfully in the bush.

"My will-o'-the-wisp," he muttered recklessly, "leading where I shall follow — into the swamps!"

A few minutes later Dominey threw himself upon his couch, curiously and unaccountably drowsy. Von Ragastein, who had come in to wish him good night, stood looking down at him for several moments with significant intentness. Then, satisfied that his guest really slept, he turned and passed through the hanging curtain of dried grasses into the next banda, where the doctor, still fully dressed, was awaiting him. They spoke together in German and with lowered voices. Von Ragastein had lost something of his imperturbability.

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"Everything progresses according to my orders?" he demanded.

"Everything, Excellency! The boys are being loaded, and a runner has gone on to Wadihuan for ponies to be prepared."

"They know that I wish to start at dawn?"

"All will be prepared, Excellency."

Von Ragastein laid his hand upon the doctor's shoulder.

"Come outside, Schmidt," he said. "I have something to tell you of my plans."

The two men seated themselves in the long, wicker chairs, the doctor in an attitude of strict attention. Von Ragastein turned his head and listened. From Dominey's quarters came the sound of deep and regular breathing.

"I have formed a great plan, Schmidt," Von Ragastein proceeded. "You know what news has come to me from Berlin?"

"Your Excellency has told me little," the doctor reminded him.

"The Day arrives," Von Ragastein pronounced, his voice shaking with deep emotion. He paused a moment in thought and continued, "the time, even the month, is fixed. I am recalled from here to take the place for which I was destined. You know what that place is? You know why I was sent to an English public school and college?"

"I can guess."

"I am to take up my residence in England. I am to have a special mission. I am to find a place for myself there as an Englishman. The means are

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left to my ingenuity. Listen, Schmidt. A great idea has come to me."

The doctor lit a cigar.

"I listen, Excellency."

Von Ragastein rose to his feet. Not content with the sound of that regular breathing, he made his way to the opening of the banda and gazed in at Dominey's slumbering form. Then he returned.

"It is something which you do not wish the Englishman to hear?" the doctor asked.

"It is."

"We speak in German."

"Languages," was the cautious reply, "happen to be that man's only accomplishment. He can speak German as fluently as you or I. That, however, is of no consequence. He sleeps and he will continue to sleep. I mixed him a sleeping draught with his whisky and soda."

"Ah!" the doctor grunted.

"My principal need in England is an identity," Von Ragastein pointed out. "I have made up my mind. I shall take this Englishman's. I shall return to England as Sir Everard Dominey."

"So!"

"There is a remarkable likeness between us, and Dominey has not seen an Englishman who knows him for eight or ten years. Any school or college friends whom I may encounter I shall be able to satisfy. I have stayed at Dominey. I know Dominey's relatives. To-night he has babbled for hours, telling me many things that it is well for me to know."

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"What about his near relatives?"

"He has none nearer than cousins."

"No wife?"

Von Ragastein paused and turned his head. The deep breathing inside the banda had certainly ceased. He rose to his feet and, stealing uneasily to the opening, gazed down upon his guest's outstretched form. To all appearance, Dominey still slept deeply. After a moment or two's watch, Von Ragastein returned to his place.

"Therein lies his tragedy," he confided, dropping his voice a little lower. "She is insane — insane, it seems, through a shock for which he is responsible. She might have been the only stumbling block, and she is as though she did not exist."

"It is a great scheme," the doctor murmured enthusiastically.

"It is a wonderful one! That great and unrevealed Power, Schmidt, which watches over our country and which will make her mistress of the world, must have guided this man to us. My position in England will be unique. As Sir Everard Dominey I shall be able to penetrate into the inner circles of Society — perhaps, even, of political life. I shall be able, if necessary, to remain in England even after the storm bursts."

"Supposing," the doctor suggested, "this man Dominey should return to England?"

Von Ragastein turned his head and looked towards his questioner.

"He must not," he pronounced.

"So!" the doctor murmured.

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Late in the afternoon of the following day, Domiiney, with a couple of boys for escort and his rifle slung across his shoulder, rode into the bush along the way he had come. The little fat doctor stood and watched him, waving his hat until he was out of sight. Then he called to the orderly.

"Heinrich," he said, "you are sure that the Herr Englishman has the whisky?"

"The water bottles are filled with nothing else, Herr Doctor," the man replied.

"There is no water or soda water in the pack?"

"Not one drop, Herr Doctor."

"How much food?"

"One day's rations."

"The beef is salt?"

"It is very salt, Herr Doctor."

"And the compass?"

"It is ten degrees wrong."

"The boys have their orders?"

"They understand perfectly, Herr Doctor. If the Englishman does not drink, they will take him at midnight to where His Excellency will be encamped at the bend of the Blue River."

The doctor sighed. He was not at heart an unkindly man.

"I think," he murmured, "it will be better for the Englishman that he drinks."

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CHAPTER III

Mr. John Lambert Mangan of Lincoln's Inn gazed at the card which a junior clerk had just presented in blank astonishment, an astonishment which became speedily blended with dismay.

"Good God, do you see this, Harrison?" he exclaimed, passing it over to his manager, with whom he had been in consultation. "Dominey — Sir Everard Dominey — back here in England!"

The head clerk glanced at the narrow piece of pasteboard and sighed.

"I'm afraid you will find him rather a trouble-some client, sir," he remarked.

His employer frowned. "Of course I shall," he answered testily. "There isn't an extra penny to be had out of the estates — you know that, Harrison. The last two quarters' allowance which we sent to Africa came out of the timber. Why the mischief didn't he stay where he was!"

"What shall I tell the gentleman, sir?" the boy enquired.

"Oh, show him in!" Mr. Mangan directed ill-temperedly. "I suppose I shall have to see him sooner or later. I'll finish these affidavits after lunch, Harrison."

The solicitor composed his features to welcome a client who, however troublecome his affairs had be-

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come, still represented a family who had been valued patrons of the firm for several generations. He was prepared to greet a seedy-looking and degenerate individual, looking older than his years. Instead, he found himself extending his hand to one of the best turned out and handsomest men who had ever crossed the threshold of his not very inviting office. For a moment he stared at his visitor, speechless. Then certain points of familiarity — the well-shaped nose, the rather deep-set grey eyes — presented themselves. The surprise enabled him to infuse a little real heartiness into his welcome.

"My dear Sir Everard!" he exclaimed. "This is a most unexpected pleasure — most unexpected! Such a pity, too, that we only posted a draft for your allowance a few days ago. Dear me — you'll forgive my saying so — how well you look!"

Dominey smiled as he accepted an easy chair.

"Africa's a wonderful country, Mangan," he remarked, with just that faint note of patronage in his tone which took his listener back to the days of his present client's father.

"It — pardon my remarking it — has done wonderful things for you, Sir Everard. Let me see, it must be eleven years since we met."

Sir Everard tapped the toes of his carefully polished brown shoes with the end of his walking stick.

"I left London," he murmured reminiscently, "in April, nineteen hundred and two. Yes, eleven years, Mr. Mangan. It seems queer to find myself in London again, as I dare say you can understand."

"Precisely," the lawyer murmured. "I was just

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wondering — I think that last remittance we sent to you could be stopped. I have no doubt you will be glad of a little ready money," he added, with a confident smile.

"Thanks, I don't think I need any just at present," was the amazing answer. "We'll talk about financial affairs a little later on."

Mr. Mangan metaphorically pinched himself. He had known his present client even during his school days, had received a great many visits from him at different times, and could not remember one in which the question of finance had been dismissed in so casual a manner.

"I trust," he observed, chiefly for the sake of saying something, "that you are thinking of settling down here for a time now?"

"I have finished with Africa, if that is what you mean," was the somewhat grave reply. "As to settling down here, well, that depends a little upon what you have to tell me."

The lawyer nodded.

"I think," he said, "that you may make yourself quite easy as regards the matter of Roger Unthank. Nothing has ever been heard of him since the day you left England."

"His — body has not been found?"

"Nor any trace of it."

There was a brief silence. The lawyer looked hard at Dominey, and Dominey searchingly back again at the lawyer.

"And Lady Dominey?" the former asked at length.

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"Her ladyship's condition is, I believe, unchanged," was the somewhat guarded reply.

"If the circumstances are favourable," Dominey continued, after another moment's pause, "I think it very likely that I may decide to settle down at Dominey Hall."

The lawyer appeared doubtful.

"I am afraid," he said, "you will be very disappointed with the condition of the estate, Sir Everard. As I have repeatedly told you in our correspondence, the rent roll, after deducting your settlement upon Lady Dominey, has at no time reached the interest on the mortgages, and we have had to make up the difference and send you your allowance out of the proceeds of the outlying timber."

"That is a pity," Dominey replied, with a frown. "I ought, perhaps, to have taken you more into my confidence. By the by," he added, "when — er — about when did you receive my last letter?"

"Your last letter?" Mr. Mangan repeated. "We have not had the privilege of hearing from you, Sir Everard, for over four years. The only intimation we had that our payments had reached you was the exceedingly prompt debit of the South African bank."

"I have certainly been to blame," this unexpected visitor confessed. "On the other hand, I have been very much absorbed. If you haven't happened to hear any South African gossip lately, Mangan, I suppose it will be a surprise to you to hear that I have been making a good deal of money."

"Making money?" the lawyer gasped. "You making money, Sir Everard?"

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"I thought you'd be surprised," Dominey observed coolly. "However, that's neither here nor there. The business object of my visit to you this morning is to ask you to make arrangements as quickly as possible for paying off the mortgages on the Dominey estates."

Mr. Mangan was a lawyer of the new-fashioned school,— Harrow and Cambridge, the Bath Club, racquets and fives, rather than gold and lawn tennis. Instead of saying "God bless my soul!" he exclaimed "Great Scott!" dropped a very modern-looking eyeglass from his left eye, and leaned back in his chair with his hands in his pockets.

"I have had three or four years of good luck," his client continued. "I have made money in gold mines, in diamond mines and in land. I am afraid that if I had stayed out another year, I should have descended altogether to the commonplace and come back a millionaire."

"My heartiest congratulations!" Mr. Mangan found breath to murmur. "You'll forgive my being so astonished, but you are the first Dominey I ever knew who has ever made a penny of money in any sort of way, and from what I remember of you in England — I'm sure you'll forgive my being so frank — I should never have expected you to have even attempted such a thing."

Dominey smiled good-humouredly.

"Well," he said, "if you enquire at the United Bank of Africa, you will find that I have a credit balance there of something over a hundred thousand pounds. Then I have also — well, let us say a trifle

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more, invested in first-class mines. Do me the favour of lunching with me, Mr. Mangan, and although Africa will never be a favourite topic of conversation with me, I will tell you about some of my speculations."

The solicitor groped around for his hat.

"I will send the boy for a taxi," he faltered.

"I have a car outside," this astonishing client told him. "Before we leave, could you instruct your clerk to have a list of the Dominey mortgages made out, with the terminable dates and redemption values?"

"I will leave instructions," Mr. Mangan promised. "I think that the total amount is under eighty thousand pounds."

Dominey sauntered through the office, an object of much interest to the little staff of clerks. The lawyer joined him on the pavement in a few minutes.

"Where shall we lunch?" Dominey asked. "I'm afraid my clubs are a little out of date. I am staying at the Carlton."

"The Carlton grill room is quite excellent," Mr. Mangan suggested.

"They are keeping me a table until half-past one," Dominey replied. "We will lunch there, by all means."

They drove off together, the returned traveller gazing all the time out of the window into the crowded streets, the lawyer a little thoughtful.

"While I think of it, Sir Everard," the latter said, as they drew near their destination, "I should be

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glad of a short conversation with you before you go down to Dominey."

"With regard to anything in particular?"

"With regard to Lady Dominey," the lawyer told him a little gravely.

A shadow rested on his companion's face.

"Is her ladyship very much changed?"

"Physically, she is in excellent health, I believe. Mentally I believe that there is no change. She has unfortunately the same rather violent prejudice which I am afraid influenced your departure from England."

"In plain words," Dominey said bitterly, "she has sworn to take my life if ever I sleep under the same roof."

"She will need, I am afraid, to be strictly watched," the lawyer answered evasively. "Still, I think you ought to be told that time does not seem to have lessened her tragical antipathy."

"She regards me still as the murderer of Roger Unthank?" Dominey asked, in a measured tone.

"I am afraid she does."

"And I suppose that every one else has the same idea?"

"The mystery," Mr. Mangan admitted, "has never been cleared up. It is well known, you see, that you fought in the park and that you staggered home almost senseless. Roger Unthank has never been seen from that day to this."

"If I had killed him," Dominey pointed out, "why was his body not found?"

The lawyer shook his head.

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"There are all sorts of theories, of course," he said, "but for one superstition you may as well be prepared. There is scarcely a man or a woman for miles around Dominey who doesn't believe that the ghost of Roger Unthank still haunts the Black Wood near where you fought."

"Let us be quite clear about this," Dominey insisted. "If the body should ever be found, am I liable, after all these years, to be indicted for manslaughter?"

"I think you may make your mind quite at ease," the lawyer assured him. "In the first place, I don't think you would ever be indicted."

"And in the second?"

"There isn't a human being in that part of Norfolk would ever believe that the body of man or beast, left within the shadow of the Black Wood, would ever be seen or heard of again!"

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CHAPTER IV

Mr. Mangan, on their way into the grill room, loitered for a few minutes in the small reception room, chatting with some acquaintances, whilst his host, having spoken to the *maître d'hôtel* and ordered a cocktail from a passing waiter, stood with his hands behind his back, watching the inflow of men and women with all that interest which one might be supposed to feel in one's fellows after a prolonged absence. He had moved a little on one side to allow a party of young people to make their way through the crowded chamber, when he was conscious of a woman standing alone on the topmost of the three thickly carpeted stairs. Their eyes met, and hers, which had been wandering around the room as though in search of some acquaintance, seemed instantly and fervently held. To the few loungers about the room, ignorant of any special significance in that studied contemplation of the man on the part of the woman, their two personalities presented an agreeable, almost a fascinating study. Dominey was six feet two in height and had to its fullest extent the natural distinction of his class, together with the half military, half athletic bearing which seemed to have been so marvellously restored to him. His complexion was no more than becomingly tanned; his slight

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moustache, trimmed very close to the upper lip, was of the same ruddy brown shade as his sleekly brushed hair. The woman, who had commenced now to move slowly towards him, save that her cheeks, at that moment, at any rate, were almost unnaturally pale, was of the same colouring. Her red-gold hair gleamed beneath her black hat. She was tall, a Grecian type of figure, large without being coarse, majestic though still young. She carried a little dog under one arm and a plain black silk bag, on which was a coronet in platinum and diamonds, in the other hand. The major-domo who presided over the room, watching her approach, bowed with more than his usual urbanity. Her eyes, however, were still fixed upon the person who had engaged so large a share of her attention. She came towards him, her lips a little parted.

"Leopold!" she faltered. "The Holy Saints, why did you not let me know!"

Dominey bowed very slightly. His words seemed to have a cut and dried flavour.

"I am so sorry," he replied, "but I fear that you make a mistake. My name is not Leopold."

She stood quite still, looking at him with the air of not having heard a word of his polite disclaimer.

"In London, of all places," she murmured. "Tell me, what does it mean?"

"I can only repeat, madam," he said, "that to my very great regret I have not the honour of your acquaintance."

She was puzzled, but absolutely unconvinced.

"You mean to deny that you are Leopold von Ra-

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gastein?" she asked incredulously. "You do not know me?"

"Madam," he answered, "it is not my great pleasure. My name is Dominey — Everard Dominey."

She seemed for a moment to be struggling with some embarrassment which approached emotion. Then she laid her fingers upon his sleeve and drew him to a more retired corner of the little apartment.

"Leopold," she whispered, "nothing can make it wrong or indiscreet for you to visit me. My address is 17, Belgrave Square. I desire to see you to-night at seven o'clock."

"But, my dear lady," Dominey began —

Her eyes suddenly glowed with a new light.

"I will not be trifled with," she insisted. "If you wish to succeed in whatever scheme you have on hand, you must not make an enemy of me. I shall expect you at seven o'clock."

She passed away from him into the restaurant. Mr. Mangan, now freed from his friends, rejoined his host, and the two men took their places at the side table to which they were ushered with many signs of attention.

"Wasn't that the Princess Eiderstrom with whom you were talking?" the solicitor asked curiously.

"A lady addressed me by mistake," Dominey explained. "She mistook me, curiously enough, for a man who used to be called my double at Oxford. Sigismund Devinter he was then, although I think he came into a title later on."

"The Princess is quite a famous personage," Mr.

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Mangan remarked, "one of the richest widows in Europe. Her husband was killed in a duel some six or seven years ago."

Dominey ordered the luncheon with care, slipping into a word or two of German once to assist the waiter, who spoke English with difficulty. His companion smiled.

"I see that you have not forgotten your languages out there in the wilds."

"I had no chance to," Dominey answered. "I spent five years on the borders of German East Africa, and I traded with some of the fellows there regularly."

"By the by," Mr. Mangan enquired, "what sort of terms are we on with the Germans out there?"

"Excellent, I should think," was the careless reply. "I never had any trouble."

"Of course," the lawyer continued, "this will all be new to you, but during the last few years Englishmen have become divided into two classes — the people who believe that the Germans wish to go to war and crush us, and those who don't."

"Then since my return the number of the 'don'ts' has been increased by one."

"I am amongst the doubtfuls myself," Mr. Mangan remarked. "All the same, I can't quite see what Germany wants with such an immense army, and why she is continually adding to her fleet."

Dominey paused for a moment to discuss the matter of a sauce with the head waiter. He returned to the subject a few minutes later on, however.

"Of course," he pointed out, "my opinions can

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only come from a study of the newspapers and from conversations with such Germans as I have met out in Africa, but so far as her army is concerned, I should have said that Russia and France were responsible for that, and the more powerful it is, the less chance of any European conflagration. Russia might at any time come to the conclusion that a war is her only salvation against a revolution, and you know the feeling in France about Alsace-Lorraine as well as I do. The Germans themselves say that there is more interest in military matters and more progress being made in Russia to-day than ever before."

"I have no doubt that you are right," agreed Mr. Mangan. "It is a matter which is being a great deal discussed just now, however. Let us speak of your personal plans. What do you intend to do for the next few weeks, say? Have you been to see any of your relatives yet?"

"Not one," Dominey replied. "I am afraid that I am not altogether keen about making advances."

Mr. Mangan coughed. "You must remember that during the period of your last residence in London," he said, "you were in a state of chronic impecuniosity. No doubt that rather affected the attitude of some of those who would otherwise have been more friendly."

"I should be perfectly content never to see one of them again," declared Dominey, with perfect truth.

"That, of course, is impossible," the lawyer protested. "You must go and see the Duchess, at any rate. She was always your champion."

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"The Duchess was always very kind to me," Dominey admitted doubtfully, "but I am afraid she was rather fed up before I left England."

Mr. Mangan smiled. He was enjoying a very excellent lunch, which it seemed hard to believe was ordered by a man just home from the wilds of Africa, and he thoroughly enjoyed talking about duchesses.

"Her Grace," he began —

"Well?"

The lawyer had paused, with his eyes glued upon the couple at a neighbouring table. He leaned across towards his companion.

"The Duchess herself, Sir Everard, just behind you, with Lord St. Omar."

"This place must certainly be the rendezvous of all the world," Dominey declared, as he held out his hand to a man who had approached their table. "Seaman, my friend, welcome! Let me introduce you to my friend and legal adviser, Mr. Mangan — Mr. Seaman."

Mr. Seaman was a short, fat man, immaculately dressed in most conventional morning attire. He was almost bald, except for a little tuft on either side, and a few long, fair hairs carefully brushed back over a shining scalp. His face was extraordinarily round except towards his chin, where it came to a point; his eyes bright and keen, his mouth the mouth of a professional humourist. He shook hands with the lawyer with an *empressement* which was scarcely English.

"Within the space of half an hour," Dominey continued, "I find a princess who desires to claim

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my acquaintance; a cousin," he dropped his voice a little, "who lunches only a few tables away, and the man of whom I have seen most during the last ten years amidst scenes a little different from these, eh, Seaman?"

Seaman accepted the chair which the waiter had brought and sat down. The lawyer was immediately interested.

"Do I understand, then," he asked, addressing the newcomer, "that you knew Sir Everard in Africa?"

Seaman beamed. "Knew him?" he repeated, and with the first words of his speech the fact of his foreign nationality was established. "There was no one of whom I knew so much. We did business together — a great deal of business — and when we were not partners, Sir Everard generally got the best of it."

Dominey laughed. "Luck generally comes to a man either early or late in life. My luck came late. I think, Seaman, that you must have been my mascot. Nothing went wrong with me during the years that we did business together."

Seaman was a little excited. He brushed upright with the palm of his hand one of those little tufts of hair left on the side of his head, and he laid his plump fingers upon the lawyer's shoulder.

"Mr. Mangan," he said, "you listen to me. I sell this man the controlling interests in a mine, shares which I have held for four and a half years and never drew a penny dividend. I sell them to him, I say, at par. Well, I need the money and it seems to me that I had given the shares a fair chance. Within five weeks — five weeks, sir," he repeated, struggling to

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attune his voice to his civilised surroundings, "those shares had gone from par to fourteen and a half. To-day they stand at twenty. He gave me five thousand pounds for those shares. To-day he could walk into your stock market and sell them for one hundred thousand. That is the way money is made in Africa, Mr. Mangan, where innocents like me are to be found every day."

Dominey poured out a glass of wine and passed it to their visitor.

"Come," he said, "we all have our ups and downs. Africa owes you nothing, Seaman."

"I have done well in my small way," Seaman admitted, fingering the stem of his wineglass, "but where I have had to plod, Sir Everard here has stood and commanded fate to pour her treasures into his lap."

The lawyer was listening with a curious interest and pleasure to this half bantering conversation. He found an opportunity now to intervene.

"So you two were really friends in Africa?" he remarked, with a queer and almost inexplicable sense of relief.

"If Sir Everard permits our association to be so called," Seaman replied. "We have done business together in the great cities — in Johannesburg and Pretoria, in Kimberley and Cape Town — and we have prospected together in the wild places. We have trekked the veldt and been lost to the world for many months at a time. We have seen the real wonders of Africa together, as well as her tawdry civilisation."

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"And you, too," Mr. Mangan asked, "have you retired?"

Seaman's smile was almost beatific.

"The same deal," he said, "which brought Sir Everard's fortune to wonderful figures brought me that modest sum which I had sworn to reach before I returned to England. It is true. I have retired from money-making. It is now that I take up again my real life's work."

"If you are going to talk about your hobby," Dominey observed, "you had better order them to serve your lunch here."

"I had finished my lunch before you came in," his friend replied. "I drink another glass of wine with you, perhaps. Afterwards a liqueur — who can say? In this climate one is favoured, one can drink freely. Sir Everard and I, Mr. Mangan, have been in places where thirst is a thing to be struggled against, where for months a little weak brandy and water was our chief dissipation."

"Tell us about this hobby?" the lawyer enquired.

Dominey intervened promptly. "I protest. If he begins to talk of that, he'll be here all the afternoon."

Seaman held out his hands and rolled his head from side to side.

"But I am not so unreasonable," he objected. "Just one word — so? Very well, then," he proceeded quickly, with the air of one fearing interruption. "This must be clear to you, Mr. Mangan. I am a German by birth, naturalised in England for the sake of my business, loving Germany, grateful to England. One third of my life I have lived in Berlin,

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one third at Forest Hill here in London, and in the city, one third in Africa. I have watched the growth of commercial rivalries and jealousies between the two nations. There is no need for them. They might lead to worse things. I would brush them all away. My aim is to encourage a league for the promotion of more cordial social and business relations between the people of Great Britain and the people of the German Empire. There! Have I wasted much of your time? Can I not speak of my hobby without a flood of words?"

"Conciseness itself," Mangan admitted, "and I compliment you most heartily upon your scheme. If you can get the right people into it, it should prove a most valuable society."

"In Germany I have the right people. All Germans who live for their country and feel for their country loathe the thought of war. We want peace, we want friends, and, to speak as man to man," he concluded, tapping the lawyer upon the coat sleeve, "England is our best customer."

"I wish one could believe," the latter remarked, "that yours was the popular voice in your country."

Seaman rose reluctantly to his feet.

"At half-past two," he announced, glancing at his watch, "I have an appointment with a woollen manufacturer from Bradford. I hope to get him to join my council."

He bowed ceremoniously to the lawyer, nodded to Dominey with the familiarity of an old friend, and made his bustling, good-humoured way out of the room.

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"A sound business man, I should think," was the former's comment. "I wish him luck with his League. You yourself, Sir Everard, will need to develop some new interests. Why not politics?"

"I really expect to find life a little difficult at first," admitted Dominey, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I have lost many of the tastes of my youth, and I am very much afraid that my friends over here will call me colonial. I can't fancy myself doing nothing down in Norfolk all the rest of my days. Perhaps I shall go into Parliament."

"You must forgive my saying," his companion declared impulsively, "that I never knew ten years make such a difference in a man in my life."

"The colonies," Dominey pronounced, "are a kill or cure sort of business. You either take your drubbing and come out a stronger man, or you go under. I had the very narrowest escape from going under myself, but I just pulled together in time. To-day I wouldn't have been without my hard times for anything in the world."

"If you will permit me," Mr. Mangan said, with an inherited pomposity, "on this our first meeting under the new conditions, I should like to offer you my hearty congratulations, not only upon what you have accomplished but upon what you have become."

"And also, I hope," Dominey rejoined, smiling a little seriously and with a curious glint in his eyes, "upon what I may yet accomplish."

The Duchess and her companion had risen to their feet, and the former, on her way out, recognising her solicitor, paused graciously.

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"How do you do, Mr. Mangan?" she said. "I hope you are looking after those troublesome tenants of mine in Leicestershire?"

"We shall make our report in due course, Duchess," Mangan assured her. "Will you permit me," he added, "to bring back to your memory a relative who has just returned from abroad — Sir Everard Dominey?"

Dominey had risen to his feet a moment previously and now extended his hand. The Duchess, who was a tall, graceful woman, with masses of fair hair only faintly interspersed with grey, very fine brown eyes, the complexion of a girl, and, to quote her own confession, the manners of a kitchen maid, stared at him for a moment without any response.

"Sir Everard Dominey?" she repeated. "Everard? Ridiculous!"

Dominey's extended hand was at once withdrawn, and the tentative smile faded from his lips. The lawyer plunged into the breach.

"I can assure your Grace," he insisted earnestly, "that there is no doubt whatever about Sir Everard's identity. He only returned from Africa during the last few days."

The Duchess's incredulity remained, wholly good-natured but ministered to by her natural obstinacy.

"I simply cannot bring myself to believe it," she declared. "Come, I'll challenge you. When did we meet last?"

"At Worcester House," was the prompt reply. "I came to say good-bye to you."

The Duchess was a little staggered. Her eyes

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softened, a faint smile played at the corners of her lips. She was suddenly a very attractive looking woman.

"You came to say good-bye," she repeated, "and?"

"I am to take that as a challenge?" Dominey asked, standing very upright and looking her in the eyes.

"As you will."

"You were a little kinder to me," he continued, "than you are to-day. You gave me — this," he added, drawing a small picture from his pocketbook, "and you permitted —"

"For heaven's sake, put that thing away," she cried, "and don't say another word! There's my grown-up nephew, St. Omar, paying his bill almost within earshot. Come and see me at half-past three this afternoon, and don't be a minute late. And, St. Omar," she went on, turning to the young man who stood now by her side, "this is a connection of yours — Sir Everard Dominey. He is a terrible person, but do shake hands with him and come along. I am half an hour late for my dressmaker already."

Lord St. Omar chuckled vaguely, then shook hands with his new-found relative, nodded affably to the lawyer and followed his aunt out of the room. Mangan's expression was beatific.

"Sir Everard," he exclaimed, "God bless you! If ever a woman got what she deserved! I've seen a duchess blush — first time in my life!"

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CHAPTER V

Worcester House was one of those semi-palatial residences set down apparently for no reason whatever in the middle of Regent's Park. It had been acquired by a former duke at the instigation of the Regent, who was his intimate friend, and retained by later generations in mute protest against the disfiguring edifices which had made a millionaire's highway of Park Lane. Dominey, who was first scrutinised by an individual in buff waistcoat and silk hat at the porter's lodge, was interviewed by a major-domo in the great stone hall, conducted through an extraordinarily Victorian drawing-room by another myrmidon in a buff waistcoat, and finally ushered into a tiny little boudoir leading out of a larger apartment and terminating in a conservatory filled with sweet-smelling exotics. The Duchess, who was reclining in an easy-chair, held out her hand, which her visitor raised to his lips. She motioned him to a seat by her side and once more scrutinised him with unabashed intentness.

"There's something wrong about you, you know," she declared.

"That seems very unfortunate," he rejoined, "when I return to find you wholly unchanged."

"Not bad," she remarked critically. "All the

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same, I have changed. I am not in the least in love with you any longer."

"It was the fear of that change in you," he sighed, "which kept me for so long in the furthest corners of the world."

She looked at him with a severity which was obviously assumed.

"Look here," she said, "it is better for us to have a perfectly clear understanding upon one point. I know the exact position of your affairs, and I know, too, that the two hundred a year which your lawyer has been sending out to you came partly out of a few old trees and partly out of his own pocket. How you are going to live over here I cannot imagine, but it isn't the least use expecting Henry to do a thing for you. The poor man has scarcely enough pocket money to pay his travelling expenses when he goes lecturing."

"Lecturing?" Dominey repeated. "What's happened to poor Henry?"

"My husband is an exceedingly conscientious man," was the dignified reply. "He goes from town to town with Lord Roberts and a secretary, lecturing on national defence."

"Dear Henry was always a little cranky, wasn't he?" Dominey observed. "Let me put your mind at rest on that other matter, though, Caroline. I can assure you that I have come back to England not to borrow money but to spend it."

His cousin shook her head mournfully. "And a few minutes ago I was nearly observing that you had lost your sense of humour!"

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"I am in earnest," he persisted. "Africa has turned out to be my Eldorado. Quite unexpectedly, I must admit, I came in for a considerable sum of money towards the end of my stay there. I am paying off the mortgages at Dominey at once, and I want Henry to jot down on paper at once those few amounts he was good enough to lend me in the old days."

Caroline, Duchess of Worcester, sat perfectly still for a moment with her mouth open, a condition which was entirely natural but unbecoming.

"And you mean to tell me that you really are Everard Dominey?" she exclaimed.

"The weight of evidence is rather that way," he murmured.

He moved his chair deliberately a little nearer, took her hand and raised it to his lips. Her face was perilously near to his. She drew a little back — not too abruptly.

"My dear Everard," she whispered, "Henry is in the house! Besides — Yes, I suppose you must be Everard. Just now there was something in your eyes exactly like his. But you are so stiff. Have you been drilling out there or anything?"

He shook his head.

"One spends half one's time in the saddle."

"And you are really well off?" she asked again wonderingly.

"If I had stayed there another year," he replied, "and been able to marry a Dutch Jewess, I should have qualified for Park Lane."

She sighed.

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"It's too wonderful. Henry will love having his money back."

"And you?"

She looked positively distressed.

"You've lost all your manners," she complained. "You make love like a garden rake. You should have leaned towards me with a quiver in your voice when you said those last two words, and instead of that you look as though you were sitting at attention, with a positive glint of steel in your eyes."

"One sees a woman once in a blue moon out there," he pleaded.

She shook her head. "You've changed. It was a sixth sense with you to make love in exactly the right tone, to say exactly the right thing in the right manner."

"I shall pick it up," he declared hopefully, "with a little assistance."

She made a little grimace.

"You won't want an old woman like me to assist you, Everard. You'll have the town at your feet. You'll be able to frivol with musical comedy, flirt with our married beauties, or — I'm sorry, Everard. I forgot."

"You forgot what?" he asked steadfastly.

"I forgot the tragedy which finally drove you abroad. I forgot your marriage. Is there any change in your wife?"

"Not much, I am afraid."

"And Mr. Mangan — he thinks that you are safe over here?"

"Perfectly."

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She looked at him earnestly. Perhaps she had never admitted, even to herself, how fond she had been of this scapegrace cousin.

"You'll find that no one will have a word to say against you," she told him, "now that you are wealthy and regenerate. They'll forget everything you want them to. When will you come and dine here and meet all your relatives?"

"Whenever you are kind enough to ask me," he answered. "I thought of going down to Dominey to-morrow."

She looked at him with a new thing in her eyes — something of fear, something, too, of admiration.

"But — your wife?"

"She is there, I believe," he said. "I cannot help it. I have been an exile from my home long enough."

"Don't go," she begged suddenly. "Why not be brave and have her removed. I know how tender-hearted you are, but you have your future and your career to consider. For her sake, too, you ought not to give her the opportunity —"

Dominey could never make up his mind whether the interruption which came at that moment was welcome or otherwise. Caroline suddenly broke off in her speech and glanced warningly towards the larger room. A tall, grey-haired man, dressed in old-fashioned clothes and wearing a pince-nez, had lifted the curtains. He addressed the Duchess in a thin, reedy voice.

"My dear Caroline," he began,—"ah, you must forgive me. I did not know that you were engaged. We will not stay, but I should like to present to you

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a young friend of mine who is going to help me at the meeting this evening."

"Do bring him in," his wife replied, her voice once more attuned to its usual drawl. "And I have a surprise for you too, Henry — a very great surprise, I think you will find it!"

Dominey rose to his feet — a tall, commanding figure — and stood waiting the approach of the newcomer. The Duke advanced, looking at him enquiringly. A young man, very obviously a soldier in mufti, was hovering in the background.

"I must plead guilty to the surprise," the Duke confessed courteously. "There is something exceedingly familiar about your face, sir, but I cannot remember having had the privilege of meeting you."

"You see," Caroline observed, "I am not the only one, Everard, who did not accept you upon a glance. This is Everard Dominey, Henry, returned from foreign exile and regenerated in every sense of the word."

"How do you do?" Dominey said, holding out his hand. "I seem to be rather a surprise to every one, but I hope you haven't quite forgotten me."

"God bless my soul!" the Duke exclaimed. "You don't mean to say that you're really Everard Dominey?"

"I am he, beyond a doubt," was the calm assurance.

"Most amazing!" the Duke declared, as he shook hands. "Most amazing! I never saw such a change in my life. Yes, yes, I see — same complexion, of course — nose and eyes — yes, yes! But you seem

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taller, and you carry yourself like a soldier. Dear, dear me! Africa has done wonderfully by you. Delighted, my dear Everard! Delighted!"

"You'll be more delighted still when you hear the rest of the news," his wife remarked drily. "In the meantime, do present your friend."

"Precisely so," the Duke acquiesced, turning to the young man in the background. "Most sorry, my dear Captain Bartram. The unexpected return of a connection of my wife must be my apology for this lapse of manners. Let me present you to the Duchess. Captain Bartram is just back from Germany, my dear, and is an enthusiastic supporter of our cause.— Sir Everard Dominey."

Caroline shook hands kindly with her husband's protégé, and Dominey exchanged a solemn handshake with him.

"You, too, are one of those, then, Captain Bartram, who are convinced that Germany has evil designs upon us?" the former said, smiling.

"I have just returned from Germany after twelve months' stay there," the young soldier replied. "I went with an open mind. I have come back convinced that we shall be at war with Germany within a couple of years."

The Duke nodded vigorously.

"Our young friend is right," he declared. "Three times a week for many months I have been drumming the fact into the handful of wooden-headed Englishmen who have deigned to come to our meetings. I have made myself a nuisance to the House of Lords and the Press. It is a terrible thing

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to realise how hard it is to make an Englishman reflect, so long as he is making money and having a good time.— You are just back from Africa, Everard?"

"Within a week, sir."

"Did you see anything of the Germans out there? Were you anywhere near their Colony?"

"I have been in touch with them for some years," Dominey replied.

"Most interesting!" his questioner exclaimed. "You may be of service to us, Everard. You may, indeed! Now tell me, isn't it true that they have secret agents out there, trying to provoke unsettlement and disquiet amongst the Boers? Isn't it true that they apprehend a war with England before very long and are determined to stir up the Colony against us?"

"I am very sorry," Dominey replied, "but I am not a politician in any shape or form. All the Germans whom I have met out there seem a most peaceable race of men, and there doesn't seem to be the slightest discontent amongst the Boers or any one else."

The Duke's face fell. "This is very surprising."

"The only people who seem to have any cause for discontent," Dominey continued, "are the English settlers. I didn't commence to do any good myself there till a few years ago, but I have heard some queer stories about the way our own people were treated after the war."

"What you say about South Africa, Sir Everard," the young soldier remarked, "is naturally interest-

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ing, but I am bound to say that it is in direct opposition to all I have heard."

"And I," the Duke echoed fervently.

"I have lived there for the last eleven years," Dominey continued, "and although I spent the earlier part of that time trekking after big game, lately I am bound to confess that every thought and energy I possess have been centered upon money-making. For that reason, perhaps, my observations may have been at fault. I shall claim the privilege of coming to one of your first meetings, Duke, and of trying to understand this question."

His august connection blinked at him a little curiously for a moment behind his glasses.

"My dear Everard," he said, "forgive my remarking it, but I find you more changed than I could have believed possible."

"Everard is changed in more ways than one," his wife observed, with faint irony.

Dominey, who had risen to leave, bent over her hand.

"What about my dinner party, sir?" she added.

"As soon as I return from Norfolk," he replied.

"Dominey Hall will really find you?" she asked a little curiously.

"Most certainly!"

There was again that little flutter of fear in her eyes, followed by a momentary flash of admiration. Dominey shook hands gravely with his host and nodded to Bartram. The servant whom the Duchess had summoned stood holding the curtains on one side.

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"I shall hope to see you again shortly, Duke," Dominey said, as he completed his leave-taking. "There is a little matter of business to be adjusted between us. You will probably hear from Mr. Mangan in a day or two."

The Duke gazed after the retreating figure of this very amazing visitor. When the curtains had fallen he turned to his wife.

"A little matter of business," he repeated. "I hope you have explained to Everard, my dear, that although, of course, we are very glad to see him back again, it is absolutely hopeless for him to look to me for any financial assistance at the present moment."

Caroline smiled.

"Everard was alluding to the money he already owes you," she explained. "He intends to repay it at once. He is also paying off the Dominey mortgages. He has apparently made a fortune in Africa."

The Duke collapsed into an easy-chair.

"Everard pay his debts?" he exclaimed. "Everard Dominey pay off the mortgages?"

"That is what I understand," his wife acquiesced.

The Duke clutched at the last refuge of a weak but obstinate man. His mouth came together like a rat-trap.

"There's something wrong about it somewhere," he declared.

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CHAPTER VI

Dominey spent a very impatient hour that evening in his sitting-room at the Carlton, waiting for Seaman. It was not until nearly seven that the latter appeared.

"Are you aware," Dominey asked him, "that I am expected to call upon the Princess Eiderstrom at seven o'clock?"

"I have your word for it," Seaman replied, "but I see no tragedy in the situation. The Princess is a woman of sense and a woman of political insight. While I cannot recommend you to take her entirely into your confidence, I still think that a middle course can be judiciously pursued."

"Rubbish!" Dominey exclaimed. "As Leopold von Ragastein, the Princess has indisputable claims upon me and my liberty, claims which would altogether interfere with the career of Everard Dominey."

With methodical neatness, Seaman laid his hat, gloves and walking stick upon the sideboard. He then looked into the connecting bedroom, closed and fastened the door and extended himself in an easy-chair.

"Sit opposite to me, my friend," he said. "We will talk together."

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Dominey obeyed a little sullenly. His companion, however, ignored his demeanour.

"Now, my friend," he said, beating upon the palm of one hand with the forefinger of his other, "I am a man of commerce and I do things in a business way. Let us take stock of our position. Three months ago last week, we met by appointment at a certain hotel in Cape Town."

"Only three months," Dominey muttered.

"We were unknown to one another," Seaman continued. "I had only heard of the Baron von Ragastein as a devoted German citizen and patriot, engaged in an important enterprise in East Africa by special intercession of the Kaiser, on account of a certain unfortunate happening in Hungary."

"I killed a man in a duel," Dominey said slowly, with his eyes fixed upon his companion's. "It was not an unforgivable act."

"There are duels and duels. A fight between two young men, in defence of the honour of or to gain the favour of a young lady in their own station of life, has never been against the conventions of the Court. On the other hand, to become the lover of the wife of one of the greatest nobles in Hungary, and to secure possession by killing the husband in the duel which his honour makes a necessity is looked upon very differently."

"I had no wish to kill the Prince," Dominey protested, "nor was it at my desire that we met at all. The Prince fought like a madman and slipped, after a wild lunge, on to the point of my stationary sword."

"Let that pass," Seaman said. "I am not of

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your order and I probably do not understand the etiquette of these matters. I simply look upon you as a culprit in the eyes of our master, and I feel that he has a right to demand from you much in the way of personal sacrifice."

"Perhaps you will tell me," Dominey demanded, "what more he would have? I have spent weary years in a godless and fever-ridden country, raising up for our arms a great troop of natives. I have undertaken other political commissions in the Colony which may bear fruit. I am to take up the work for which I was originally intended, for which I was given an English education. I am to repair to England, and, under such identity as I might assume after consultation with you at Cape Town, I am to render myself so far as possible a *persona grata* in that country. I do not wait for our meeting. I see a great chance and I make use of it. I transform myself into an English country gentleman, and I think you will admit that I have done so with great success."

"All that you say is granted," Seaman agreed. "You met me at Cape Town in your new identity, and you certainly seemed to wear it wonderfully. You have made it uncommonly expensive, but we do not grudge money."

"I could not return home to a poverty-stricken domain," Dominey pointed out. "I should have held no place whatever in English social life, and I should have received no welcome from those with whom I imagine you desire me to stand well."

"Again I make no complaints," Seaman declared.

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"There is no bottom to our purse, nor any stint. Neither must there be any stint to our loyalty," he added gravely.

"In this instance," Dominey protested, "it is not a matter of loyalty. Everard Dominey cannot throw himself at the feet of the Princess Eiderstrom, well-known to be one of the most passionate women in Europe, whilst her love affair with Leopold von Ragastein is still remembered. Remember that the question of our identities might crop up any day. We were friends over here in England, at school and at college, and there are many who will still remember the likeness between us. Perfectly though I may play my part, here and there there may be doubts. These will be doubts no longer if I am to be dragged at the chariot wheels of the Princess."

Seaman was silent for a moment.

"There is reason in what you say," he admitted presently. "It is for a few months only. What is your proposition?"

"That you see the Princess in my place at once," Dominey suggested eagerly. "Point out to her that for the present, for political reasons, I am and must remain Everard Dominey, to her as to the rest of the world. Let her be content with such measure of friendship and admiration as Sir Everard Dominey might reasonably offer to a beautiful woman whom he met to-day for the first time, and I am entirely and with all my heart at her service. But let her remember that even between us two, in the solitude of her room as in the drawing-rooms where we might meet, it can be Everard Dominey only until my mis-

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sion is ended. You think, perhaps, that I lay unnecessary stress upon this. I do not. I know the Princess and I know myself."

Seaman glanced at the clock. "At what hour was your appointment?"

"It was not an appointment, it was a command," Dominey replied. "I was told to be at Belgrave Square at seven o'clock."

"I will have an understanding with the Princess," promised Seaman, as he took up his hat. "Dine with me downstairs at eight o'clock on my return."

Dominey, descending about an hour later, found his friend Seaman already established at a small, far-away table set in one of the recesses of the grill room. He was welcomed with a little wave of the hand, and cocktails were at once ordered.

"I have done your errand," Seaman announced. "Since my visit I am bound to admit that I realise a little more fully your anxiety."

"You probably had not met the Princess before?"

"I had not. I must confess that I found her a lady of somewhat overpowering temperament. I fancy, my young friend," Seaman continued, with a twitch at the corner of his lips, "that somewhere about August next year you will find your hands full."

"August next year can take care of itself," was the cool reply.

"In the meantime," Seaman continued, "the Princess understands the situation and is, I think, impressed. She will at any rate do nothing rash. You

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and she will meet within the course of the next few hours, but on reasonable terms. To proceed! As I drove back here after my interview with the Princess, I decided that it was time you made the acquaintance of the person who is chiefly responsible for your presence here."

"Terniloff?"

"Precisely! You have maintained, my young friend," Seaman went on after a brief pause, during which one waiter had brought their cocktails and another received their order for dinner, "a very discreet and laudable silence with regard to those further instructions which were promised to you immediately you should arrive in London. Those instructions will never be committed to writing. They are here."

Seaman touched his forehead and drained the remaining contents of his glass.

"My instructions are to trust you absolutely," Dominey observed, "and, until the greater events stir, to concentrate the greater part of my energies in leading the natural life of the man whose name and place I have taken."

"Quite so," Seaman acquiesced.

He glanced around the room for a moment or two, as though interested in the people. Satisfied at last that there was no chance of being overheard, he continued:

"The first idea you have to get out of your head, my dear friend, if it is there, is that you are a spy. You are nothing of the sort. You are not connected with our remarkably perfect system of es-

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pionage in the slightest degree. You are a free agent in all that you may choose to say or do. You can believe in Germany or fear her — whichever you like. You can join your cousin's husband in his crusade for National Service, or you can join me in my efforts to cement the bonds of friendship and affection between the citizens of the two countries. We really do not care in the least. Choose your own part. Live yourself thoroughly into the life of Sir Everard Dominey, Baronet, of Dominey Hall, Norfolk, and pursue exactly the course which you think Sir Everard himself would be likely to take."

"This," Dominey admitted, "is very broad-minded."

"It is common sense," was the prompt reply. "With all your ability, you could not in six months' time appreciably affect the position either way. Therefore, we choose to have you concentrate the whole of your energies upon one task and one task only. If there is anything of the spy about your mission here, it is not England or the English which are to engage your attention. We require you to concentrate wholly and entirely upon Terniloff."

Dominey was startled.

"Terniloff?" he repeated. "I expected to work with him, but —"

"Empty your mind of all preconceived ideas," Seaman enjoined. "What your duties are with regard to Terniloff will grow upon you gradually as the situation develops."

"As yet," Dominey remarked, "I have not even made his acquaintance."

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"I was on the point of telling you, earlier in our conversation, that I have made an appointment for you to see him at eleven o'clock to-night at the Embassy. You will go to him at that hour. Remember, you know nothing, you are waiting for instructions. Let speech remain with him alone. Be particularly careful not to drop him a hint of your knowledge of what is coming. You will find him absolutely satisfied with the situation, absolutely content. Take care not to disturb him. He is a missioner of peace. So are you."

"I begin to understand," Dominey said thoughtfully.

"You shall understand everything when the time comes for you to take a hand," Seaman promised, "and do not in your zeal forget, my friend, that your utility to our great cause will depend largely upon your being able to establish and maintain your position as an English gentleman. So far all has gone well?"

"Perfectly, so far as I am concerned," Dominey replied. "You must remember, though, that there is your end to keep up. Berlin will be receiving frantic messages from East Africa as to my disappearance. Not even my immediate associates were in the secret."

"That is all understood," Seaman assured his companion. "A little doctor named Schmidt has spent many marks of the Government money in frantic cables. You must have endeared yourself to him."

"He was a very faithful associate."

"He has been a very troublesome friend. It

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seems that the natives got their stories rather mixed up concerning your namesake, who apparently died in the bush, and Schmidt continually emphasised your promise to let him hear from Cape Town. However, all this has been dealt with satisfactorily. The only real dangers are over here, and so far you seem to have encountered the principal ones."

"I have at any rate been accepted," Dominey declared, "by my nearest living relative, and incidentally I have discovered the one far-seeing person in England who knows what is in store for us."

Seaman was momentarily anxious.

"Whom do you mean?"

"The Duke of Worcester, my cousin's husband, of whom you were speaking just now."

The little man's face relaxed.

"He reminds me of the geese who saved the Capitol," he said, "a brainless man obsessed with one idea. It is queer how often these fanatics discover the truth. That reminds me," he added, taking a small memorandum book from his waistcoat pocket and glancing it through. "His Grace has a meeting to-night at the Holborn Town Hall. I shall make one of my usual interruptions."

"If he has so small a following, why don't you leave him alone?" Dominey enquired.

"There are others associated with him," was the placid reply, "who are not so insignificant. Besides, when I interrupt I advertise my own little hobby."

"These — we English are strange people," Dominey remarked, glancing around the room after a brief but thoughtful pause. "We advertise and

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boast about our colossal wealth, and yet we are incapable of the slightest self-sacrifice in order to preserve it. One would have imagined that our philosophers, our historians, would warn us in irresistible terms, by unanswerable scientific deduction, of what was coming."

"My compliments to your pronouns," Seaman murmured, with a little bow. *A propos* of what you were saying, you will never make an Englishman — I beg your pardon, one of your countrymen — realise anything unpleasant. He prefers to keep his head comfortably down in the sand. But to leave generalities, when do you think of going to Norfolk?"

"Within the next few days," Dominey replied.

"I shall breathe more freely when you are securely established there," his companion declared. "Great things wait upon your complete acceptance, in the country as well as in town, as Sir Everard Dominey. You are sure that you perfectly understand your position there as regards your — er — domestic affairs?"

"I understand all that is necessary," was the somewhat stiff reply.

"All that is necessary is not enough," Seaman rejoined irritably. "I thought that you had wormed the whole story out of that drunken Englishman?"

"He told me most of it. There were just one or two points which lay beyond the limits where questioning was possible."

Seaman frowned angrily.

"In other words," he complained, "you remem-

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bered that you were a gentleman and not that you were a German."

"The Englishman of a certain order," Dominey pronounced, "even though he be degenerate, has a certain obstinacy, generally connected with one particular thing, which nothing can break. We talked together on that last night until morning; we drank wine and brandy. I tore the story of my own exile from my breast and laid it bare before him. Yet I knew all the time, as I know now, that he kept something back."

There was a brief pause. During the last few minutes a certain tension had crept in between the two men. With it, their personal characteristics seemed to have become intensified. Dominey was more than ever the aristocrat; Seaman the plebeian schemer, unabashed and desperately in earnest. He leaned presently a little way across the table. His eyes had narrowed but they were as bright as steel. His teeth were more prominent than usual.

"You should have dragged it from his throat," he insisted. "It is not your duty to nurse fine personal feelings. Heart and soul you stand pledged to great things. I cannot at this moment give you any idea what you may not mean to us after the trouble has come, if you are able to play your part still in this country as Everard Dominey of Dominey Hall. I know well enough that the sense of personal honour amongst the Prussian aristocracy is the finest in the world, and yet there is not a single man of your order who should not be prepared to lie or cheat for his country's sake. You must fall

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into line with your fellows. Once more, it is not only your task with regard to Terniloff which makes your recognition as Everard Dominey so important to us. It is the things which are to come later.—Come, enough of this subject. I know that you understand. We grow too serious. How shall you spend your evening until eleven o'clock? Remember you did not leave England an anchorite, Sir Everard. You must have your amusements. Why not try a music hall?"

"My mind is too full of other things," Dominey objected.

"Then come with me to Holborn," the little man suggested. "It will amuse you. We will part at the door, and you shall sit at the back of the hall, out of sight. You shall hear the haunting eloquence of your cousin-in-law. You shall hear him trying to warn the men and women of England of the danger awaiting them from the great and rapacious German nation. What do you say?"

"I will come," Dominey replied in spiritless fashion. "It will be better than a music hall, at any rate. I am not at all sure, Seaman, that the hardest part of my task over here will not be this necessity for self-imposed amusements."

His companion struck the table gently but impatiently with his clenched fist.

"Man, you are young!" he exclaimed. "You are like the rest of us. You carry your life in your hands. Don't nourish past griefs. Cast the memory of them away. There's nothing which narrows a man more than morbidness. You have a past which

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may sometimes bring the ghosts around you, but remember the sin was not wholly yours, and there is an atonement which in measured fashion you may commence whenever you please. I have said enough about that. Greatness and gaiety go hand in hand. There! You see, I was a philosopher before I became a professor of propaganda. Good! You smile. That is something gained, at any rate. Now we will take a taxicab to Holborn and I will show you something really humorous."

At the entrance to the town hall, the two men, at Seaman's instigation, parted, making their way inside by different doors. Dominey found a retired seat under a balcony, where he was unlikely to be recognised from the platform. Seaman, on the other hand, took up a more prominent position at the end of one of the front rows of benches. The meeting was by no means overcrowded, overenthusiastic, overanything. There were rows of empty benches, a good many young couples who seemed to have come in for shelter from the inclement night, a few sturdy, respectable-looking tradesmen who had come because it seemed to be the respectable thing to do, a few genuinely interested, and here and there, although they were decidedly in the minority, a sprinkling of enthusiasts. On the platform was the Duke, with civic dignitaries on either side of him; a distinguished soldier, a Member of Parliament, a half-dozen or so of nondescript residents from the neighbourhood, and Captain Bartram. The meeting was on the point of commencement as Dominey settled down in his corner.

First of all the Duke rose, and in a few hackneyed

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but earnest sentences introduced his young friend Captain Bartram. The latter, who sprang at once into the middle of his subject, was nervous and more than a little bitter. He explained that he had resigned his commission and was therefore free to speak his mind. He spoke of enormous military preparations in Germany and a general air of tense expectation. Against whom were these preparations? Without an earthly doubt against Germany's greatest rival, whose millions of young men, even in this hour of danger, preferred playing or watching football or cricket on Saturday afternoons to realising their duty. The conclusion of an ill-pointed but earnest speech was punctuated by the furtive entrance into the hall of a small boy selling evening newspapers, and there was a temporary diversion from any interest in the proceedings on the part of the younger portion of the audience, whilst they satisfied themselves as to the result of various Cup Ties. The Member of Parliament then descended upon them in a whirlwind of oratory and in his best House of Commons style. He spoke of black clouds and of the cold breeze that went before the coming thunderstorm. He pointed to the collapse of every great nation throughout history who had neglected the arts of self-defence. He appealed to the youth of the nation to prepare themselves to guard their womenkind, their homes, the sacred soil of their country, and at that point was interrupted by a drowsy member of the audience with stentorian lungs, who seemed just at that moment to have waked up.

"What about the Navy, guv'nor?"

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The orator swept upon the interrupter in his famous platform manner. The Navy, he declared, could be trusted at all times to do its duty, but it could not fight on sea and land. Would the young man who had just interrupted do his, and enrol his name for drill and national service that evening? — and so on. The distinguished soldier, who was suffering from a cold, fired off a few husky sentences only, to the tune of rounds of applause. The proceedings were wound up by the Duke, who was obviously, with the exception of the distinguished soldier, much more in earnest than any of them, and secured upon the whole a respectful attention. He brought in a few historical allusions, pleaded for a greater spirit of earnestness and citizenship amongst the men of the country, appealed even to the women to develop their sense of responsibility, and sat down amidst a little burst of quite enthusiastic applause.— The vote of thanks to the chairman was on the point of being proposed when Mr. Seaman, standing up in his place, appealed to the chairman for permission to say a few words. The Duke, who had had some experience with Mr. Seaman before, looked at him severely, but the smile with which Mr. Seaman looked around upon the audience was so good-natured and attractive, that he had no alternative but to assent. Seaman scrambled up the steps on to the platform, coughed apologetically, bowed to the Duke, and took possession of the meeting. After a word or two of compliment to the chairman, he made his confession. He was a German citizen — he was indeed one of that bloodthirsty race.

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(Some laughter.) He was also, and it was his excuse for standing there, the founder and secretary of a league, doubtless well known to them, a league for promoting more friendly relations between the business men of Germany and England. Some of the remarks which he had heard that evening had pained him deeply. Business often took him to Germany, and as a German he would be doing less than his duty if he did not stand up there and tell them that the average German loved the Englishman like a brother, that the object of his life was to come into greater kinship with him, that Germany, even at that moment, was standing with hand outstretched to her relatives across the North Sea, begging for a deeper sympathy, begging for a larger understanding. (Applause from the audience, murmurs of dissent from the platform.) And as to those military preparations of which they had heard so much (with a severe glance at Captain Bartram), let them glance for one moment at the frontiers of Germany, let them realise that eastwards Germany was being continually pressed by an ancient and historic foe of enormous strength. He would not waste their time telling them of the political difficulties which Germany had had to face during the last generation. He would simply tell them this great truth,— the foe for whom Germany was obliged to make these great military preparations was Russia. If ever they were used it would be against Russia, and at Russia's instigation.— In his humble way he was striving for the betterment of relations between the dearly beloved country of his birth and the equally beloved country

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of his adoption. Such meetings as these, instituted, as it seemed to him, for the propagation of unfair and unjustified suspicions, were one of the greatest difficulties in his way. He could not for a moment doubt that these gentlemen upon the platform were patriots. They would prove it more profitably, both to themselves and their country, if they abandoned their present prejudiced and harmful campaign and became patrons of his Society.

Seaman's little bow to the chairman was good-humoured, tolerant, a little wistful. The Duke's few words, prefaced by an indignant protest against the intrusion of a German propagandist into an English patriotic meeting, did nothing to undo the effect produced by this undesired stranger. When the meeting broke up, it was doubtful whether a single adherent had been gained to the cause of National Service. The Duke went home full of wrath, and Seaman chuckled with genuine merriment as he stepped into the taxi which Dominey had secured, at the corner of the street.

"I promised you entertainment," he observed. "Confess that I have kept my word."

Dominey smiled enigmatically. "You certainly succeeded in making fools of a number of respectable and well-meaning men."

"The miracle of it extends further," Seaman agreed. "To-night, in its small way, is a supreme example of the transcendental follies of democracy. England is being slowly choked and strangled with too much liberty. She is like a child being overfed with jam. Imagine, in our dear country, an

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Englishman being allowed to mount the platform and spout, undisturbed, English propaganda in deadly opposition to German interests. The so-called liberty of the Englishman is like the cuckoo in his political nest. Countries must be governed. They cannot govern themselves. The time of war will prove all that."

"Yet in any great crisis of a nation's history," Dominey queried, "surely there is safety in a multitude of counsellors?"

"There would be always a multitude of counsellors," Seaman replied, "in Germany as in England. The trouble for this country is that they would be all expressed publicly and in the press, each view would have its adherents, and the Government be split up into factions. In Germany, the real destinies of the country are decided in secret. There are counsellors there, too, earnest and wise counsellors, but no one knows their varying views. All that one learns is the result, spoken through the lips of the Kaiser, spoken once and for all."

Dominey was showing signs of a rare interest in his companion's conversation. His eyes were bright, his usually impassive features seemed to have become more mobile and strained. He laid his hand on Seaman's arm.

"Listen," he said, "we are in London, alone in a taxicab, secure against any possible eavesdropping. You preach the advantage of our Kaiser-led country. Do you really believe that the Kaiser is the man for the task which is coming?"

Seaman's narrow eyes glittered. He looked at

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his companion in satisfaction. His forehead was puckered, his eternal smile gone. He was the man of intellect.

"So you are waking up from the lethargy of Africa, my friend!" he exclaimed. "You are beginning to think. As you ask me, so shall I answer. The Kaiser is a vain, bombastic dreamer, the greatest egotist who ever lived, with a diseased personality, a ceaseless craving for the limelight. But he has also the genius for government. I mean this: he is a splendid medium for the expression of the brain power of his counsellors. Their words will pass through his personality, and he will believe them his. What is more, they will sound like his. He will see himself the knight in shining armour. All Europe will bow down before this self-imagined Cæsar, and no one except we who are behind will realise the ass's head. There is no one else in this world whom I have ever met so well fitted to lead our great nation on to the destiny she deserves.— And now, my friend, to-morrow, if you like, we will speak of these matters again. To-night, you have other things to think about. You are going into the great places where I never penetrate. You have an hour to change and prepare. At eleven o'clock the Prince von Terniloff will expect you."

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CHAPTER VII

There had been a dinner party and a very small reception afterwards at the great Embassy in Carlton House Terrace. The Ambassador, Prince Terniloff, was bidding farewell to his wife's cousin, the Princess Eiderstrom, the last of his guests. She drew him on one side for a moment.

"Your Excellency," she said, "I have been hoping for a word with you all the evening."

"And I with you, dear Stephanie," he answered. "It is very early. Let us sit down for a moment."

He led her towards a settee but she shook her head.

"You have an appointment at half-past eleven," she said. "I wish you to keep it."

"You know, then?"

"I lunched to-day at the Carlton grill room. In the reception-room I came face to face with Leopold von Ragastein."

The Ambassador made no remark. It seemed to be his wish to hear first all that his companion had to say. After a moment's pause she continued:

"I spoke to him, and he denied himself. To me! I think that those were the most terrible seconds of my life. I have never suffered more. I shall never suffer so much again."

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