BANNER SERIAL FICTION

She Painted Her Face

A story of love and intrigue . . . by **DORNFORD YATES**

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CHAPTER VIII—Continued

—16—

"Ah, Richard," she said. "And John Herrick, I'm glad to see you again."

We went to her side at once, and she gave us her hand to be kissed—and then, but not until then, Elizabeth left the car.

The Count was not there to greet her. (He was in fact attempting without success to present 'my nephew, Percy' to the Duchess of Whelp.)

The reception was over, and we were alone in the hall, when, as though from nowhere, a maid appeared at our side.

"Her ladyship begs that you will take tea in her suite."

"At once?" said Herrick, rising.

"At once, sir. If you follow me, I will show you the way."

She waited for me to rise, and then, with a delicate deference, took the lead.

Her demeanor was point-device: her appearance, beyond reproach: she breathed efficiency. She was dark and by no means ill-favored, and I would have said discreet, but for a curious expression about her lips—Leonardo da Vinci could have caught it, for the woman was not smiling, and yet the smile was there.

I followed her thoughtfully, because I knew who she was. And that was Elsa—Elizabeth's personal maid.

She led us the way we had gone some 45 minutes before—that is, by the staircase-turret Elizabeth always used; and, as we went, I paid what attention I could to the doors which shut the turret from the rest of the house. Of these there were three—one which gave to a lobby upon the ground-floor, one which gave to the picture-gallery upon the first floor, and one which opened directly into Elizabeth's bedroom upon the second floor. These doors, which were small but massive, could be neither bolted nor barred, but below each old-fashioned latch was a good Yale lock. The bolts of these locks were not shot, but were at present held back by catches within the locks: but, once the catches were down, none could have passed the doors unless they had been admitted or possessed the appropriate key. (I have made it clear before now that the turret had also a door which gave to the terrace without, that this door had a Yale lock, but could also be barred.) All the locks were within the turret, except the last: and that was in Elizabeth's bedroom.

Her sitting-room door was open, and as we entered the bedroom, I heard Elizabeth's voice.

"I have said that, because of my fall, I cannot remember what happened for several hours: that, after that, I was cared for by people I did not know and that, by their advice, I sught the Duchess of Whelp. I may say that these people knew you and that, though they had not been engaged to, er, care for my health, nobody could have been kinder—or more insistent that I should not return to Brief."

"If you think," said Virgil, as I walked into the room . . .

Elizabeth turned and smiled.

"Do sit down," she said. "The inquest is nearly done."

In some agitation, the Count of Brief got to his feet, and Percy surveyed us with murder in both his eyes.

" 'If you think,' you were saying," said Elizabeth.

"Thank you," said Percy, calmly. "If you think you can get away with a tale like that—"

"D'you mind getting out of this room?"

There was a pregnant silence.

Then I walked to the door to the landing and opened it wide.

The Count of Brief glanced at his watch.

"My God, I'm late," he said, and fairly ran out of the room.

" 'Adjourned,' not 'done,' " said Percy, and with that, he turned on his heel and followed the other out.

As I shut the door—

" 'Such men are dangerous,' " said Herrick, and put on Elizabeth's hat . . .

For a quarter of an hour we talked. Then she and I left for the stables, and Herrick went to the tower. But long before then, my inventory was complete. The door to the landing had a Yale lock, but no bars.

There was no mark upon Caesar, and if his legs had been tender, he now was perfectly sound. The grooms had noticed nothing when he came in. Two other good-looking hunters were each let out of his box, and Elizabeth bade me choose one "for tomorrow at seven o'clock." And then she gave her orders, and we went down the garden and up to the belvedere.

There was that about her which turned this into a bower.

Sitting sideways, half on and half off the gray of the parapet, backed by the living green of the jealous boughs, a stave of the evening sunshine touching her lovely hair, she seemed to have found her true setting for the very first time.

I found myself the youth that was seeking his fortune, to whom the princess was gracious—because the great tradition must be observed.

"How d'you do, Richard Exon?"

I took her hand and kissed it.

"The better for seeing you."

"Does that mean that you have missed me?"

"Yes," said I. "At every hour of the day."

Elizabeth nodded contentedly.

"I like to hear you say it," she said . . .

I wrenched my mind from her beauty to other things.

"Was that Elsa who fetched us?" I said.

"It was."

"Are you sure of her? I'm not mad about her, myself."

Elizabeth laughed.

"My dear, you see a robber in every bush. Elsa is a maid in a thousand—and true as steel."

"I'm Glad to See You."

"Is she going to sleep in your suite?"

She nodded.

"By your request."

"I—I didn't specify Elsa," said I, uneasily.

Elizabeth knitted her brows.

"Richard, be reasonable. You've seen her for less than two minutes: and I have known her well for nearly four years. And if anyone is to sleep there, it must be she. If I were to choose someone else, I might as well say to Elsa 'I don't trust you.' "

"Yes, I see that," I sighed. "All the same, you will lock your doors?"

"All five," said Elizabeth.

"Where are the keys?"

"There's only the one you know—the one you brought me on Friday, with the rest of my things. That's a master key and fits all five of the locks."

There was a little silence.

Then—

"I wish we were at Raven," I said—and spoke as I thought.

"I wish I'd been there, with you both," she replied. "And all the time I was here, being waited on hand and foot. And sometimes you went hungry, whilst I was being fed by a chef who gets five hundred a year." She stood up there, and took my lapels in her hands. "I owe you money, don't I?"

"I suppose you do," said I, "but it's not worth talking about."

"Well, I'm not going to pay it back. I'm proud to be in your debt. I'd like everyone to know it. What I really owe you can't be reduced to pounds: if it could, I could never pay it—and you know that as well as I. But this I can pay: but I won't. I asked you to lend me money, and now I won't pay you back. You've piled such mountains between us that let this lift up its head—a sordid little mole-hill of 40 p-paper pounds."

Before this outburst, I stood like a man transfixed, with the breath of her lips on my face, and her eyes, two pools of starlight, reflecting a tiny image I knew was mine.

So for one hungry moment . . .

Then she clapped her hands to her face and burst into tears.

I would like to be shown the man that would not have gathered her weeping into his arms—and have done his poor best to comfort such beauty in such distress. And for me her hairs were numbered . . .

Be that as it may, I know she was in my arms, and the world was rocking about me, and stars that I could not see shot out of their spheres, to make another heaven.

I do not know what I said: I think I did no more than say over her name: but, after a little, she wiped the tears from her eyes and put an arm round my neck.

"D'you love me, Richard?"

"Yes," I said. "I cannot tell you how much."

"And will you always love me?"

"Always, my darling."

"And, after this, you will treat me as your equal? And not kneel down and look up, with your eyes on my face?"

"I—I will try, to, Elizabeth."

"And you will not do me honor? John Herrick may kiss my hand: but you and I—Won't you ask me if I love you, my darling?"

"I—I'm afraid to, my sweet," I faltered, and held her close. "But if Old Harry consents, I will ask you to be my wife."

The beautiful eyes grew wide.

"Since when has the Duchess of Whelp—"

"Since Friday," said I. "You have no father or mother: by doing as you have done, you have set her up in their place. For your sake, she has left her retirement and taken the field: she could do no more, if you were her only child: and you cannot take such service from such a personage, and then deny her the rights of a patroness."

"What d'you think my father would say, if he were alive?"

"I know what he'd say," said I, "if he were the Count of Brief."

Elizabeth sighed.

"You do make things hard, don't you? If you were a race-horse, my darling, you'd have to run in a hood. Still, at least I've managed to get you on to the course. And it's bound to be a walk-over—if only you don't run out."

"I'll never do that," said I.

But I did not say that, as both of us very well knew, fence we never so wisely, I must be disqualified. Instead, I stooped and kissed her exquisite mouth, and then drew her up to her feet and into my arms . . .

As though inspired by the Count of Brief's evil genius, Old Harry saw fit that evening to wear such a mask as made the blood run cold. Her right hand and her mirror, between them, had taught her terrible things. She had so painted her face that she made me think of some chieftain, arranged for war, and had tired her head with ear-rings—two monstrous, pear-shaped diamonds that dangled as lusters do, and shuddered brilliance with every movement she made.

Here let me say that the game which she played was so cunning that I was soon out of my depth: add to which that she spoke in German which I could not understand. But, since I later knew all, I will set down directly what happened, because my own reactions have nothing to do with the tale.

Old Harry had had Herrick's note. She, therefore, laid herself out to entice the Count on to the ground which Virgil had said was forbidden, three hours before. In a word, she set out to make him put a rope round his neck—a seemingly hopeless task . . . but not to the Duchess of Whelp, for she turned the rope into a garland, and, after a little, he put the pretty thing on. She handed him memories and then demanded them back; she said he must see her diary; she made the desert of danger bloom with good will; arm in arm, they wandered over its borders . . . By the time that the entree was served, the Count was most deeply committed—and Virgil, whom I was watching, could hardly sit still.

And then, without any warning, Old Harry let fly.

Above our subdued conversation, her voice rang out.

"What became of George Eliot?"

The table was round, and I was facing the Count, so I saw him well.

A servant was presenting a dish, but, because of this startling query, his master had no mind to spare and the man stood beside him unnoticed—except by everyone else.

Even at a literary luncheon, the question, so suddenly put, might well have disconcerted a wiser man: as it was, its striking irrelevance hit the Count over the heart.

He stared upon the Duchess, who had coolly returned to her plate, as though she had asked him whether his soul was saved: then he lifted his eyes to Virgil's—to read an interpretation which brought the sweat on to his face.

He shot a glance round the table, and a hand went up to his mouth . . .

Old Harry looked up from her place.

" 'What became of George Eliot?' I said."

Somehow the man made answer.

" 'George Eliot,' madam? Now let me see . . ." The Duchess stared. " 'George Eliot.' I think the edition we had—"

"Edition?" cried the Duchess. "Edition? What ever d'you mean?"

There was a painful silence.

The servant presenting the dish stood up and looked round for guidance: but Bertram, who had come to his help, was staring upon his master with saucer eyes. The latter wiped the sweat from his brow.

"My memory," he said, "is uncertain. You have revived it, madam, to some extent, but—"

"You remembered our visit to Palfrey, where the pictures were going to be sold. And your father saw one of George Eliot . . ."

Her victim leapt at the bait.

"Oh, now I have you, madam. The picture, you mean. For the moment—"

"Picture? Is one of us mad? I asked what became of George Eliot." She threw a glance round. "Is there nobody here to support me . . . when I say that that is something which Rudolf of Brief should know?" Her eyes came to rest upon Bertram. "Steward, I know your face. Were you here when I came?"

In some emotion, Bertram inclined his head.

"I was here, your Grace."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Edgar Allan Poe Born in Boarding House in Boston, Tradition Tells

Edgar Allan Poe never possessed a home in the true and accurate meaning of that word. Tradition tells that he was born in a boarding house in Boston, observes a Washington Star editorial writer. His boyhood was spent under alien roofs in Richmond and in England. Neither at the University of Virginia nor at West Point had he anything better than "quarters." Casual shelter was his lot during his wanderings between 1830 and 1836, after which latter date he was habitually a dependent guest of his aunt, the kindly Mrs. Maria Clemm, whose beautiful daughter he married at the apex of one of the most poignantly sorrowful romances in the history of literature—a story to rank with the tragedies of Abelard and Heloise and Dante and Beatrice.

Mrs. Clemm made the young couple as comfortable as she could for three years in Amity street in Baltimore. The exact address is a matter of controversy, but the approximate location has been ascertained.

But Poe himself probably would not care. His cottage at Fordham in New York keeps his name alive for tourists, and Baltimore already is famous as the custodian of his weary ashes. More important than any single spot associated with his name is the immortality of his works. Even an ordinary reader is quick to feel the undiminished power of them. The occasional student who examines them with care learns to love the man from whose tortured soul they sprang. He perished at forty, yet left in his books a monument unparalleled—perhaps the largest, the most skillfully composed, the most notably diverse and the most profoundly compelling fruit that ever a suffering spirit has produced since the art of letters began.

Putting "Col" in "Colonel"

The "col" in "colonel" has the sound of "ker" because the word in former times was spelled "coronel," having had that spelling in the French and Spanish languages at the time it was adopted into English. It was also formerly pronounced "kuronel" and "kornel," but about 1800 the present pronunciation became the standard. The "r" sound remained, although in the meantime it had become the custom to spell the word as it is now.

SOON FIND OUT

A stranger was talking to a farmer and said to him: "This seems to be a healthful country. You say you are nearly 70 and can still do a full day's work. That's pretty good."

"Yes, but my old dad, who is 97, is even a harder worker than I am," said the farmer.

"His health must be wonderfully good," remarked the stranger.

"No, it ain't," replied the farmer. "For the last several years he ain't had quite his old-time pep. Sometimes I kinda think farmin' don't agree with him."

Substitute

The teacher had forbidden the children to eat candy or chew gum during school time. One day she became suspicious of a lump in Jimmie's cheek.

"Jimmie," she said reprovingly, "are you eating candy or chewing gum?"

"Neither one," replied Jimmie, "I'm soaking a prune to eat at recess."

LET DOWN

Maiden—Can you drive with one hand, Mr. Corntossel?

Aged Suitor (eagerly)—Wall, I should say.

Maiden—Then I wish you would take your whiskers off my face.

First Round

He—Remember when we first met in that revolving door at the post office?

She—That wasn't the first time we met.

He—Yes, but it was the first time we started going around together.

Inheritance

"Billy," said his father sternly, "I want you to learn better table manners. You're a regular little pig at the table. I suppose you know what a pig is?"

Billy meekly replied: "Yes, sir; it's a hog's little boy."

In Movie Land

First Film Star—How do you like your new father?

Second Film Star—Oh, he's quite nice.

First Film Star—Yes, isn't he? We had him last year.

All Things Equal

Old Lady (as husband fails to help her up the steps of railway coach)—Henry, you ain't so gallant as when I was a gal.

Husband—No, Lettie, and you ain't so buoyant as when I was a boy.

Too True!

A girl was asked to explain why men never kiss each other, while women do. She replied:

"Men have something better to kiss; women haven't."

All Depends

Axel—Selma's husband has been a sufferer for years, hasn't he?

Tree — I don't know. How long have they been married?

No Hurry

His Pal—If you know who stole your car why don't you go after it?

Freshman—I'm just waiting for him to put on a new set of tires.

Colorful Story

Teacher — Freddy, haven't you read anything?

Freddy—Yes, teacher. I have red hair.

AGAINST THE RULES

Bunny Cop—Hey! Mr. Possum, didn't I tell you I didn't want to see you hanging around here again?

Practical Suggestion

Prospective Buyer — There are eight in my family, and we have a lot of friends.

Auto Salesman—Let me sell you this second-hand patrol wagon. It has held 20—in a pinch."

First Consideration

Miss Multiroy—I'm sorry to hurt you, but our engagement must end. I trust you will not feel too badly about it!

Lord Stonibroke—Don't think of me. Think of my creditors.

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Sentinel Features

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