

The Honor of Valdi
(Continued from page 28)

Guido stepped noiselessly back into the passage, and the door shut.

There was no change in the duke's bearing towards Valdi, during the next two days. But there was a change in Don Mario, who was restless and feverishly impatient for his accomplice to act. "Why do we wait?" he urged. "We have no time to linger."

Yet, Valdi did linger. On the second night after the duke's visit, the sleeper lying before the mirror door was awakened by someone stepping across him.

"Hush, prince," warned a strange voice, as he started up. "Make no sound until I close the passage. It is done."

The bound that brought Valdi erect was one with the movement that fitted his bronze fingers to Don Mario's throat.

"You have killed him! You! And the fault mine!" he cried, shaking the man dog-like in his passion. "Oh, I have been mad to trifle with you, to try alone to save him."

Choking, Don Mario caught at the other's wrists.

"Loose me—you would have done it—"

"Never! never! I could have killed you with a glad heart the first night you proposed treason to me. I could have joyed in sending you to the hangman any hour since. But—you said it—who would have believed my word against yours? I hoped to trap you." He flung the man violently from him. "I plan to murder Guido, who owe him life? I plot to take his place, who am his officer? Yet, through folly, I have done it."

Sent reeling against a chair, Don Mario felt his bruised throat.

"I thought you meant it," he panted. "If not, undo it."

"Undo it?"

"The poison is in the goblet beside him, he will not wake to drink of it before dawn. I will go back and empty the mixture."

The expression that came to Valdi's face was less of relief than of returning life.

"No," he refused sternly. "In the duke's room you go no more; I do not trust you. I myself will empty the goblet."

"Rufino," faltered a silver voice.

Both men turned and saw Rosario on the threshold of her chamber, a slender white figure.

Her husband crossed to her and caught her in his arms.

"Rosario, you heard?"

"A little, only a little. You guard the duke?" She looked shuddering at Don Mario.

Valdi kissed her once, then gently motioned her to go back to her room.

"Wait in there. I will come to you, Rosario."

She obeyed, keeping her shining, trustful eyes upon him until the door closed; eyes piteously courageous.

Valdi went steadily into the darkness of the hidden passage. The way was very long, with unexpected steps and turns, and when a dim light showed the end of the perilous journey, Valdi found himself dazzled.

The large, lofty chamber was faintly illuminated by a single gilded lamp suspended by chains from the ceiling. The furniture cast long shadows, the distant corners of the place were illimitable vistas of uncertainty. But Valdi saw only the table standing by the canopied bed, and a tall, shimmering goblet waiting there. Cautiously, stepping carefully on the marble floor, he advanced toward this object.

The light, even breathing of the sleeping man continued unchanged. Reassured, Valdi went on, until his fingers grasped the goblet's stem, and drew it to him. With an irrepressible sigh of relief he poured the crimson liquid on the floor, and laid the empty goblet on its side upon the table.

But as he moved to retreat, there was also a movement in the bed. A white hand darted from the brocaded curtains and closed over the hand just leaving the table.

"Wait yet a little, cousin," advised Guido's smooth, ironic tones. "Go not without a word of greeting, pray."

A strong shudder shook Valdi from head to foot, shaking also the hand clasping his. But he made no attempt to escape.

"No, my lord," he answered mechanically.

"Thank you, cousin," the hold was released. "Let us have more light."

The command was promptly obeyed. From the hidden passage issued Don Mario Russo, carrying a lamp, whose light shone strongly on his thin, triumphant face and gleaming eyes.

"You?" exclaimed Valdi, effectually aroused. "You dare come here?"

"Why, yes," the duke observed. "He dares come here. Early in the evening Don Mario came to me with warning of your present visit. Also, he told me how, since he met you at Rocca Grigia, you have not ceased to urge upon him your plan of removing me. He has reminded me of your insistence upon occupying the room where the hidden passage was said to end, of how singular and embarrassed has been your manner with me, and of the old enmity between

our houses. And, admit, your actions confirm him."

Valdi stared across at the smiling man with the lamp. What could he say to clear himself, how disprove this thing? Despair swelled in his throat, stifling speech.

"Speak," invited his judge.

"There is nothing the prince can deny," Don Mario asserted. "Why is he here, if not for evil?"

"To undo your work," retorted Valdi, with difficulty. "As you know well, double traitor. My lord, that man has already poisoned your cup. He tricked me—I tried to save you."

Don Mario laughed.

"A feeble tale," he said. "Why did the prince not tell you if the treason were mine?"

"A weak defence, truly," agreed the duke. "Have you no better, cousin?"

"It is the truth," Valdi answered hopelessly. "But I was not bred in a subtle court. I am snared. Do as you will with me, my lord."

There was a fatalistic dignity of resignation in the gesture with which he folded his arms and stood waiting, Guido lying among his tinted velvets and satins remained silent an instant before replying.

"Set down the lamp, Mario Russo," he bade. "What I am about to say, you both, no doubt, anticipate. For the man who has accepted my kindness to betray it, the officer false to his allegiance, and the friend who plots treason, I have, and can have, no pardon. There will be an execution at the palace at dawn. But because of the high names involved, it shall be secret. Prince, pray ring the bell beside you and summon the officer of my guard."

It was the master of Belfiore who had spoken; unanswerable, not to be contradicted. Valdi at once obeyed, and resumed his attitude of unresisting dignity. Better, infinitely better, for Rosario not to know until afterward.

The sharp ring of steel echoed the silver tinkle of the bell. The door opened with a flare of additional light, a glittering officer advanced three steps and saluted, his men standing rigidly behind him. Evidently he had previously received his orders, for Guido simply nodded.

"Take your prisoner," he signified.

Valdi moved forward, his chest slightly heaving. But not toward him did the soldiers advance. There was a martial stir of movement, and the circle had closed around Don Mario. Amazed, Valdi halted.

"I?" cried the prisoner shrilly. "I?"

The duke rose on his elbow, turning his brilliant, merciless face that way.

"Who else?" he demanded. "My ingenious kinsman here, perhaps? Come, the play is over, Lorenzo de Cariano. Did you think I could not find you under the name of Mario Russo, as you thought me ignorant of the hidden passages of my own palace? Grow wise. You are not the man to overthrow me. Oh, it was fairly well devised; you meant to tempt Valdi to poison me, then openly accuse him of it after my death, and, freed from us both, put your brother Paolo back as ruler of Belfiore. And when you saw I was watching you yesterday, you flung all guilt upon my too loyal cousin. You have made your throw, and lost. Take him away, Scarpi."

There was a movement backward, the officer saluted, and the room was left to silence.

"Go back to Rosario, cousin," smiled Guido, and stifled a yawn.

"My lord, how did you know?" Valdi wondered, his head reeling.

"Why did you sleep armed before the mirror door?" the other countered.

"To guard you, my lord. I feared Mario Russo."

"So I supposed when I saw you there. Moreover, if you had meant to poison me, you would have filled the goblet, not emptied it. You make a wretched defence, cousin, in a good case. Go back to Rosario. Good-night."

The door closed behind him as he entered the passage, but Valdi paid no heed. Breathless, eager, he was hastening back through the darkness—to Rosario.

THE END.

A LEAP YEAR STORY.

He sits on the sofa, from time to time opening his lips as though about to say something important, but each time hesitating. At last the fair young thing looks up at him with a radiant smile, her red lips parting deliciously over her ivory teeth and her glowing eyes thrilling him to the soul. "Obey that impulse!" she murmurs. He did, and in June she is to take him for life.

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HUMILIATION.

Sir William Howard Russell's diary for April, 1852, has this glimpse of Thackeray—"The sportsmen among whom I had the honor to be numbered were of the Winkle order: Thackeray, Dickens, John Leech, Jerrold, Lemon, Ibbotson, were invited, and carriages were reserved to Watford. As we were starting a written excuse was brought from Dickens to be conveyed to Mrs. X. by Thackeray. The party drove up to the house, and after compliments Thackeray delivered the billet. The effect was unpleasant. Mrs. X. fled along the hall, and the guests heard her calling to the cook, 'Martin, don't roast the ortolans; Mr. Dickens isn't coming.' Thackeray said he never felt so small. 'There's a test of popularity for you! No ortolans for Penderennis!'"

PART OF THE CURE.

"Need you rub so hard?" asked the little man meekly. He had ventured to test his endurance at the Turkish baths, and was soundly regretting it. First, he had been nearly suffocated, then he had been rubbed raw, and then he had been hurled into a cold bath, and now he was being rubbed raw again. Oh, how he longed for his clothes! The muscular masseur took no notice of his question, but continued to rub and chafe and punch and pummel, till his patient felt he had hardly a bone left in his body. Then the masseur raised a heavy hand and gave three sounding smacks on his bare back. "What are you doing?" asked the little man, smarting into some show of spirit at last. "That's to let them know I'm ready for the next," answered the masseur complacently. "The bell's out of order, you see, and I have to signal somehow."

ANOTHER CHANCE.

Percy Parkinson rose and brushed the dust from his knees. Then drawing himself up to his full height, he gazed resentfully upon the form of Miss Muriel Muggins, who nonchalantly fanned herself the while. "Very well, Miss Muggins," came in bitter tones from Percy. "Oh, very well! You have spurned me, it is true! Indeed, you have spurned me twice! But though despair eats my heart I shall not die! I mean to go into the busy world. I will fight! I will win! My name shall become known, and my riches shall become envied—" "Pardon me for in-

terrupting you, Mr. Parkinson," interjected Miss Muggins, "but when you shall have accomplished all that you may try me again."

LOVE LETTERS OF A HUSBAND.

Dear Jane,—Arrived here this morning G.K. It's a poor-looking town, but business is good. I'll write more next time.—Your loving husband, John.

Dear Jane,—Got here last night. Train was three hours late. No news, but business is good. Longer letter next time.—Yours as ever, John.

Dear Jane,—Sorry to hear you weren't feeling well. Hope you are better by now. Getting a good many orders here. No news, but more next time.—Lovingly, John.

Dear Jane,—Just to let you know I'm all right, though the rheumatism has been bothering me again. Got here this morning and have done a lot of business already. Nothing to write, but I'll do better next time.—With love, John.

THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH.

Under a costly canopy
The village blacksmith sits;
Before him is a touring car
Broken to little bits—
And the owner, and the chauffeur, too,
Have almost lost their wits.
The village blacksmith smiles with glee
As he lights his fat cigar—
He tells his helpers what to do
To straighten up the car—
And the owner, and the chauffeur, too,
Stand humbly where they are.

The children, going home from school,
Look in at the open door;
They like to see him make his bills
And hear the owners roar—
And the chauffeurs weep as they declare
They ne'er paid that before.
He goes each morning to the bank,
And salts away his cash;
A high silk hat and long frock coat
Help him to cut a dash—
But the owner, and the chauffeur, too,
Their teeth all vainly gnash.
The chestnut tree long since has died,
The smith does not repine;
His humble shop has grown into
A building big and fine—
And it bears "Garage" above the door
On a large electric sign.
—Chicago Evening Post.

The **Prophy-lactic** Tooth Brush
A clean tooth never decays—the Pro-phy-lac-tic keeps teeth clean