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CHAPTER XXXIII.
TRUE LOVE NEVER RUNS SMOOTH
"Haven't I?" retorted Hal, fiercely. "I've the best claim in the world! I love her, and she loves me! That's claim enough for me! Look out—whose's this coming in? Oh, George! it's the Lambtons! Go on and leave me here; I couldn't join in the cackle yet."

Jeanne hurried off, and Hal returned to the stable, to find George still at work on the harness. He looked up as Hal entered, and touching his cap, said:

"Yes, sir!"
"I didn't speak," said Hal; then he stopped and laid his hand on the man's shoulder.

"Look here, George," he said, "I want you to do something for me."
The man's eyes brightened, but he didn't speak.

"I want a message conveyed to the Princess Verona, without any one being aware of it but herself. Understand?"

"I'll do it, Master Hal," said George, with great confidence.

"How?" demanded Hal.
"No matter, sir—give me the message."

"For a letter," mused Hal.
"No, sir," said George, respectfully; "not a letter—that's dangerous—get left about or miscarries. Let it be a message, sir; I'll give it to the young lady, never fear, Master Hal."

"Right," said Hal, and the curt "right" meant volumes. "Tell her, then, that I must see her, and soon, and that I will go or come anywhere, any time, to speak a word with her. I must see her mind!"

George nodded, and tightened his lips.
"You shall have them exact words of yours, Master Hal, before we're many hours older; the exact words. Anything else, sir—anything that may show I come from you, and ain't on the other side?"

"Yes, here, take this!" said Hal, and, with a sudden flash, he drew a piece of withered camellia from some where under his waistcoat. "You are a sharp fellow, George."

"That's enough for me, Master Hal—a word from you is enough!" with a flash of the eyes; then he laid his hand on Hal's arm and drew him back! "There's the count, sir! going up to the courtyard. Now's my time, Master Hal. Go along with him, sir."

and let him see you're safe at home—go on, sir, and leave the other part to me," and, instantly resuming his usually respectful manner, he touched his cap and sauntered off.

Stounded and somewhat confused by the unexpected display of George's talent for conspiracy, Hal was wise enough to do as he was bidden, and made for the courtyard.

"Perhaps he's brought the challenge himself," he thought. "If he has, I'll fight him on the spot, if he likes, confound him!"

But once more Hal was doomed to bitter disappointment. All smiles and politeness, the count held out his hand with his courtly bow.

"I have had the unhappiness to miss Lady Ferndale's visit, and I have brought a message from the princess, who is, alas, a sufferer from that too universal ill—a nervous headache."

As he says this, he keeps his eye on Hal, with the obliged smile, and Hal—well, while longing to knock him down, he is obliged to mutter the usual courtesies.

"My sister is in the castle somewhere," he says. "I'll help you find her."

The count is profuse in his thanks, profuse to the point of gratitude, and actually slips his arm through Hal's, and so they go up to the hall to the drawing-room, whence issue the well-known voices of Maud and Georgina, both talking at once in the old—old style.

"I am intruding," says the count, hesitating at the door, but Hal leads him—almost shoves him—in and introduces him.

If anything was wanting to complete Maud and Georgina's happiness, the presence of a Russian count would supply it.

Before five minutes have elapsed the count is the center of an attentive group, literally basking in his charming manner. Mrs. Lambton has remained in her room to rest, but Mr. Lambton, in his tweed suit, and mock old English gentleman air, is amazingly polite with the count, and before five minutes have passed has given him an invitation to the park.

"You'll find us plain and homely folks, Count Mikoff, but we'll give you a hearty welcome, and try and make you comfortable. Oh, here's Mr. Vane. I mean the marquis, and how do you do, my lord? A lucky thing for us that the Lady Jeanne and Mr. Hal should run against us in that confounded tea-garden."

"Papa!" ejaculates Maud, "tea-garden?"

"Very much like one, my dear, anyhow. And how do you find yourself? You don't look quite up to the mark. Ah, nothing like old England, as I tell the count—re-mark-able man, eh?"

my lord?" he says, in a sharp whisper.
"Vane, with his grave smile, looks around, and shakes hands, glancing, as he does so, at Jeanne—Jeanne; so slim and graceful, and altogether lovely. He does not shake hands with her, but he might as consistently do so, for she is as much a stranger to him."

"A fine place this, my lord," says Mr. Lambton, looking around with awe and delight. "A regular foreign castle, something like the one in England, marquis, but what you might call heavier. And here's Mr. Fitzjames—I mean Lord Lane. How do you do?—delighted to see you, my lord."

Clarence comes in, looking anything but delighted to see his old friends; then one after another drop in, and it seems such a cloud of nobility, that Mr. Lambton gets purple with importance and self-satisfaction, and Maud and Georgina beside themselves with delight.

"Neighbors of yours, Mr. Bertram?" says the count, going up to where Hal, leaning against the window, watches the comedy in profound silence.

"Yes," says Hal.
"A charming specimen of the old English gentleman, eh?" says the count.

Hal stares.
"You're wrong for once," he says. "Mr. Lambton is a gentleman, no doubt, and English, and a jolly good fellow, but he's not what you think—although he could buy up many of the real thing."

"Rich, wealthy, eh?" says the count, smiling.
Hal nods curtly.
"Rich as Croesus," he says.
"And his family?"

"You see 'em," says Hal; "there's no more."
"In-deed," murmurs the count, with his sweetest smile. "What prizes for some fortunate compatriots!"

"Perhaps I don't go in for heiresses myself," says Hal, with red spots on his cheeks.
"The count does not take offense, although Hal's tone too plainly infers that he, the count, is a fortune-hunter; he merely shrugs his shoulders, murmurs "no," displays his wrinkles, and goes back to Maud."

CHAPTER XXXIV.
THE FAITHFUL GEORGE.
This may certainly be considered the happiest moment of Maud and Georgina's lives, to say nothing of Mr. Lambton's. In that gentleman's eyes, a lord was a being something more than human, something to make much of, to worship and to gloat over, and here they were as thick as currants in a Christmas pudding, and all as affable, as he remarked afterward, as if they were mere nobodies.

"Depend upon it, girls," he said, in the privacy of their own apartments, "the higher you go in the social scale, the more natural and simple you find 'em. It's a mistaken notion to suppose that the queen sits down to dinner every day in the crown and coronation robes, and I'm beginning to think that these swells are pretty much like everybody else!" and Mr. Lambton never made a truer or shrewder remark.

But if the Lambtons seem particularly impressed by any one of the aristocrats, it is by the count, and the count returns the compliment, his keen little grey eyes as glittering as the huge diamonds in Mr. Lambton's shirt front, and his face screwed up into a smile, bland and affable as only a Russian can be.

Hal, as he leaned against the window, watching this swell, and listening to the perfect and polished English, falling softly and slowly from the thin and carefully-rouged lips, suffered from such an intense longing to seize the little, carefully-dressed figure and fling it on to the lawn, that he was obliged to thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and keep them there by a strong effort of restraint.

Presently, before he knew it, the count had transferred his smile to himself, and, also, without his being scarcely aware of it, Hal is giving him particulars of the Lambton menage.

"Rich, is he not, your friend?" says the count, coaxing his mustache with his scented handkerchief.
"Rich as—Pluto; the richest man in the country—bar none."

"And no sons, you say?" remarks the count. "Only those charming daughters. Ah, yes, very charming! Quite examples of the amiable and cultured English."

"You think so, do you?" says Hal, pugnaciously. "All right."
"Do you mean 'yes' or 'no'?" asks the count, with a good-natured smile. "I ask pardon; my English is so imperfect."
"Oh, come," says Hal, sullenly, "you speak English like a native—and better than nine out of ten Englishmen I know, count."
"Ah, you flatter me," says his excellency, with a bow which so exasperates Hal that he is compelled to dart out of the window into the open air. The count looks after him with a smile and a little shrug of the shoulders, and returns to the ladies, among whose voices Hal hears his soft one chiming in melodiously.

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and touches his hat to Hal, as if he had not seen him before that morning. Hal follows him into the stable, where George has commenced rubbing down a horse, and gives vent to the usual impatient "Well?"

"Half-a-minute, sir," says George, rubbing away for dear life. "One of those German chaps saw me coming in and asked me where I'd been. He's coming down the yard now; let's talk about the horse, sir. Yes, he wants some beans, sir, and he shall have 'em; he's worth it, he is—make a good 'un across the country, sir—"

"The man's gone," interrupts Hal, impatiently. "Well?"

"Well, sir, I've been there—quick work, Master Hal, but I didn't want to hang about long—"

"Did you see the princess?" breaks in Hal, scarcely restraining his anxiety.

George nods with quiet satisfaction, but evidently has made up his mind to tell his story in his own way.

"First I went to the stables, and I hung about, Master Hal, a-praising the coachman's harness-polish—which is the bestest stuff—and says, quite promiscuously like: 'Is her highness been down this morning?' and he says: 'Yes, and gone half an hour ago.' This put me out, Master Hal, for I reckoned to catch her, it being just her time; and I didn't know what to do. But at that moment, while I was sitting there admiring the beastly polish, in comes the gardener, and I fell to admiring his flowers, and he was so pleased that he asked me to walk around, which we did; but I didn't notice the flowers much, Master Hal—my eyes went around like sauls in a windmill, but there wasn't a glimpse of her highness to be got. Presently the gardener looks around, too. 'If I was sure the princess wasn't about,' he says, 'I'd show you her own glass house; there's some flowers there as 'ud go your heart good, Herre Shorshe'—that's what he calls 'George,' Master Hal! Seeing nobody about, he takes me in at last; just as he closes the door, I catch sight of a lady's frock."

"The gardener, he pulls up, and tugs at me to draw me out again, but I pretend that I don't understand; and presently the princess comes slowly down the conservatory and see us."

(To be continued.)

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