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CHAPTER XXXIV.
THE FAITHFUL GEORGE.

Then it was that Vane stepped back, but too late to spare himself the sight of Clarence's eager flush, and the long, passionate kiss which he impressed on the little hand. Jeanne started and turned pale, then, without a word, hurried up the stairs, just as Vane closed his dressing-room door, and stood, pale and stern, with an anguish on his face beyond description.

Had Hal been a Frenchman, there is no doubt that he would have found some vent for his impetuous and excitement by arraying his handsome person in the most becoming toilet he possessed; but as personal adornment at any time received but scant attention at his hands, it was certainly not likely it would absorb him now. Dashing into his room, he fills the basin with cold water and plunges his head into it, rubs himself dry with a towel, as if he meant to scour off his short curls, and, after a vigorous application of two brushes, hard enough to scrub a floor with, considers that he has done sufficient. The peaceful unkempt of the vesper bells floats gently through the valley, singing a requiem for the dying sun, as Hal strides through the park which surrounds the castle. Not a human being is in sight, save the herdman slowly driving his cows to the farm on the side of the hill, and he scarcely bestows a glance upon the young Englishman as he strides across the valley.

Thinking it best to give the villa gardens a wide berth, Hal makes a detour, and as the clock strikes six, comes upon the great cedar. It is a soft, delicious evening, which valleys alone know of, wafted gently by the wind in the sweet, specious odor of the ferns; at a little distance is the tinkling of a sheep-bell and the lowing of the cows on their homeward way, and through it all comes the ripple and plash of the little babbling stream—the stream which Hal will see while memory holds her seat.

Hal is warm, for, though there was no occasion—seeing that he had all the afternoon before him—for walking fast, he has done his mile in a very few minutes, and, as he throws himself down upon the grass, for he does not know whether the companion may not be watching the grounds with a field-glass, he takes off his hat and wipes his brow, and tries to possess his soul in patience, five, ten

minutes—ten years, seemingly, pass, and he is about to groan aloud, when suddenly he hears the rustle of a dress, and, springing to his feet, sees Verona close beside him.

For a moment he is speechless; she has come, for all his expectancy, so like a vision, in her wonderful beauty, that he can do nothing else than stare, with all his honest, boyish love beaming from his dark eyes. As he does so, he notices, unconsciously, and with a pang, that she is changed somehow; by the stream these where he had nearly fallen over her, it was a child's face, a child's frank smile that had been upturned to him; now—was it because she was paler and her eyes seemed darker and deeper that she seemed older?

Hal is no analyst, no philosopher, only a love-mitten boy, and didn't know that, with his passionate kisses—the first that had ever fallen on her lips from man—he had slain the child in Verona, and had created the woman, loving, passionate and shy.

She was shy—sweetly, gravely shy, and when she held out her hand, Hal could not have plucked up courage to save his life. But he holds it tightly, though it struggles faintly for freedom, and so he stands looking at her. At last she lifts her eyes—with one swift flash from their depths that goes straight into Hal's heart—and says:

"Did you want to see me, Mr. Berrin?"

CHAPTER XXXV.
A PRETTY PLOT.

Did he wish to see her?

Had he ever wished for anything as much since his life began—

"Verona," he says, "his voice all a-quiver," as Shakespeare says, "Verona, are you angry with me because of—because of last night?"

"Angry?" and she lifts her long lashes and looks at him.

"You have been ill, are still ill?" he goes on to say, "Jeanne called today."

"I know," says Verona, softly turning away her head and revealing a profile like one of those cameos one finds in ancient jewels.

"And they told her you were ill?"

Verona looks at his flushed, eager face with a gentle sadness. "I was not ill," she says.

"I knew it!" he rejoins, drawing a long breath of relief, combined with indignation. "I knew it was a—no true. Princess—Verona—who told them to tell Jeanne that, and put her off?"

Verona looks down, silent.

Hal groans almost audibly, and, dropping her hand, leans against the tree to control himself.

"Now you are angry with me!" she sighs.

Hal turns to her eagerly, and takes her hand again.

"How can you say that?" he says. "Don't you see that I am almost out of my mind?"—and, indeed, he looks like it—"how would you feel if you loved me as I love you, if I were shut up away from you and not allowed to see you, and that in a beastly foreign place, where one doesn't know the language—and the people, instead of standing up like men to fight it out, smile and look on as if nothing was the matter?"

Verona fixes her dark eyes with a frightened, pleading look upon his handsome, flushed face.

"Verona," he goes on—"I may call you Verona, mayn't I? Tell me all, do tell me everything! I feel like a man tied hand and foot, helpless. Are they really keeping you a prisoner in—in this beastly place?"

"I don't know," she says, hesitatingly, and with a little quick shudder. "Indeed, I do not know—but I am afraid they do not like me to go out or to see any one!"

"And I am the cause," says outspoken Hal. "Who is it, the prince, your father?"

Verona shakes her head.

"The count, then?"

Silence.

"Ah!" and Hal draws a long breath; "so I thought! And what does he do that for, and are you going to submit to it? Think, Verona, a prisoner!"

She turns pale, and her lips quiver.

"I know; but what can I do? I am only a girl, a helpless woman, and—"

"And the count has some right?" says Hal, fiercely; "and if he treats you like this before, what would he do after, when he has you entirely in his power?"

Verona shrinks, and the slight shudder runs through her again.

Hal sees it; there is not an expression of her face, her eyes, her lips, that he does not note; and his face flames.

"Where is he now?" he asks.

"Dressing to go to the castle," says Verona. "Do you not know?"

"And you are not coming?" says Hal, eagerly.

She shakes her head.

"No."

He takes two or three impetuous strides, and comes back to her, his face working, his eyes afloat.

"Verona," he says, and he takes her hand and looks at her hungrily—there is no other word for it—"listen to me. Don't turn your head away; I can't see your eyes."

Verona, with a faint blush, raises her eyes and lets them droop again.

"Verona, I am only a boy; I don't know anything about the world; I'm as ignorant as a black crow, and I'm as poor as a church mouse! But, oh, Verona, I love you—I love you so well as any man could do—better, a thousand times better; and if you do not love me, if we are to part, I would rather die than live; I feel that I never could bear to live without you!"

And poor, brave Hal gives something that sounds like a sob. "Verona, my beautiful Verona, I love you!"

And, as he speaks, he draws her toward him.

Verona's face flushes, then suddenly grows pale; her lips open, her bosom heaves beneath the muslin, and, with a little cry, she droops upon his broad breast.

White-hot, not red, Hal presses her closely to him, and touches her soft brow with his lips, as reverently, although passionately, as if she were a saint.

"My darling, my Verona! Are you really mine? do you really love me?"

With an effort she raises her head and looks up at him, her eyes moist, and beaming with that look of ineffable passion which all women may feel, but only Italians can show.

"I love you," she whispers, her hand



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Hal gasps, breathless for a moment, overwhelmed by such love, and, when he speaks again, his voice is stirred and broken.

"Listen, my sweet angel; you were to marry the count. How long have you known him?"

Verona is silent for a moment.

"Ever since I can remember."

"What made you—what brought it about—I mean how came he to have the impudence to confound him—to think of such a thing?"

Verona thinks.

"I do not know. He is a great friend of papa's."

"Ah, I see," says Hal. "Your father is indebted to him, perhaps."

Verona looks up proudly.

"No!"

"Knows his secrets," says Hal.

"But that can't matter," says Hal. "He can't injure the prince here in Gasperey." Does the prince want you to marry the count?"

"I do not know; he has never said so," says Verona.

"Can't he see that the count is old enough to be your grandfather? If he doesn't want it, why doesn't he stop it?"

(To be continued)

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