

VENDETTA;

The Story of One Forgotten.

CHAPTER XXIX.—Continued.

On the last day of January I returned to Naples, after an absence of more than a month, and was welcomed back by all my numerous acquaintances with enthusiasm. The Marquis D'Aventour, had, as I have said, been the chief attraction of the Carnival, and the streets were scenes of fantastic mirth and revelry; there was music and song, dancing and masquerading, and feasting. But I withdrew from the tumult of merriment, and absorbed myself in the necessary preparations for my marriage.

CHAPTER XXX.

Looking back on the incidents of those strange feverish weeks that preceded my wedding day, they seem to me like the dreams of a dying man. Shifting colors, confused images, mists of clear light, hours of long darkness—all things, growing, rising, falling, and passing in my life like the fragments of a kaleidoscope, ever changing into new forms and bewildering patterns. My brain was clear; yet I often questioned myself whether I was not going mad—whether all the careful methodical plans I formed were but the hazy fancies of a hopeless y delirious mind. Yet to each detail of my life there was no complexity, no consistency, no possibility for that. A madman may have a method of action to a certain extent, but there is always some slight slip, some omission, some mistake which helps to discover his condition. Now I forgot nothing—I had the composed exactitude of a careful banker who balances his accounts every day after it has been regularly. I can laugh to think of all that but then—then I moved, spoke and acted like a human machine impelled by stronger forces than my own—in all things precise, in all things inflexible.

Within the week of my return from Avellino my coming marriage with the Countess Bonanni was announced, and the news spread like wildfire. I had not seen her since the morning of the duel, and his presence gave me a sort of nervous shock. He was exceedingly cordial, though I fancied he was also slightly embarrassed. After a few common-place remarks he said abruptly: "So your marriage will positively take place?"

I forced a laugh. "Ma certamente! Do you doubt it?" His handsome face clouded and his manner grew still more constrained.

"No; but I ought to have hoped—" "Non che," I said, "I perfectly understand to what you allude. But men of the world are not fastidious, we know better than to pay any heed to the foolish love-fancies of a woman before her marriage, so long as she does not trick us afterwards. The letters you sent me were trifling, mere trifles. In wedding the Countess I assure you I have loved the lovely woman in Avellino; but as the most lovely woman in Avellino!" And I laughed again heartily.

D'Aventour looked puzzled; but he was a punctilious man, and knew how to steer clear of a delicate subject. He smiled. "A la bonne heure," he said—"I wish you joy with all my heart! You are the best judge of your own happiness; as I am sure you are." And with a gay parting salute he left me. No one else in the city appeared to share his forbidding scruples, if he had any, about my forthcoming marriage. It was everywhere talked of with as much interest and expectation as though it were some new amusement invented for the amusement of the Carnival. Among other things I learned the reputation of being a most innocent lover, for now I would consent to no delays. I hurried all the preparations on with feverish precipitation. I had very little difficulty in persuading Nina that the honor our wedding took place the better, she was to the full as eager as myself as ready to rush to her own destruction. Guido had been. Her chief passion was avarice, and the repeat-rumors of my supposed fabulous wealth had aroused her greed from the very moment that had first met me in my assumed character of the Count Oliva. As soon as her engagement to me became known in Naples, she was an object of envy to all those of her own sex who, during the previous autumn, had laid out their store of fascinations to entrap me in vain—and this made her perfectly happy. Perhaps the supreme satisfaction of a woman of this sort can attain to, is the fact of making her less virtuous sisters discontented and miserable. I loaded her, of course with the costliest gifts, and she, by the same mistake of the fortune left by her late husband, as well as of the unfortunate Guido's money, set no limits to her extravagance. She ordered the most expensive and elaborate costumes; she was engaged morning after morning with dressmakers, tailors and milliners, and she was surrounded by a certain number of female friends, for whose benefit she displayed the treasures of her wardrobe till they were ready to cry for spite and vexation, though they did to smile and hold in their breath and outraged vanity beneath this social mask of complacent composure. And Nina loved nothing better than to torture the poor women whose eyes were fixed on the glimmering satins, the rich velvets, rich velvets, embroidery adorned with real gems, pieces of costly old lace, priceless costumes, and articles of bijouterie; she loved also to dazzle the eyes and bewilder the brains of young girls, whose finest toilette was a garb of simplest white stuff unadorned save by a single tulle ribbon, and to send them away sick at heart, thinking for they knew not what, dissatisfied with everything, and grumbling at fate for not permitting them to deck themselves in such marvellous "arrangements" of costume as those possessed by the happy, the fortunate future Countess Oliva.

It had they but known all they would not have envied her. Women are too fond of measuring happiness by the amount of clothes they obtain, and I truly believe dress is the one thing that never fails to console them. How often a fit of hysterics can be cut short by the opportune arrival of a new gown. My wife, in consequence of her approaching nuptials, had three of the richest and most beautiful dresses of color that suited her fragile, fairy-like beauty of perfection. All her old wretchedness and her graceful tricks of manner and speech were put forth again for my benefit. I knew them all so well. I understood the value of her light carresses and languishing looks thoroughly. She was very anxious to attain the full dignity of her position as the wife of so rich a nobleman as I was reputed to be, therefore she raised no objection when I fixed the day of our marriage for Giovedì Grasso. Then the foiling and mummery, the dancing, masquerading and screaming at its height, it pleased my whim to have this other piece of excellent masquerading take place at the same time.

The wedding was to be as private as possible, owing to my wife's "recent and bereavements," as she herself said with a pretty sigh and tearful pleading glance. It would take place in the chapel of San Giovanni, adjoining the cathedral. We were married there before the ending the time that intervened. Nina's manner was somewhat singular. To me she was often timid, and sometimes half-confidential. Now and then I caught her large dark eyes fixed on me with a startled, anxious look, but this expression soon passed away. She was subject, too, to wild fits of excitement and soon to moods of absorbing and gloomy silence. I could plainly see that she was strung up to an extreme pitch of nervous excitement and irritability. But I asked her no questions. If, I thought, if she tortured herself with memories, all the better—if she saw or fancied she saw the reason of it, it was her own "dead and buried husband" and she should be free to rack and bewilder herself as she pleased, and went to bed from the Villa as I came and went to bed from the Villa as I

pleased. I wore my dark glasses as usual, and not even Giacomo could follow me with his peering, inquisitive gaze; for since the night he had been hurled so fiercely to the ground by Guido's reckless and impatient hand, the poor old man had been paralyzed, and had spoken no word since. My upper chamber, tended by Assunta, and my wife had already written to her relatives in Lombardy, asking them to send for him home.

"Of what use to keep him?" she had asked me. True! Of what use to give even roof-shelter to a poor old human creature, maimed, broken and useless for evermore? After long years of faithful service, turn him out, cast him forth! If he die of neglect, starvation and illness, what matter?—he is a worn-out tool, his day is done—let him perish. I would not plead for him—why should I? I had made my own plans for his comfort—plans shortly to be carried out; and if the miserable Assunta should die, as she might, I would have no more strength than a year-old pup, with a bewildered pain in his upturned, black-lustrous eyes. One incident occurred during these last days of vengeance that struck a sharp pain to my heart, together with a sense of the bitterest anger. I had gone up to the Villa somewhat early in the morning, and on crossing the garden, I found a man crouching motionless on one side of the path that led directly up to the house. I went to examine it, and started back in horror—it was my dog Wyvis shot dead. His silky black body and forepaws were dabbled in blood, his honest brown eyes were glazed with the film of his dying agonies. Sickened and infuriated at the sight, I called to a gardener who was trimming the shrubbery. "Who has done this?" I demanded.

"The man looked pityingly at the poor bleeding remains, and said in a low voice: "It was Madama's order, signor. The dog bit her yesterday; we shot him at daybreak." I stooped to caress the faithful animal's body, and as I stroked the silky coat my eyes were drawn to his eyes.

"How did it happen?" I asked in smothered accents. "Was your lady hurt?" The gardener shrugged his shoulder and sighed. "Ma!—no! But he tore the lace on her dress with his teeth and grazed her hand. It was little but enough. He will bite no more—povera!"

"I liked the dog," I said briefly, "he was a faithful creature. Bury him decently under that tree," and I pointed to the giant cypress on the lawn, "and take this money for your trouble." He looked surprised but grateful, and promised to do so. Over my arm I carried fully caressing the fallen head of my more trusted friend I ever possessed, I strode hastily into the house, and met Nina coming out of her morning room, clad in one of her graceful trailing gowns, in which soft lavender tints were blended like the shaded colors of late and early violets.

"She gave a slight start," I said abruptly. "Oh, yes; is it not dead? But I was compelled to have it done. Yesterday I was with you in each of his chains, and he sprang furiously at me for no reason at all. So—" And holding up her soft small hand she showed me three trifling marks in the delicate flesh. "I thought I had been wounded by the claws of a snake; I put a dog that was at all times, so I determined to get rid of him. It is always painful to have a favorite animal killed; but really Wyvis belonged to my poor husband, and I think he has never been quite the same since his master's death, and now Giacomo is ill—" "Yes!" I said curtly, cutting her explanations short.

Within myself I thought how much more sweet and valuable was the dog's life than hers. Brave Wyvis—good Wyvis! He had done his best—he had tried to be at her dainty heels; his honest instincts had led him to attempt rough vengeance on the woman he had loved; but his master's fate, and his own performance of duty. But I said no more on the subject. The dog's death was not alluded to again by either Nina or myself. He lay in his mossy grave under the cypress bushes—his memory unvisited by any lie, and his fidelity embraced in my heart as a thing good and gracious, far exceeding the interest of friendship of so-called Christian humanity.

The days passed slowly on. To the revelers who chased the flying steps of Carnival with shouting and laughter, no doubt the hours were brief, being so brimful of merriment; but to me, who heard nothing save the measured ticking of my own time-piece of revenge, and who saw my wife's hands that held the second ring nearest to the last, and the fatal figure of the dial, the very moments seemed long and laden with wariness. I rambled the streets of the city aimlessly, feeling more like a deserted stranger than a well-known and envied nobleman, whose wealth made him the cynosure of all eyes. The riotous ring, the music, the color that whirled and rolled through the great streets of Toledo at the season, bewildered and pained me. Though I knew and was accustomed to the wild vagaries of carnivals, yet this year this seemed to be out of place, distracting, senseless, and all unfamiliar.

Sometimes I escaped from the city tumult and wandered out to the cemetery. There I headed the opening of the second passage made by the brigands to ascertain if all was safe and undisturbed. Everything was as I had left it, save that the tangle of brushwood had become thicker, and weeds and brambles had sprung up, making it less visible than before, and probably rendering it more impassable. By a fortunate accident I had secured the key of the opening of the second passage made by the brigands to ascertain if all was safe and undisturbed. Everything was as I had left it, save that the tangle of brushwood had become thicker, and weeds and brambles had sprung up, making it less visible than before, and probably rendering it more impassable. By a fortunate accident I had secured the key of the opening of the second passage made by the brigands to ascertain if all was safe and undisturbed. 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