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WON AT LAST.

CHAPTER XXVI.  
"And kissed it quite as much?" I interpreted. "H'm—perhaps so," I said, Ned, did madame notice?"  
"Of course not. She was diving down after that ridiculous book of yours. Besides, there wasn't anything to notice."  
"Oh, wasn't there! Did mademoiselle, then?"  
"Mademoiselle had the toothache."  
"Oh, had she. I didn't believe it."  
"I'll tell you who did see, though, Nat," I said.  
"Who?"  
"Why, St. George, to be sure! He looked as if he could have knifed Roger with pleasure."  
"I can't help how he looked."  
"And don't care, either, eh? I say, Nat, if there had been no Roger in the case don't you think you—"  
"No," she cried, emphatically, cutting me short. "Never! Oh, Ned, don't talk about him! I don't want to think about him. He is like a cloud to me even now and I don't want clouds hanging over me. Oh, Ned—raising her shining eyes to my face—"I can hardly believe that I shall really and truly see him to-morrow!"

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CHAPTER XXVII.  
The morning of the ball; and the excitement which had been rife within the walls of Chavasse for the past week seemed to increase from the moment of old Batterbin's descent from her bedroom, and culminated in a general distracted bustle.  
Of course I was of no use; and Nat was not allowed to do anything for fear of tiring herself before the evening, and so the rapid exit of madame and the governess from the breakfast room left us looking at each other, and wondering what we should do next.  
"What do you mean to do, Nat?" I asked.  
"I don't know—nothing until the evening, I suppose. Madame says, 'I'm to keep quiet for fear I tire myself.' Such nonsense!" said the little lady disrespectfully and ungratefully.  
"I never felt better in my life. I don't believe I shall ever be tired any more."  
Also she looked as if she never would, I thought, glancing at the dark animated face. However pretty she might look by and by, tricked out in her ball finery, she would never look prettier than she did now—that was certain.  
"Let us go out for a walk," I suggested—"round the park, you know, it will pass the time away."  
"Oh, yes, that will be jolly!"—and she jumped up. "I won't be five minutes, Ned."  
Ned was she, but came running down again before I had made up my mind to stir from the fire. She was indignant, of course.  
"Do make haste, you lazy fellow! We shall lose the best part of the morning; or perhaps madame will catch us and say I must stay in-doors or fear of making my nose red. As though it ever was red! That's one of the advantages of being a gypsy, Alice was in a dreadful state about hers yesterday, and vowed that she and her cousin meant to sit close by the fire until it was time to dress. What's that?" she broke off to say to be middle of a laugh, for there had come a soft tap at the door.  
"Me, miss;" and Virtue Dent put in her pale face and neat muslin mobcap. "Madame said I was to show out these before I took them upstairs."  
"These" were three bouquets which she dangled, now presenting herself at all length, carried before her on a tray, and upon which Nat pounced with a cry of admiration.  
"Oh, look here, Ned! Aren't they lovely?"  
They were. One—the largest—was composed entirely of crimson roses, each blossom perfect, and attached to it was Raby St. George's card; the second was crimson and white, the product of the Holmeadane conservatories, we both knew, without glancing at the pasteboard attached to it; the third and smallest was of the palest cream-color roses, saving for the centre a vivid cluster of scarlet geraniums, and a rim of the same round the edge. The prettiest of the three I thought it; and so did Nat, apparently, for she picked it up and held it caressingly against her cheek. There was no card at all to this, but it did not appear necessary.  
"H'm!" I said, surveying the blooming trayful, critically. "It's fine to be you, Miss Nat. Adonis didn't pay a farthing under two or three guineas for these roses, I'll wager; and I should say you have the cream of the Holmeadane conservatories there. It is a blessing you haven't any more sweethearts, all things considered, or we should have had a cartload, I suppose."  
"They are very pretty, aren't they?" Nat said, still with her cheek pressed

lightly against the flowers that she held.  
"Oh, pretty enough! Which are you going to wear?"  
"These, of course!"  
"Ah, just so! What will madame say to that?"  
"She can't say anything—that's the best of it. I couldn't possibly wear either of those even if I wanted to, and these exactly match my dress. It is pale cream slashed with scarlet, you know. Madame said I was too brown to wear white, and must have something unique. It is so pretty, you'll see. Isn't it lucky?"  
"Wonder how he knew?" I said, imitating the whisper into which her voice had dropped, for Virtue, with her hands demurely folded upon the band of her white apron, stood waiting patiently until the flowers should be done with.  
"I dare say Alice told him. Her dress is white and pink; and she told me to drop the major a hint, so that his flowers should be the right color. The dress is awfully pretty—almost as pretty as mine."  
"And she'll look almost as pretty as you in it, I suppose?"  
"Pooh!" Nat said, laughing. "We sha'n't clash. We are too much unlike for that. There—you can take them now, Virtue!"—laying the cream and scarlet mass down tenderly. "Be careful of them, won't you?"  
"Oh, yes, miss!" Virtue took up the tray again, turned to the door, and then looked round again. "Madame told me to say, if you were going to take Miss Natalie out, Mr. Ned, would you keep about the park, please, for fear she should be tired?"  
"All right; you tell madame we are just going to stroll quietly round," I returned, going out into the hall for my coat and hat, and Virtue courted, and adrook the trayful of flowers upstairs.  
"Now for a good brisk walk to get up an appetite," I said, as we stepped out. "I mean to keep all mine for supper-time."  
"You great greedy thing; I believe that's all you think about," she retorted, laughing.  
"Well, I confess that I'd rather eat than dance, if it comes to that. By the way, how many dances do you mean to give your two disconsolate swains?"  
"None, if I can get out of it. The idea of the 'stepple' dancing is a little too ridiculous. I hope he won't be so absurd as to try."  
The "stepple" was Fraser Froude, and was the young lady's own particular name for him.  
"In deference to our risible muscles, so do I. By the bye, how does Adonis dance?"  
"Perfectly, as he does everything else. I don't suppose I shall dance much. Roger hates it, for one thing."  
"I know; he plagued me out of my life when I learned. He's an awful fellow to chaff when he likes. I suppose my part of the programme is to keep guard while you spoon in the corners, eh?"  
"Well, we'll do as much for you one of these days, when the future Madame of the Mount presents herself," she returned, laughing.  
"Thanks; it's quite enough for me to help to engineer your love affairs," I rejoined. "I say, Nat, I hope that when you are Mrs. Yorke—halloo, what's that?"  
We were in the Lady's Walk, moving slowly as we talked, and I swung round at what seemed to be a cell behind us. It was repeated shrilly, and then Virtue Dent, skirts and apron flying, came running down the path. Seeing that we had halted, she paused too, and settled down into her usual demure self again.  
"Does madame want me, Virtue?" Nat asked.  
"Not you, miss; it's you, Mr. Ned. She says will you come in for a few minutes, please? She won't keep you long."  
"What's it about?" I asked.  
"I don't know, sir. Madame didn't tell me."  
(To be continued.)

Evening Telegram Fashion Plates.

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9505.—A CHARMING NEGLIGEE.



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