

WON AT LAST.

CHAPTER XI.
(Continued.)
"That fellow sticks close enough to her apron-strings—oh, Ned? He'd be better at his forge. He's going to the bad, it strikes me."
"Eh? Why?" I asked. The handsome, sulky young blacksmith was no favorite of mine; but I did like pretty, pert little Lotty, and, in common with all Whittleford, I believed that, in spite of her saucy flirting ways, the girl was fond of him. "What makes you think that?" I said.
"I go by signs," Dizarte replied, brushing some specks of jalap-powder off his black coat-sleeve with his large red silk handkerchief. "The man isn't at his work three days a week, and he spends most of his time at the Cap and Bells. Besides, the young fool was mixed up in that blessed poaching affair up at Roxborough last evening. He'll be caught one of these times, as sure as he has a head upon his shoulders, and that will settle him. He ought to have the sense to know it."
I assented, thinking that the mercenary would "settle" him so far as the Wayside Cottage was concerned, if it chanced to reach madame's ears. "He used to be pretty steady, too," I said.
"Yes, I know, until a few months ago. It is that saucy little puss of a girl who is to blame for it at bottom, I verily believe. It seems that he can't rest without keeping her within sight. We can see Wide's shanty from here, you know, and I never go out or come in without stumbling over Flood, either on the common or under the hedge, sinking about somewhere. Last night, for instance, I was called out to the rectory—Mrs. Deeping had some new fad on—and it was late when I got back—past twelve—and there, at the gate, I stumbled over the man again. Brought my heart into my mouth! I wondered who it was."
"What! Lying down outside the gate at that time of night?" I ejaculated.
"Crouching down, at any rate."
"I wonder what on earth for?"
"Goodness knows, unless he is cracked!" Dizarte said, moving away from the window. "All I know is that there he was. Queer—eh?"
"Queer?" I echoed. "Why, he must be going off his head."
"If he is, I hope he'll choose some other place than outside my garden gate," said the doctor, dismissing the subject of Phil Flood and his eccentricities coolly enough. "What brings you here, Ned? Nothing wrong at Chavasse, I hope?"
"No," I told him; but I had strolled over hoping to see Yorke. Dizarte opened his little gray eyes at me.
"Yorke? Why, he's not here, my good fellow! He was off by the first train this morning."
"Oh!" I echoed, astonished. "Off where?"
"Why, to Paris! Didn't he tell you last night that he was going?"
"Not a syllable," I returned, feeling lazed. "Paris? What has he gone here for?"
"Faith, that's more than I can tell you," said Dizarte, with a laugh; "for he didn't tell me. Something to do with his sister, I believe. At any rate he came in upon me this morning before I was out of bed, and in a fluster and said he must go, and that he would be back in a week. Confoundingly awkward it is just now, with so much sickness about, and without no ice too; but I let the boy go, of course. Wonder he didn't tell you! I'm going to have a bit of lunch before I start; will you stay?"
But I declined the lunch, and, bidding Dizarte good-morning, turned out of the Redpots gates a good deal more puzzled than when I had turned in at them. That this sudden flight of Roger to Paris had something to do with mademoiselle I did not doubt for an instant; the question was, What?
And the question remained unanswered, for, although I brooded busily over the whole affair until Nat declared laughingly that I was in love and suggested the Lady Idonia Clyde the Earl of Roxborough's elderly and reckless daughter, as the probable subject of my young affections, I could come to no satisfactory conclusion; nor did the course of events at Chavasse help me. Mlle. Valdini had not only won madame's good will, but was clever enough to keep it, and in fact had ingratiated herself with almost everybody in Whittleford in whose way she came. It is true that I did not like her, and that Miss Nat was in a state of more or less open rebellion, while Alice Deeping refused altogether to give in to the suave graces of the governess; but I think that we three were the only exceptions to the general rule. Madame declared that as a teacher she was simply perfect, while Nat herself poutingly admitted that mademoiselle somehow made her learn without any trouble at all. In fact, mademoiselle soon became a necessity at Chavasse. She helped madame with the accounts, she gave an eye to the housekeeping—the indignation of poor old Batterlin—she chaperoned Nat whenever it was necessary, she played for us in the evening, she wrote some of madame's letters, and she never by any chance made the slightest reference to Roger Yorke.
He had come back from his visit to Paris, looking fagged, worried, and out of sorts, and old Dizarte had declared, with many a sly chuckle, that he must have been keeping it up at a fine pace. Whatever he had done or left undone there, it is certain that he uttered not a word about it, good, bad or indifferent. And somehow I had never found exactly the right time to speak to him of the interview in the Lady's Walk. In fact, I was trying to forget it, and to argue myself into the belief that after all it was no business of mine. To me, and to all, so far as I could see, he was much the same as ever; but there was a gloom and an uneasiness about him at times altogether new in debonair Roger, though these grew less marked as the weeks went by.
Old Dizarte had a nasty touch of gout as the weather grew colder, and was forced to lie up; and this was

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one reason why Yorke came less often to Chavasse just at this time. And although I often saw them meet, I never caught a second passionate glance from his blue eyes at the little dusky face of Natalie Orme, and began to tell myself that I had made a mistake in putting Roger Yorke down as the victim to the fascinations of the little lady.
The weather had grown cold, November was half over, and the trees in the park were almost bare, when a bit of news ruffled the serenity of Whittleford—the engagement of Alice Deeping to Major Constable. The rector came in one day to luncheon and told us the news—and uncommonly delighted and excited about it he seemed to be.
"Yes, I am very pleased," he said, in reply to madame's congratulations. "Very pleased. It is a good match for Alice, very good. The major is well-born and well off, and a great favorite of mine. He is a man to whom any father might be glad to give his daughter."
"Indeed I am sure of it," madame answered, in her most cordial tones, and I congratulate you and Mrs. Deeping, most heartily. Major Constable is a great favorite of mine also. You must give Alice my best love, and all her we shall expect her here to-morrow to be congratulated in due form."
This was said as the rector shook hands before leaving. I followed him to the hall, to help him on with his coat. Whether I looked solemn or not, I do not know; but he asked me what I was looking so glum about, and if I was jealous.
"Yes, awfully," I returned, laughing at the notion. "Tell Alice she has broken my heart. I say, though—'I'll tell you what I was thinking, sir. Major Constable is a jolly nice fellow and I like him very much; but it is awkward about his arm."
"Ah, so it is!" said the rector, his kindly round face clouding a little. "The very thing I said."
"What does Alice say?"
"Ally!" he laughed. "Oh, she said that she had always found her two hands rather prone to get into mischief and poke themselves into other people's pies, and that, when they had the work of three to do, they might contrive to keep out of pickle! He's very fond of him, bless her! Good-bye, Ned. I'll give her your message."
Turning back into the dining-room, thought at first that it was empty, and was about to leave it again, when I found like a stifled sob caught my ear. There was Nat curled up in one of the big window-seats, her black eyes swimming in tears. This sight was so extraordinary that for a moment I stared in open-mouthed amazement. "Why, Nat, my dear little girl, what on earth is the matter?"
"Nothing!" She tossed her curly head, and gave a queer little hysterical sound between a sob and a laugh. "I don't know what I am crying for, unless it is that I am cracked. For goodness sake, Ned, don't stand staring at one in that moon-struck way! Your eyes are positively zogging!"
Judging from these remarks that the young woman's temper was slightly heated, I averted my eyes, and stared industriously at nothing until her own were dried and her handkerchief was restored to her pocket. Then ventured to say, with a becoming mount of meek interrogation—
"Well, Nat?"
"I am very glad, Ned," she said softly.
"Oh, is that what you cried for?"
"Pooh, you goose! Are you going up to the rectory this afternoon?"

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"I hadn't thought of it. I will, if you will come too."
"I can't. I must practice that song that madame wants me to sing to-morrow evening"—there was to be a dinner-party, rather a special affair—but I wish you would go. Say everything nice from me to Alice, won't you?"
I said I would, not displeased with the task for I had nothing to do, as it happened. Besides, I wanted to procure some gut for fishing at Bovere's too, and so took myself to the rectory willingly, not without a touch of curiosity as to how Roger Yorke would take the news, and wondering if there had been any truth in the suspicion of Whittleford that he was really in love with Alice Deeping. I hoped not.

(To be Continued.)
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On Second Thought.

What has become of the old-fashioned father who whipped his son when the latter disobeyed him?
If you can carry a mattress upstairs, you can take that as an indication that you are in good physical condition.
Speaking of leisure time, it is the player in a three-handed billiard game who has it.
It is also well to remember that the fact that the world's champion heavyweight is a black man is no reflection on you.
No man may be said to be generally unknown unless he has been suggested for the Vice-Presidency.
For a young man the most difficult task is that of attempting to live up to a smart father.
A woman can do it with a hairpin. But a man needs a chest of carpenter's tools.
It is also well to remember that the best of our industry is the result of unremitting industry, and not because of any exhibition of superior intelligence.
Eph Wiley says the women would get on better with the men if they used more velvet and less sandpaper.
As one interested in the ethics of sartorial art, we desire to ask why the man who puts the high school horse through its paces invariably dresses the act in evening clothes?

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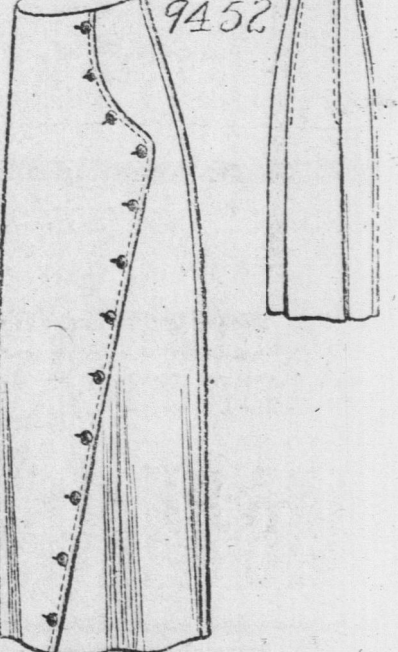
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