

WON AT LAST.

CHAPTER IV.

"What a jolly girl she is—eb, Roger!" I exclaimed, looking admiringly after the graceful figure in blue muslin.

"Rather!" said Yorke, heartily. "The best girl in Whittlesford or out of it! So this Miss Orme is due today, is she?"

"Yes; I am going to meet her now."

"Then give me a lift, will you? I have to go back to the surgery, and have a call to make besides. There is plenty of time. The London train doesn't get in until 4.30 and there goes four."

I told him to jump in, only too glad to have him with me, and then whipped up the ponies. Not until the High Street was behind us did I ask him what he was doing in that direction.

"Old Wilde's off his legs again," he told me shortly.

"What, again? What is up with him this time?"

"The old thing, I've no doubt. He declares that he hasn't been out at night for months; but that's humbug. He has been at his old trick of sneaking game at Roxborough Chac; as sure as my name's what it is, and now he is twisted into a knot with rheumatic gout. He must suffer a martyrdom. Well, serve him right! The game laws are a great mistake, no doubt; but the Roxborough preserves are on Roxborough land, and are no business of his. But he'd sooner act like that than work any day."

"He'll get caught one of these days," I said.

"Of course he will; I tell him so. But the old fellow is about the biggest natural rogue in Whittlesford."

"Always was, so far as I can remember," I agreed.

"And always will be—you may rely upon that. He might behave himself, if only for his daughter's sake, this old reprobate!"

"Poor Lotty! It's a pity she doesn't marry that sweetheart of hers, I think."

"What, Flood, the blacksmith?" cried Yorke, turning upon me those bright frank eyes of his. "That would be a sort of leap from the frying-pan into the fire, or I'm mistaken. Phil Flood and old Wilde are about in the same boat, I fancy. He knows the taste of hare well enough; and he's a rough codd for a little bit of a thing like Lotty too."

"Well, yes; but he's awfully fond of her."

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"Oh, yes—I darsay! I'll get down here, Ned—and thanks."

I pulled up the ponies, and he jumped down. We were just at the end of the village where two roads met—one leading to the station, the other, which hardly deserved to be called a road, branching off round by the river. The junction made a sort of three-cornered space, and close to a high red wall stood old Wilde's cottage, with a patch of common before it, and its small garden bright with a prolific crop of scarlet and purple poppies. It was a ram-shackle old shanty, that cottage, and it seemed to get more dilapidated day by day.

I watched Yorke knock at the little low door, bend his head to get in as it was opened, and caught a glimpse of Lotty Wilde's rosy childish face and long dark curls, which were always all over her head, as people say. She was a pretty little kittenish creature, a mere baby in looks and ways, and too refined and delicate altogether to be the daughter of that tough old reprobate, her father, who was every whit as bad as Roger Yorke had said.

Some of the discreet dames of Whittlesford had whispered that Miss Lotty was a flirt, and that the way in which she carried on with Phil Flood, the young blacksmith, was quite disgraceful, while meek Mrs. Deeping had on one occasion stigmatized her conduct as "really shocking." But I did not think that Lotty was any worse than Mrs. Deeping's daughter, who flirted in the coolest, most matter-of-course fashion with every man who came in her way. I rather liked pretty Lotty, and I often wished that she had a better place to live in than that crazy-looking erection, with her drunken old poaching father.

"Good-day, Mr. Chavasse, sir. Doctor's there again, I see. He don't spare trouble, he don't—not there, at any rate!"

I gave such a start that I dropped my whip. Sitting quite still, with the reins slack upon the ponies' backs, I had not heard an approaching step, and turned, to find the speaker, who gave his cap a sulky touch, close at my side. It was Phil Flood, the blacksmith, a black-browed, swarthy, broad-shouldered fellow, handsome, too, in a certain dark, rough style. He stared at the closed door of old Wilde's cottage, and frowned as he repeated, not looking at me:

"Doctor's there again, then, Mr. Ned."

"Yes, Wilde is down again, I hear." "He ain't so bad that he needs the doctor every day, sir," he returned, in the same stolidly sullen way. "There's work enough in Whittlesford for Dr. Yorke without his being always there."

"Doctor Yorke doesn't spare himself," I observed, what was wrong with the fellow, brusque and sulky as I knew him to be by nature. "He has pulled old Wilde through more than once, you know."

"I know that, sir."

"You ought to be glad, for Lotty's sake," I went on, jokingly.

He gave me an ugly glance from under his black brows.

"Lotty's no business o' his, Mr. Ned."

"Everybody is a doctor's business. And, talking of business, how is it you're not at it, Flood? Nothing to do?"

"No; there's plenty to do, sir."

"Then, if I were you, I'd do it. Idling isn't the way to get the Wayside Cottage, you know."

The Wayside Cottage, a pretty little place at the other end of Whittlesford, belonged to Chavasse, and Flood wanted it to take Lotty Wilde to if he could get her, it was supposed. Madame had said that he should have it when he gave up going to the

Cap and Bells, and stuck to his forge more—not before; and Flood knew it. He looked sulkier than ever when I said that.

"There isn't a man in Whittlesford that can do more than I can, Mr. Chavasse, or do it better, though I say it," he said, still sullenly.

"Of course, when you like—we all know that. Take my advice, and do it. The Wayside Cottage is worth having, and so is Lotty. I must be off now. Good-day, Flood; and I won't tell madame that you were doing nothing at this time of day."

I touched the ponies with the whip, turning them into the road which led to the station, and was off at a brisk pace. But I glanced back, as the phaeton swept round a curve, at Phil Flood, still standing at the edge of the patch of common, with his eyes fixed upon the door of Wilde's cottage. I could see his face, and there was a look of sullen fierceness and anger upon it which somehow gave me an odd shock for the instant, and for the second time I wondered vaguely what was the matter with him. But just then I heard the sound of the coming train, and I whipped up the ponies smartly, knowing that I should be late after all; and the memory of the young blacksmith and his lowering sulky face went out of my head. But in a time not far distant I was to remember it, and to wish that my eyes had been keener upon that day.

Despite my haste I was late—the train was moving away when I pulled up the ponies and jumped down. I hurried into the station, coming in to violent collision with Darley, the station-master, in my haste. I saw nobody waiting, and turned to him, longing to get over my first meeting with Natalie Orme.

"Isn't there a lady for the Mount, Darley?" I said, breathlessly. "I am late."

"There is, sir—in the waiting-room—that is, there's two of 'em."

Two! This was even more pleasant than I had anticipated. I wished to goodness that I had taken Alice Deeping's joking offer, and let her come with me. I hurried into the waiting-room, to find myself face to face with what? The Queen of the Cannibal Islands? In the name of all that was awful, could this tall, broad, brown-skinned woman with the black eyes and gleaming white teeth, the huge turban and red and yellow robe be Natalie Orme? The Fates forbid!

"For a moment I was too taken aback to speak, and stared helplessly at this barbaric princess, with the heavy chains and bracelets upon her bare brown neck and arms. Then she was nuzzled aside by some one behind her, and I found myself looking down into a little, dark, delicate face, with a pair of the most wonderful eyes that I had ever beheld, and knew, with a feeling of intense relief, that this must be the real Natalie Orme.

CHAPTER V.

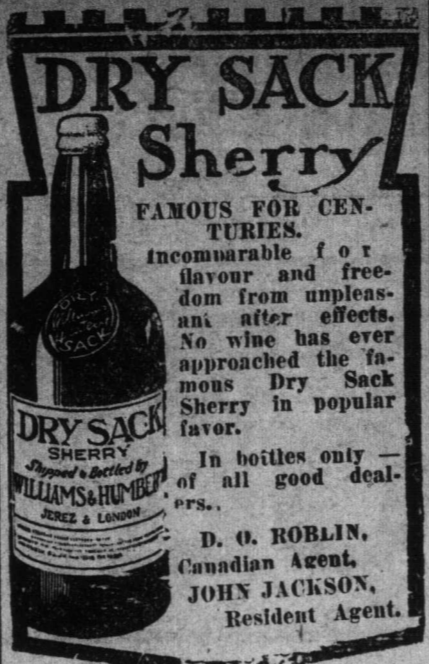
As well as I can I will give a portrait of Natalie Orme as she looked on that hot July afternoon in the dingy waiting-room at Whittlesford Station. Her skin was really brown—not sunburned, but brown, clear, transparent, with every movement of the blood showing plainly beneath it. She was a veritable nut-brown maid, Alice Deeping's pink cheeks were pale to color, but not in the curious emotional way in which this girl's flushed and paled. She was slight in figure, so slight that she looked almost tall, and yet her head, covered with little ripples and curls of jet-black silky hair, did not reach my shoulder by a good two inches. Her face was small and delicate, with straight dark brows; but I do not know that I should have thought it beautiful but for her eyes. Those

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eyes were wonderful; I have never seen any like them, and do not expect to do so. It was not that they were large and black and soft and brilliant, though that was enough to make them lovely. It was a singular trick of dilation which the pupils had, and which gave them a golden tinge. When I came to know her better, I found that this peculiarity was strongest whenever she was pleased or excited. She was excited and nervous now, and so, as her glance met mine, it was the very first thing that struck me.

I was quick enough to see that madame had been right—she was shy, and no mistake about it! For a moment I hardly knew what to say as I met those great dilating anxious eyes; but the fact that she was obviously more nervous than I was gave me confidence to say pretty coolly, as I raised my hat:

"I'm awfully sorry to be late, Miss Orme; you must forgive me for keeping you waiting, which will be more than my mother will do if you tell her. She meant to come and meet you herself; but unluckily she has a headache; so you must take me as her substitute until we get to Chavasse, and let me bid you welcome to Whittlesford in her place."

That was my opening speech, so far as I recollect, and I got it out somehow; and glad enough I was when it was spoken!

The little brown face, with the hood coming and going in it, brightened quickly; and Natalie Orme put her slim gloved hand into my hand. "Thank you," she responded. "You are very kind."

It was a sweet voice, though low and shy, and as I heard it the last trace of my nervousness vanished.

"I will take you to the carriage now," I said. "You must be awfully tired. Railway travelling is worse than anything else in this sort of weather, isn't it?"

"I am accustomed to heat," she returned. "Oh, yes, of course—I forgot! Here in England, you see, we freeze for about eight months at a stretch, and then alternately bake and shiver for the other four. This way, Miss Orme—and—"

(To be continued.)

Evening Telegram Fashion Plates.

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A pattern of this illustration mailed to any address on receipt of 10c. in silver or stamps.

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- 2 Cars fitted with 3 MICHELINS each out of 4 Tyres.
- 5 Cars fitted with 4 MICHELINS each out of 4 Tyres.
- 3 Cars fitted without any MICHELINS at all, which shows out of 52 Tyres, 32 were MICHELINS. In other words, 61 1/2 per cent of Tyres fitted were MICHELINS, the remainder being divided between five other makers.

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