CHAPTER XXVI.

Hurrying there accordingly, turned out that I was pretty right. The carriage stood at the rectory gates, and the three ladies, madame, Mlle. Valdini, and Nat, were just coming down the path. The carriage was an open one, for madame's perfect health scorned anything else except ing in wet weather, and of course St. George and I hurried to put them in it. Nat clutching my arm on the spot and, under pretense of a whisper avoiding the hand which held out to her. The other two were in, and I had just himself off across the road, put Nat into her place beside madame, who was bending over the further George, and had pifed my armful of books on the seat beside her, when there came close behind me the sound of a man's firm rapid step. If it had never struck upon my ear

shone in her glorious eyes. I let the last book drop where it would, and wheeled round, to find myself face to

"Why, Roger, old man"-and I held out my hand and gripped his gladly-'vou don't mean to say you are really back? When was it?"

"This morning. I haven't been in Whittlesford an hour."

Saying this hastily as he shook my hand, he passed me and raised his hat to madame in reply to her exclamation as she caught sight of him. And then, in a flash, I saw two things -that Raby St. George shot a swift glance filled with wrath and quick suspicion from Yorke's face to Na talie's, and then turned as ghastly pale as his swarthy skin would let him, and that Mlle. Valdini started forward for an instant with distended eyes, and then shrunk back into her corner, drawing her veil over a white and quivering face.

No one saw it but myself, I think. Madame began to scold me for having dropped the major's book, and, stoop and the folds of the skirt was most charmingly unconscious of the pretty little tableau beside her, as the black and blue eyes flashed together, while Nat's little fingers were lost for a moment in Roger's broad palm.

It was only for a moment, though. Then the carriage was bowling swift ly down the High Street, St. George had said good-afternoon and taken

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Yorke and I stood alone outside the rectory gate. Certainly I was not going to drive back to Chavasse now. Madame had not dreamed of asking

"Where were you off to. Roger?" asked, slipping my arm within his. I There was no mistake about it-I cared more for Roger Yorke than for anyone else in the world.

"Looking for you as much as anything else," he replied, with a short laugh. "I fancied it just possible that I might find you at the rectory. I was surprised to see madame though. How is she?"

"Mådame? Oh, pretty fair, I think! Had a bit of headache this norning, but I believe it's gone off

"Pshaw!" he said, laughing again and giving my arm a shake. "What an idiot you are, Need! Answer pro-

'All right! Yes, Nat's well enough -I suppose that's what you are driv ng at. Looks so, doesn't she?"

"As far as I could see. Did voi give her my letter?"

"Of course. You don't suppose "Pooh! Well"-impatiently-"what

did she do?" "Read it," I returned, deliberately and sententiously. And really seemed to me a sensible reply. What s mostly done with letters? But ing to recover it from among the rugs | Yorke did not think so, I suppose, for

> e gave my arm another jerk. "If you don't drop that precious good fellow! It was no joke to me having to cut away and leave her like that, I can tell you. I suppose she thought it uncommonly odd?"

"I suppose so."

"Of course she did. But I explained how it was in my letter, and that really couldn't help it. She undertood that?"

Well, I should think she ought. She must know it by heart by this time. I won't swear that she doesn't sleep with it under her pillow. It's well you're back-it would have been worn out in another week. But why

gree, and had to be careful that "I did not. Now that I am back it is different. I shall sneak to Madame Chavasse to-morrow."

"That you won't," I returned, de-

"What rumpus?" he asked, looking at me and plainly forgetting every-

Nat first: Your invitation went with

"Perhaps 't would be better," he said, thoughtfully.

"I'm sure it would; and in any case doubt if madame will be visible un-

til the evening." "I'll wait then. You will explain

"Oh, yes! I say, Roger, your brother-in-law is better, I hope. Dizarte

"Better? Oh, yes, thanks; he is getting on all right now! Poor Clara was in an awful state-that's why she

telegraphed for me. I thought myself that he was booked when I got there, poor fellow; but he pulled through, luckily! He was out of danger when came away, I'm glad to say."

So frankly, readily, and easily he spoke that I felt my face burn, recalling the suspicion which had seized upon me when he went away Confound mademoiselle! I thought. Why should her pale face make me doubt my friend, and what had she

"Was it an accident, Roger?" I ask-

"No-fever. That abominable French drainage is enough to kill an elephant-it was nothing but that. say, Ned, who is that fellow-eh?" "Eh? Who?" I questioned, staring

of Redpots, for we had walked on as we talked. "Whom do you mean?" "That fellow who was with you, o course. Who is he?"

about me, as we stopped at the gate

"Oh, I see! His name is Raby St. George: he comes from Jamaica

"Comes after Natalie Orme," Roger truck in, coolly. I laughed.

"Your eyes are sharp enough. How lid you find that out?"

"As easily as you would have done n my place. Who is he? What is In as few words as possible I told

im-repeating, in fact, pretty much what Nat had told me. With his hands in his pockets, he listened calmly, nodding now and again, but not speaking. "Handsome fellow, isn't he?" I end-

"Uncommonly." "They say he's rolling in cash, too re you jealous, Roger?"

"Not I!" He laughed, pressing his strong hand upon my shoulder. "I'n life upon her faith.' Not that I feel worth it, bless her! Well, good-bye old man: you don't care to come in. suppose?

"No. thanks-I must get back to dinner. What am I to tell Nat? Shall give her a kiss for you?"

"You'll get it if I catch you at it ceeing that it's more than I've ever lone yet! Tell her-no, don't tell her nything. She will understand, and shall see her to-morrow. Good-

I walked back to Chavasse at a rap l pace, but I was late for all that to was madame, luckily, for when vas decked out for the ball suppernly Nat was there. Laughing. stooned down and kissed her.

"What's that for?" she demanded ndignantly, giving her cheek a vigrous rub.

"For you, my dear-all expenses

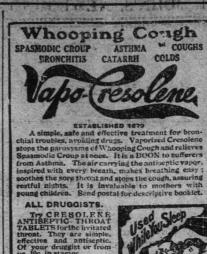
"I mean, what do you mean by it?" "That I don't retain other people's property, madame. I'm simply pass

"As though I believed that, you idiculous boy!" she cried, laughing on at her neck. "Oh, Ned"-slipping coaxing little hand within my arm-'tell me what he said: do-there's

"A good many things-among oth ers, that I was an idiot."

"I'm sure I don't wonder!" she creid, impatiently, "Oh, Ned, do tell I have been waiting for you al this time. He didn't say one word to know he sent me a message. Tell me what it was?"





"No, he didn't exactly," I answered seriously, for, looking at the beautiful shyly radiant little face, I hadn't the heart to tease her any more. "I suppose he thought that I should only make a muddle of it, and he said that

ou would understand." "Oh ves!" she said softly.

"But he asked me a heap of quesions about you," I went on; "and he means to open fire upon madame after the ball. He wouldn't write to you while he was away for fear of making trouble, he said. Just what I told you, you know!"

"I remember. Is that all, Ned?" "Pretty much, I think. Oh, I told him it was a mercy he had got back, vorn out in another week!'

for that letter he wrote you would be "You didn't!" cried the little lady. blushing all over her pretty face.

"Oh, yes, I did! You ask him." "Well, I don't care if you did!"-ossing up her curly head. "I dare ay if it had been my letter he would

have read it quite as often." (To be continued:)

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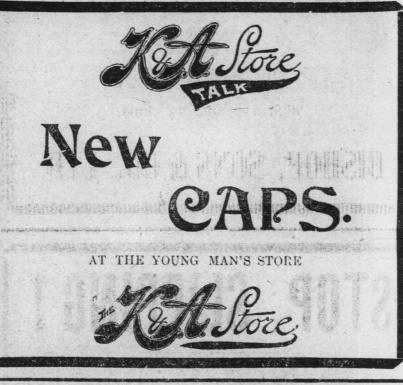
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