

WON AT LAST.

CHAPTER XXII.

"You must not be hot enough in that," I remarked.

"In this climate of yours?" he retorted, raising his black delicately traced eyebrows, as he held out his slender hands to the blaze of the hall fire. "Is it ever hot here?"

"Oh, yes! About July and August, we're sultry enough, though to be sure, it's rather chilly during the balance of the time. Nat couldn't stand it at all at first—felt it awfully. Are you ready?"

He said "Yes," and we passed out of the hall, striking off into the Lady's Walk to get to the little gate in the park palings which was the readiest way of reaching the lane. The moon was shining brightly and I could not help seeing the glances—very far from being friendly they were—which he kept casting furtively at me. He had looked at me like that more than once in the course of the evening, and now I fancied that I understood why. My familiar allusion to Nat had not pleased him, and I verily believed that he was quite ready to grow jealous of me in default of having anyone else. He had dropped his way of treating me as a boy too. I was taller and broader than he, any way. But his evident suspicions struck me as being so good that I laughed outright, making his dark frown draw his black brows together as he flashed me a look of angry questioning.

"You are amused?" he said, stiffly. "I beg your pardon," I returned civilly. "I'm sure I don't know what I was laughing at. Which way would you rather go—through the village or round by the river?"

"Which will be the shortest way?" he asked, shivering in spite of the thick coat. "By the river, a good deal. You see the village is really on a curve but the river runs straight, and the station is almost in a line with it. By the river, then?"

"I think so," he replied, shivering again, although we were walking briskly. "Is it often as cold as this?"

"Oh, dear, yes!" I said, cheerfully, moderating my pace, for I found that he would soon be breathless trying to keep up with my ordinary one. "We're having it pretty stiff this year. This frost has not broken since the week before Christmas. You don't skate, I suppose?"

"If I know what you mean, it is as

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been a startled one. From behind the interlaced snow-covered branches a man came out with such a roughly abrupt movement that the blow he struck my shoulder almost made me stagger. He was very much muffled up; and, what with the thick shawl round his neck and peaked cap drawn tightly down over his brows, I could make nothing of his face but a pair of keen eyes. He looked at us both—at me especially—and then, bending his head forward on his breast, passed rapidly down the river path, and in another instant had disappeared in the darkness.

"Who is it?" Raby St. George asked, staring after him.

"I'm sure I don't know," I returned, for I felt certain that I had never seen that thick-set roughly clad figure before. "A clumsy customer, whoever he is!"

"He knows you," St. George said faintly.

"The dickens, he does!" I exclaimed, astonished at the tone of cool conviction in which he spoke. "What makes you think that?"

"I could see it. Did you observe how he looked at you?"

"He might do that without knowing me," I returned, a little irritated.

"I think you're mistaken. Whoever he is, he doesn't belong to Whittlesford—I know every man and woman in it." We had left the river now, and were almost in sight of the station. "Are you cold?" I asked—for he was shivering again.

"Yes, horribly! Is it far now?"

"No, we shall be there in a couple of minutes," and indeed as I spoke a turn of the road brought us within view of the lights of the Station Hotel.

Raby St. George shook hands at the door, thanked me for walking with him, and took himself upstairs to thaw, his handsome face looking uncomfortably cold and livid in color. I was not sorry to be rid of him. I must confess.

I was tolerably chilly myself through walking so slowly, and put my best foot forward now as I turned back. I went round by the river, choosing it as the shortest way; but, although I kept my eyes about me keenly, I saw nothing of the rough shabby figure which had brushed against my shoulder by the group of pollard willows—not, in point of fact, meeting a soul at all.

(To be Continued.)

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