

WON AT LAST.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Oh, yes—I remember. He is always lurking about and getting tipsy. Doctor Dizarte told us, and poaching too. He fancied, I think, that he had something to do with shooting the keeper at Roxborough Chase. I'm glad we don't preserve at Chavasse."

"You would say we had had a tremendous fuss if you lived at the Mount," Nat said dolefully. "It is as if we had all got up early in readiness for something to happen which wouldn't come off. But I am looking forward to it. There is scarcely any fuss made at all in Jamaica, England is the best notion of being jolly, I think."

"You like England better than Jamaica, then?" "Oh, yes, a hundred times! I have been happier since I came to Chavasse than I have even been before in all my life. And yet, do you know, I was half afraid to come. That first day I was awfully frightened for a little while of everything and everybody."

"Quite right. When we got home and I sat down and criticised everybody."

"Myself included?" "Yourself included."

"And what was the verdict, may I ask?" Yorke said, in an amused voice. "Never mind, it wasn't very dreadful. You know I should not dare to disparage you in Ned's hearing. Now we agreed that Alice Deeping was a darling—and so she is—and that Fraser Froude was horrid—and so he is," said Nat, decisively.

"What makes you think that?" asked Roger, rather quickly. "I declare I hardly know. I think it is so, because I think him so. I suppose. But perhaps—with a quick change of tone—"you don't like to hear me say it. Do you like him?"



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"As well as I shall remember to-morrow how you are looking now. You were taking stock of everybody and scoring down the result in your mind, weren't you?"

"Myself included?" "Yourself included."

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ly with a pout she sunk out of sight again in the deep arm-chair.

"You might tell me!" she said, pettishly. "Let me ask you a question, instead."

"Very well; but if it is a riddle, pray don't expect me to answer it. Go on."

"Suppose," said Yorke, turning his head so that I knew he must be looking straight at her—"suppose that here was a thing which, against your own sense and judgment, against your will almost, you had set your heart upon winning for yourself."

"Yes?" said Nat, faintly. "Although you might feel sure that you could not win it, might know that it was unreasonable and almost ridiculous to ever fancy that you could win it, might know that you could win it."

"No!" returned Nat, in a quavering voice, which somehow made both my eyes suddenly fly open. "I think I should say, 'Try yourself.'"

"Oh! I can not report how Yorke looked, but I heard him give a kind of gasp, while, as for me, my heart seemed to make one wild leap into my throat, and then began to throb madly. Oh, all the fat was in the fire now, and wouldn't there be a row! I sat with eyes and mouth wide open, waiting for what was to come next. There was nothing but dead silence for the longest half minute."

"My darling!" he said eagerly, in such a tone of fond, passionate triumph that I felt uneasily ashamed of myself for being there, though to be sure I could not help it. "I never meant to speak to you, Natalie—I did not, upon my honor—there was such a much between us; but surely you mean that I may now?"

"I don't know," she answered softly, and yet with a quaint little touch of shy pertness. "Perhaps, I don't know what you want to say."

But fate was against poor Nat and her lover, and she was not to hear what he wanted to say that night. There came a sudden rush of wheels outside, the stopping of horses, and he three of us rose to our feet, all feeling more or less confused, and studiously avoiding looking at one another as madame opened the latched door and came hurrying in.

"Not intentionally, I dare say." "And yet you hate him?" "I did not say that."

"No, but you meant it. I don't hate him exactly, you know, although he is horrid, and will talk about his dreadful money all the time. I don't believe he ever thinks of anything else," said Nat, petulantly.

"Perhaps that is the most interesting thing he possesses," Roger returned, cynically.

"Oh, very likely; but it doesn't interest me at any rate! But tell me why you don't like him. Is it because of his eyes?" "His eyes?" Roger echoed, and gave a short laugh. "I don't know anything about his eyes," he said. "Well, I do. I know I don't like them. Is it because he will keep on smiling when he doesn't mean it?" Yorke shifted in his chair; but gave no answer, and there was a short silence. Opening his eyes when I thought it had lasted long enough, I saw him staring gloomily enough at the fire, for he had moved his seat so as to bring his face well within my range of vision. Nat's too I could see as she leaned forward in her chair looking up at him eagerly. Present-



common in the direction of Mount Chavasse. The rain had cleared off by this time, and the moon was up, its light quite strong enough to show the eager exultation and joy on Roger's face. I wished with all my heart that madame had arrived just five minutes later; things would have been more satisfactory, although to be sure they were tolerably so at present, judging from his expression. "I say, old man!" I said. "Yes?" he returned, looking round at me. "What is it?" "Oh, nothing! It's all right, you know; but it strikes me that you rather forgot I was there, didn't you?" "Slightly."

"H'm,—so I thought. I've lavished a good deal of unnecessary sympathy upon you lately, I believe; and I think I'll go home and try to console the luckless Froude a little." To be continued.)

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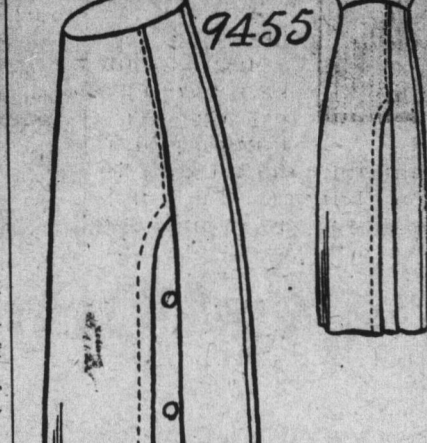
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