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## WON AT LAST.

CHAPTER IX. (Continued.)

It struck me, when, after his bow to madame and the girls, he came to shake hands with me, that he looked tired. But it was one of old Dizarte's days at Market Waxford, and it was only natural that he should look tired; so I did not notice that very much. What I did notice was the frown which darkened his face as his eyes fell upon Fraser Froude, a look which the other man reciprocated as a few stiff words of greeting passed between them. Then, as Roger moved across to Alice to receive the message, which she apparently whispered volubly in his ear, I caught a look upon his face, as his eyes rested upon Nat standing beside her, which almost sent me off my balance and quite made me gasp. I had never had the vaguest suspicion of it before. Poor old Roger! Was he another victim to the golden-black eyes of our nursery maid? The speculation so confounded me that I only seemed to come to my senses to hear madame say in her most gracious tones—

"I must introduce you to Mademoiselle Valdin, Doctor Yorke."

Roger bowed, and followed madame to the piano, looking rather curiously at the tasteful dress of Parisian make which mademoiselle wore, and at the elaborate wreaths and twists of dark hair, dressed in Parisian fashion, which crowned mademoiselle's head. She must have forgotten everything but the slow mechanical movements of her hands over the unsounded keys, it appeared, for it was not until my mother spoke that she seemed to be aware of any one near her.

"Let me present Doctor Yorke to you, mademoiselle," madame said, graciously.

Mlle. Valdin rose with the graceful self-possession which seemed natural to her, and slowly turned her head. As her face was thus revealed Roger started violently, and uttered an exclamation of disconcerted astonishment. He stared as though he could hardly believe his eyes. Mademoiselle smiled.

"Doctor Yorke and I are old friends, madame," she said to my mother sweetly. "We met in Paris more than a year ago."

CHAPTER X.

"I say, Ned, isn't it comical?"

"Eh? What?" I asked, looking down into Alice Deeping's blue eyes.

"What indeed!" she gave my arm a shake. "As though you didn't know! I believe you are thinking about it now. I know I am. I never saw anything so queer; and I'm sure it astonished you as much as it did me, for your eyes were almost as big as a couple of saucers. And now you say, 'What?' I wonder if all Mademoiselle Valdin's acquaintances look as disconcerted when they see her as Doctor Yorke did—that's all!"

"Oh," I returned, comprehensively,

"I see! Yes, it was queer enough, wasn't it?"

We were in the lane leading from Chavasse to Whittlesford, Alice and I—escorting her home to the rectory. She had thrown a scarlet wrap of Nat's over her white gown, and tied her broad hat down under her chin with the reckless indifference to appearances that characterized her. We had come out through the little side-gate opening on to the lane, and were scarcely outside it when she abruptly propounded the foregoing query.

"Queer?" she now echoed. "More than queer!"

"Oh, I don't know! There's nothing particularly odd, that I see, in a couple of people who have met once meeting again."

"Of course not—I don't mean that, you stupid boy!" She gave my arm another little shake. "That in itself would be merely a coincidence. But what in the world did they want to look so taken aback for?"

"They?" I questioned.

"Well, he, then?"

"Surprised, I suppose."

"Pooh! Surprise doesn't look like that. But she was cool enough!"

"Mademoiselle, you mean? It strikes me she would be cool over an earthquake."

"Oh, yes! She didn't care, but he did. It is something odd to see Roger Yorke thrown off his balance."

I assented with a nod, thinking that her phrase "thrown off his balance" expressed what had seemed to be Roger's state of mind better than any other could have done. Truth to tell I had been as much puzzled and surprised at the little scene in the Chavasse drawing-room as Alice herself and was cogitating over it now. Presently my reflections thereupon produced another puzzle which I proceeded to unfold.

"I say, Alice, this is odd! Roger has known the name of Nat's governess ever since we knew it ourselves. It has done nothing but bewail her fate, you know; it is strange that he never mentioned that he knew mademoiselle."

"Perhaps not; but I should have thought he would have said that he knew some one of the name. I don't think 'Valdin' is a common one."

"It may be abroad. As to mentioning it, I dare say, if she was only a casual acquaintance, he forgot it."

"Very likely. Besides, he told me it was a year since he had seen her."

I said, as we stopped at the rectory gate.

"Just so. And I'll tell you something more; he would not have been sorry if it had been twenty years before he saw her again. Good-night, Ned, and thank you for coming home with me."

The gate was opened, and she flitted up the path, turning gayly to kiss her hand to me. I watched until her

white dress, with the scarlet cloud over it, had disappeared within doors, and then turned back to walk through the village to Chavasse again. But I walked slowly, with my hands in my pockets, puzzling myself about the recognition of Roger Yorke and Mlle. Valdin which had taken us all by surprise. Not the recognition, itself; that, as Alice had said, would have been merely a coincidence, odd perhaps, but not puzzling. But what on earth could have possessed Roger Yorke to make him look as though he had seen a ghost at his first sight of that pale, sallow, composed face? I could not understand it at the time; and, going over the few words which had followed mademoiselle's announcement of their previous acquaintance, I could not understand it now. Yet, mademoiselle had explained the whole matter to my mother with the most charming ease and readiness. She had met Dr. Yorke at his sister's more than a year ago. She was the friend of madame's sister, and was then staying with her for her holiday—her vacation. But in England she had not expected the pleasure of again meeting Dr. Yorke.

So far so good. All Whittlesford knew that Roger Yorke had a sister, and knew at least as well that her place of residence was Paris; also that it was his custom, when he took his yearly holiday, to spend it in France with her and her husband. That he had done so last year I knew well enough, for at the time there had been some talk of my going with him. All very well, so far. But, if his acquaintance with mademoiselle had been merely a casual acquaintance with his sister's friend, why on earth had he looked so disconcerted—nay, dismayed to see her in the Chavasse drawing-room? Surely that was odd. I recalled the change which had come over him after that bland little speech of hers, how stiffly he had bowed to her, and how drolly he had touched her extended hand; again, now, by and by, when Nat was singing her delayed song, he had sat apart, silent and gloomy, the gay, debonaire manner which always made him so attractive gone, and with his stern blue-gray eyes always keenly, almost nervously resting upon mademoiselle's perfectly "got-up" figure. Yes, Alice was right. Roger Yorke had been completely thrown off his balance, and he could not help showing it. An uneasy sense of being at a disadvantage, of being awkwardly placid, and inwardly fighting against it had been, in my opinion, at least, expressed in his whole air and manner—nay, in the very attitude of his figure.

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Another thought came to me, as I strolled along in the September moonlight, a fancy that I might find a solution of the problem, after all. I recalled that look which had been a revelation to me—a revelation not only of his love for her, but of the reason for the barely veiled dislike which he had of late shown to Fraser Froude. Could it be, I wondered, that that acquaintanceship with mademoiselle had in reality been a love affair which he had grown tired of and got out of, and that in her appearance at Whittlesford he foresaw awkward complications? And yet—pshaw! I thought mademoiselle looked a round half dozen years older than he did, to start with, not to speak of her being the reverse of pretty. No; that could not be it. In fine, I reached Chavasse at least as far from any satisfactory conclusion as ever, and feeling inclined to "bother" mademoiselle as heartily as Nat had done herself.

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Another thought came to me, as I strolled along in the September moonlight, a fancy that I might find a solution of the problem, after all. I recalled that look which had been a revelation to me—a revelation not only of his love for her, but of the reason for the barely veiled dislike which he had of late shown to Fraser Froude. Could it be, I wondered, that that acquaintanceship with mademoiselle had in reality been a love affair which he had grown tired of and got out of, and that in her appearance at Whittlesford he foresaw awkward complications? And yet—pshaw! I thought mademoiselle looked a round half dozen years older than he did, to start with, not to speak of her being the reverse of pretty. No; that could not be it. In fine, I reached Chavasse at least as far from any satisfactory conclusion as ever, and feeling inclined to "bother" mademoiselle as heartily as Nat had done herself.

Entering, I found the drawing-room deserted, early as it was, and, ringing the bell, was told by Virtue, who answered it with her usual quiet promptness, that the ladies had retired—madame because she had a headache, mademoiselle on the plea of fatigue, and Miss Natalie in a temper. Not that the demure Virtue said this—gathered it. Obviously there was nothing to do but to go to bed myself,

white dress, with the scarlet cloud over it, had disappeared within doors, and then turned back to walk through the village to Chavasse again. But I walked slowly, with my hands in my pockets, puzzling myself about the recognition of Roger Yorke and Mlle. Valdin which had taken us all by surprise. Not the recognition, itself; that, as Alice had said, would have been merely a coincidence, odd perhaps, but not puzzling. But what on earth could have possessed Roger Yorke to make him look as though he had seen a ghost at his first sight of that pale, sallow, composed face? I could not understand it at the time; and, going over the few words which had followed mademoiselle's announcement of their previous acquaintance, I could not understand it now. Yet, mademoiselle had explained the whole matter to my mother with the most charming ease and readiness. She had met Dr. Yorke at his sister's more than a year ago. She was the friend of madame's sister, and was then staying with her for her holiday—her vacation. But in England she had not expected the pleasure of again meeting Dr. Yorke.

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