

WON AT LAST.

CHAPTER XXVII.
"Oh, I don't know!"—and I turned away from his eyes as they looked straight and eagerly at me. "She's a delicate little bit of a thing after all—and look how she danced! By Jove, I couldn't have done it! She'll be right enough after a good rest. Are you going to the Mount?"

"I was, but now that I have met you perhaps it is not necessary."
"Well, I wouldn't, if you'll excuse my saying so. They're sure to be done up, you see—in fact, I wonder they appeared at all. Nat hadn't when I came out, and I dare say she won't."

"I wanted to see her," he said, hesitating, and looking away from me down the muddy street, with a singularly troubled and worried expression.
Somehow I began to wish that St. George had not been on the door-step at the moment I was passing it; my head was full of Yorke—too full to want to be bothered with anything else. But now he had so obviously something else to say that I could not in common politeness help stopping to hear what it was.

"I wanted to see her," he repeated, now looking back at me, with a deep color creeping up under the clear pallor of his dusky skin. "Perhaps I shall be able to do so to-morrow."
"Oh, yes, I should think so!" I answered, carelessly. "She'll be visible then, no doubt, if it's anything very important."
"It is, I received a letter this morning which renders it necessary for me to decide at once whether I return to Jamaica or remain in England. I must see her before answering it. You understand, I see. Good-bye for the present, then."

Of course I understood, and I could not help showing that I did, as I uncomfortably felt when I confusedly gave him my hand, and started off toward Redpots again. Confound the fellow! I thought, taking me into his confidence in such a fashion. So we were not at the end of the "pickle" yet, it appeared. He was going to complicate matters now a little more than they were already complicated, bad luck to him! I wished St. George at Jericho, or Jamaica, which would have suited me quite as well just then. I turned in at the gates of Redpots a good deal more miserable and out of temper than I had been when I left Mount Chavasse.

Dr. Yorke was at home, the servant who admitted me said, but added that he had a patient with him

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just then. No doubt he would be at liberty directly, if I would wait. I said I would wait, and decided to do so in the hall, since from there I could keep my eye upon the door of the surgery. I had not been there a minute when it creaked and opened to let out Lotty Wilde, looking as pretty as a little Red Riding-hood, with a scarlet cloak on, and a puckered hood of the same color drawn over her dark curls. The little cry she gave at the sight of me brought Yorke to the door too. He started as he saw me, and then came out and shook hands.

"I thought I should see you to-day, Ned," he said, as Lotty, dropping her demure little courtesy, took her departure by means of a side door. "Come into my den. There's no one there but the skeleton, and you can say whatever it is that you want to say, and I the same."

But, when we got into the room, and I had imitated him in dropping into one of the big chairs by the fender, it seemed that we were both tongue-tied. Yorke sat staring moodily at the fire, and I sat straight staring blankly at him, wondering how I could best contrive to tell him about Fraser Froude. Pale, gloomy, and miserable enough he looked, but obstinate and angry, too, and I began to see that Miss Natalie Orme had contrived to rouse a temper as fiery as on that score. She would never willingly see me again, she said last night, didn't she? All right. Now I say that I will never willingly see Natalie Orme again unless she sends for me. And, considering all things, fancy that's about the safest pledge that I could give.

A silence ensued—a silence which felt at once too stupid and too miserable to break. Presently Yorke gave another short laugh, and touched my shoulder.
"Don't look so wretched, Ned, and don't bother yourself about it. It isn't your fault; one would think it was to look at you. But you ought to see pretty plainly that I can't well top here. I am not an absolute block of wood, you see, and, after even this, I don't think I should make a success of standing aside and watching St. George or that confounded Froude get her."

I had meant to lead up to the subject, and to break this luckless news to him, before going away; but now, when he himself introduced Froude's name, I felt my face redden, and knew that I looked like a fool. Yorke's eyes were too keen not to see it, and for a moment he started and stared at me. Of course I only reddened more furiously and looked more stupid, if that could be. "I see," he said, slowly—"I see. No need for me to wait, eh, Ned? Which of them is it?"
"Froude," I answered, blurring out the name, and anxious, now that the

"How do you mean?"
"In thinking that Natalie was either speaking or acting a lie in saying that she loved you and in behaving as she did. The only lie there has been is in pretending that she doesn't—the little simpleton!"
"Did she tell you to say that?" he asked, turning upon me quickly.
"No," I was obliged to admit, awkwardly.
"Of course not. She played the game as long as it pleased her, and then dropped it. Well, she is the first woman to whom I ever gave a chance of making a fool of me, and—with a deep breath—she shall be the last!"
"It's she that is made a fool of, not

you," I retorted. "She loves you."
"Ah, I don't care about that sort of love, you see. Ned, my boy! It's too changeable, eh? Well, I shall get away from here."

"What do you mean?" I cried, started, and recalling old Dizarte's words of the preceding night. "Get away!"
"Yes—and as quickly as possible. You don't suppose I want to stop in this confounded place, do you? Not I. I've had about enough of Whittlesford to last me for the rest of my life. It strikes me. No—I'm off."
"You can't mean it, Roger," I said, blankly, with a grief and consternation which I know were perfectly selfish. Was I to lose my best friend for the willful vagaries of a fickle little chit of a girl? I thought in mingled pain and anger, anathematizing Miss Nat as I had never done yet. "You don't mean it?" I interrogated, helplessly.
"Don't!" Yorke returned, with a rough laugh. "I mean it to the extent of letting Whittlesford see the last of me in a week—that's all."
"And you will stay away?" I ejaculated.
"Unless and until I am dragged back—you may take your oath of that."
"And Dizarte?" I was beginning, when he cut me short.
"I shall speak to Dizarte to-night. It will surprise him, of course, but not more than that it would have done a few weeks back, when I had the same notion in my head." He rose and walked to the window before adding in a lower tone, "I should have gone then if I hadn't been an idiot."
"I don't see what good you'll do by cutting off," I said, ruefully.
"Don't you?" He wheeled round again suddenly with another laugh as hard and harsh as the last had been. "What on earth do you take me for, you silly young fool, that you sit gawling like that? Do you think I shall go and make a hole in the first piece of water I come near, or let daylight into myself with that blessed little pistol that scared you that day? Pooh! Fool as I am, I am hardly ass enough for that. You may make your mind easy on that score. She would never willingly see me again, she said last night, didn't she? All right. Now I say that I will never willingly see Natalie Orme again unless she sends for me. And, considering all things, fancy that's about the safest pledge that I could give."

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"Froude," I answered, blurring out the name, and anxious, now that the

plunge was made, to get it over. "It was only last night, after you had gone, and upon my word, Roger, I think she must have been half crazy when she did it. She screamed and fell down in a dead faint directly after telling me."
Well, I said that, and a great deal more, enlarging upon Nat's hysterical state and wild talk when she told me, and also upon her eagerness to see him again, before that interview with a mysterious some one at the gate in the park fence had poisoned her mind and aroused her passionate temper against him. Blunderingly I retreated over and over again, as earnestly as I felt, my firm conviction that, despite everything, the willful little damsel's love for him was as complete and as strong as his for her. I repeated too as many as I remembered, of the thousand and one shy loving speeches of which I had perforce been the only recipient. But I might as well have held my tongue. Well as I had thought I had known my friend, I found that he had more obstinacy and sternness in his nature than I had ever given him credit for. When at last I rose to go, I had nothing to take with me but his reiterated resolve to get out of Whittlesford as soon as possible.
"For goodness' sake try to think better of that, old man!" I urged, dismally, as he came to the door with me, and we had for the second time clasped hands to say good-night. But he shook his head.
"No chance of my doing that, Ned, so don't think of it. I may go to the Cape. I had an offer of a good post there a month or two back. It may be vacant still."
"If you do, I shall go with you," I returned, thinking that this was worse and worse.
"Pooh! And break your mother's heart? No, my boy, it's of no use asking me to stop and see her throw herself away on Froude—confound the lantern-jawed brute! He will never make her happy—mind that!"
"I don't believe she will marry him when it comes to the push. She has made a nice muddle of things, and so she will find out, and all for a few meddling words from Heaven knows whom! That's what makes me savage!"
(To be Continued.)

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