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# RIGHTED AT LAST

BY MARY CECIL HAY

Author of "The Arundel Motto," "Nora's Love Test," "Back to the Old Home," Etc.

(Continued.)

It was a photograph of one portion of the great entrance-hall at the Towers, and at a glance it was evident that the negative was a defective one. True, the carving and the frescoes were developed with almost as much artistic beauty as is possible in a photograph. Every leaf and fruit and flower in the fret-work, and every broad design in the mosaic pavement, was clearly and tellingly defined; yet there could be no doubt about the picture being a failure, and the little Frenchman's eager eyes had found the cause now. During the seconds of exposure—the real and technical time of taking—a door in that part of the hall had been opened suddenly. The whole thing was easily explained on examining the negative; yet it was long before Monsieur Verrien's eyes were lifted; and, then, when they were, there was still a deeper puzzle in them. "I—did not know," he murmured to himself, drawing his handkerchief tenderly over the surface of the glass, "that there was a lady here. I do not know why I should have taken it so entirely for granted that there should not be a lady here; it was absurd of me, to be sure. There—there naturally would be a lady here—naturally—naturally."

Monsieur Verrien repeated the word again and again with growing emphasis, and yet he did not put aside the negative, nor raise his eyes from that defective part.

"It was a lady's form—there is no mistake about that," he mused, softly and slowly; "a lady's and a young lady's—I wonder—I wonder why I have never heard her spoken of here?"

Another silent gaze, and then the Frenchman made a rapid, characteristic gesture of self-disgust.

"Is this my affair?" he muttered, in his broken English. "Would these domestic, of their own will talk to me of the ladies of their master's house—me, whom they treat so well, and who speaks so little to them—and need the monsieur himself inform me? Bah! it is absurd."

As if to calm himself after this little ebullition of self-reproach, he put down the damaged negative, and began to turn over and admire, for the hundredth time, the mounted photographs with which he had undoubtedly been successful.

"Ah, this is the one; this is my pride!" he cried, taking one up with an extra tenderness in his hand, little, stained hands. "This no one could have taken better—no one. I chose this aspect of the house, and I chose the attitude for monsieur. How well he looks! He always does look well; but still I like this one beyond the others. How proud and solitary the figure looks, and yet how beautiful and natural there on his own threshold! Solitary! His life, for all its generous goodness, does seem solitary; and yet it—"

The sentence was not finished, but the Frenchman's sideway glance at that dimly developed figure in the spoiled negative betrayed the purport of what he had intended to say.

"I will put it away," he said, presently; "it distracts me."

He was glad one moment afterward that he had done so; for scarcely had he laid it out of sight when the room door was opened and Mr. Keith entered. He came up to the table at which the little Frenchman was at work, and, half sitting, half leaning there, watched him, chatting now and then in an idle—pleasant way.

"I think, monsieur," said Verrien, presently, the words having evidently been studied beforehand, and being uttered now by an effort, "that I have completed all the views you spoke of, and when they are all transferred—to—mean, monsieur—I set out."

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Royden looked kindly and inquiringly into the photographer's anxious face, and saw what his stay at the Towers had been for him; and although, as Verrien said, all the intended views had been taken, he answered promptly that there was more to do, and he hoped Monsieur Verrien would stay a little longer.

"Monsieur—Monsieur Keith"—the little foreigner was standing before Royden, his breath hurried, and his face full of pathos, in spite of his dark features, and the tortoise-shell spectacles pushed high on his bald head—"monsieur, I do not know how to say it. Even in my own language I could hardly say it as I mean it. But I have done the photographs you wished for, monsieur; and if you order more, it is only because—because I am poor, and you are pitiful."

Royden laughed merrily. "You have not mastered our language yet," he said, shaking his head. "Let me translate that sentence for you. Say it after me: 'Monsieur, if you order any more, it is only because I am successful, and you are satisfied.' There—that is what we call correct English."

"Monsieur Keith, will you let me say just one word more?"

"One," said Royden, smiling at Verrien's evident and almost painful anxiety; "but only one."

"I mean to say that, if you had dismissed me a week ago, you would have been most kind; and now I ought to be sent—"

"More than one, and a waste of time, monsieur. Now for business. Show me what you have taken today."

Royden's generous, kindly tact had, by this speech, set the anxious and humble Frenchman at his ease again. Business was to be transacted, and business was his province. Two minutes afterward he was engrossed by the photographs, and so excited by Mr. Keith's criticisms, and so happy in his praise, that Royden could hardly help smiling at the sudden change.

"To-morrow," he said, at last, when he had made his guest most thoroughly content, "there are two important views to take, and in the evening I shall be here as usual to see them, and to decide upon the next. Now, Verrien, what about home news? How is your daughter, for I saw you had a letter today?"

"Yes, monsieur, a letter from Marie herself; she is just the same, I know, though she writes cheerfully; and she is getting on quite well, she says, without me."

"A good thing," remarked Royden, understanding exactly what the unselfish girl had said; "she will not be vexed, then, at my keeping you longer. And how are the ladies at East Cottage?"

"Mrs. Disbrowe is very ill, monsieur—fading fast to the grave, Marie says, but quite content it is so, and nursed so tenderly, monsieur, by Miss Craven—as Marie says."

"Miss Craven is not in London even yet, then?"

"No, monsieur."

"And what about Mrs. Payte?"

"Mrs. Payte, monsieur," said the little Frenchman, without a tone of interest in his voice, "is just as ever. Marie says; so I suppose she is sharp as scalls—she always did, monsieur."

"Not quite always," said Royden, laughing. "Have you news of any one else in Statton?"

"Only of Miss Honor, monsieur, as I said."

"Anything more about her, then?"

Royden asked the question in so easy a tone that it would have taken a keener perception than Verrien's to distinguish the interest that lay so deep below it, or to detect the fact that all the news of Statton centered here for him.

With a pride that was almost comical in its intense solemnity, Monsieur Verrien drew his daughter's letter from an inner pocket of his coat, and began to read aloud one long passage devoted to Honor. The phraseology was ungrammatical and disconnected, and the reader was obliged to make continual pauses for the finding of his place among the small scraps of paper which had been at Marie's command; but for all that the father had a listener who, by quiet, concentrated interest, increased tenfold his pride in his daughter's literary achievements.

"That is all of Statton news, monsieur," he said, gathering the papers proudly into the envelope again; "you will not care for the rest, for it is about the garden, and the cat, and some old photographs of mine that she likes to look at, poor child."

A little longer Mr. Keith stared chatting with the Frenchman; then, leaving him to write his letter home, he descended the stairs, his thoughts still so busy with those trifling items of news that, when he reached the open door of the room for which he was bound, he paused a moment, as if he would recall his thoughts, and chase from his face some trouble which he felt to be there.

It was a beautiful apartment which he entered, not very large, but furnished with exquisite taste and a most thorough appreciation of comfort. He

coming in a low chair by the fire, sat an elderly lady in a lavender-colored silk dress, with lavender ribbons in her cap. She rose when Royden entered; and though she took her seat again at his request, there was no rest in her attitude. The nervousness must have been new to her, for it struck Royden in a moment.

"Are you alone?" he asked, gazing around the room. "Has Alice left you, Miss Henderson?"

The lady thus addressed had no need to reply. At the first sound of his voice the curtains which hung before one of the mullioned windows were moved aside, and a lady came from the embrasure out into the room. "I am here, Roy," she said in a voice so low and timid that it seemed hushed in fear. "I have been wondering where you were."

"Only in the green sitting-room watching Verrien at his work. Have you wanted me, dear? Have you been ill? Or"—she had come into the full light now, and stood looking anxiously at him—"frightened?"

(To be continued.)

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