

post, made her the most delightful companion for the lovers you can imagine. On the principle "Love me, love my dog," Daisy had accompanied Trouncer with a floppy, rose-colored mat, in the direct glow of the sparkling fire, and when she blushed at anything Buffalo might chance to remark, it was charming to see her stoop, and pat Trouncer's graceful head, at which time she her hair made a veil hide her scarlet cheeks, which yet betrayed her by glowing like damask roses through a golden vapor.

Trouncer bore up as long as he could, but at length, overcome by a sudden memory of the fat page, whom he had seen in the hall below, he looked cautiously round to ascertain how the land lay, before endeavoring to retire unobserved.

Aunt Julia was doing peacefully in her velvet chair; Cupid lying cozily on the sweeping folds of her satin dress, and Buffalo had a cloud of something blue in his left arm, with which his attention was fully occupied. Trouncer's mouth watered as he thought of the piece, and quietly rising, he gazed unobserved from the apartment.

"Oh, Daisy, you let me in spite of all Whiffler's lies about me. It seems too good to be true!"

"But, though I love you, Richard, I won't marry you until I can coax Papa to let me. He has made up his mind that I am to marry Charles Whiffler, to keep all the money in the family, and—oh, me! What's that?"

A horrible howl of anguish floated up the stairs, followed by a heavy fall, and Buffalo made for the scene of action, closely followed by Daisy, who was too frightened to remain behind.

The hall was empty, but the library door stood open, and from it came a repetition of the howls, mingled with a hoarse, muffled growling. The room was not lighted, but the glow from the hall lamp displayed the following tableau:

Whiffler lay on his back on the floor, Trouncer seated cozily on his chest, his damp muscle pressed against the wind-pipe of his prostrate foe, while he growled in anguish of spirit because of the untimely restraint of the bondage of his jaws. An open escritoire stood a little in the shadow, and Whiffler's fingers clutched a large roll of bills.

"Call him off, you!" yelled Whiffler. "or he'll strangle me."

"No!" said Buffalo, turning very pale "not until you tell how my gloves, which I left with my hat in the hall, come to be in this easy chair. Watch him, Trouncer!"

"Oh certainly!" said Trouncer in the language of the eye.

"Save me, Daisy!" shrieked Whiffler, but Buffalo's face was as relentless as fate.

"There you lie, Mr. Whiffler," he said, "until you confess; and with Daisy's permission, I shall just look you and Trouncer in until Mr. Darlington returns to-morrow from the country. Daisy, pre-eminently, I am very sorry for this, but I feel that there is some base plot against me."

"Just as you think right, dear Dick!" faltered Daisy, glancing with horror at her estimable cousin.

"I'll confess," gasped Whiffler, who was rapidly turning black in the face. "I'll confess! I put them there, and took the bills here, so that uncle might think you robbed him. I followed you here to do it."

"You awful wretch!" sobbed Daisy, while Buffalo made a great effort to control himself.

"Let him go, Trouncer!" he called out, "now, put back those bills, and give me my gloves!" he continued, as Whiffler, released very unwillingly by Trouncer, rose to his feet, and glared at the lovers; "and," added Buffalo, "I promise you that Daisy and I will be silent as regards this scene, to your uncle, but only so long as you refrain from further plots and lies against me!"

"Who swan's your forbearance, you sneaking beggar?" yelled Whiffler. "If it wasn't for that beast there, I'd have paid you out for the way you served me to-day, and I'll marry Miss Daisy there, too, for who's going to believe your cock-and-bull story, Mr. Injured Innocence? And as for you, Miss Daisy, you're promised to me, and I'll have time enough to pay you out when we're married!"

"When you are," said a very quiet voice from the threshold, and Mr. Darlington walked into the room and straight up to Buffalo.

"Give me your hand, Mr. Anxer," he said, extending his own. "I have witnessed the whole of this scene, and I blush to say that your generosity is quite misplaced towards that reptile I have the misfortune to call my nephew, Mr. Charles Whiffler, your hat is in the hall, and let me add that you need not take the trouble of continuing your services at my office. But, before you go, I have something more to add. Daisy I do you love Mr. Anxer."

"Yes, dear pa!" sobbed Miss Darlington, making a rush for the old gentleman's waistcoat.

"Very well then! You may consider yourselves engaged, only Mr. Anxer, I should like to see you a little steadier before—you understand, eh?"

Buffalo understood to such good purpose, that yesterday he had the pleasure of seeing Trouncer, and the fat page, amicably feasting off a wedding cake in the hall of the Darlington's mansion, both profusely decorated with white favors, while Mr. and Mrs. Buffalo—I beg their pardon!—Anxer, were whirling a doff on Pullman train to enjoy *la lune de miel* in the neighborhood of the Adirondacks.

Whiffler hasn't yet seen "where the laugh came in."

FORGET I LOVED THEE!

Thou bid'st me crush it out, and live it down— Stamp out its memory from my aching brain; Forget I loved, remove the thorny crown That presses on my brow with maddening pain.

Doest think there lurks within the human breast So little of the holy fire of Love That words can quench it? Thinkest thou that rest Can come with years, or e'en in realms above?

I'll tell thee, thou hast never felt the fire Of Love's impassioned flame, or thou wouldst know

That hope deferred, the unattained desire, But fans the embers into brighter glow.

Forget I loved thee! Almost bid me cease To dream of heaven as bury thought of thee; I can't think my heart can ever beat in peace Apart from thine? dost think that thou art free?

I tell thee, while we hold our earthly way, My every pulse shall beat response to thine; Ay, more, when from the earth we pass away, Thy spirit's haunt shall still be sought by mine!

DESMORO;

OR,

THE RED HAND.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "TWENTY STRAWS," "VOICES FROM THE LUMBER-ROOM," "THE MUMMING-BIRD," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER III.

"Fire, fire!" Miss Tillysdale, awaking with the above frightful cry in her ears, started up tremblingly, hastily threw over herself a few garments, and then, unlocking the door of her chamber, peeped forth, but instantly recoiled before a volume of thick smoke and a lurid light.

"Fire! fire!" Pretty Dinah Tillysdale heard not the alarming cries now ringing throughout the whole building; the curtains of her couch were drawn closely around her; and she, having no figures nor no fantasies, which busy care draws into the brains of some, was enjoying the honey-heavy dew of slumber.

Meanwhile the flames were progressing rapidly. Jellico was rapping at one bedroom door, Ralph was doing the same at another; while Desmoro was running hither and thither first along this corridor, and then along that—the house was only one story high—endeavoring to make his voice heard everywhere about.

Jellico now burst into the presence of Miss Tillysdale, who was standing before a looking-glass, with a night-lamp in her hand, endeavoring to arrange the set of her fine lace cap.

"Fly, madam, fly!" said the stroller. "Your house is on fire! You have not a moment to lose, if you would escape with your precious life!"

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed she, shivering with sudden terror, and then glancing round the apartment. "Where, where are my keys? I must preserve my jewels and my money!"

"I implore you, madam, to regard nothing but your life!" urged Jellico, in earnest accents, to which the lady was not paying the slightest attention. "Listen! do you hear the crackling lumber about us?" he added. "A few minutes more, and we may be too late to save ourselves! Come, madam, come!"

"My diamonds—my beautiful diamonds! I cannot go without them!" returned Miss Tillysdale, vainly searching for her keys. "Where did I put them, I wonder? Oh Dinah will know, I dare say. Where's Dinah?"

Miss Tillysdale's speech was cut suddenly short by Jellico, who seizing her in his strong arms, dragged her out into the corridor, which was now as light as day, made so by the spreading conflagration, and despite her shrieks and struggles, carried her down the wide staircase to the ground-floor, on which he safely deposited his burden.

"My diamonds!" shrilly repeated the ancient pinster, trying to regain the stairs, and make her way back again to her chamber, in her selfish love for her baubles utterly forgetting all about her dead brother's child, not heeding whether she were preserved or lost.

During this time, Ralph had penetrated two or three empty chambers, in search of gentle Dinah Tillysdale; and Desmoro had succeeded in arousing the servant-maids, who were now flying down stairs, endeavoring to escape from the raging flames.

Ralph was standing before a locked portal, striving to force it open; but the oaken panels firmly resisted all his efforts.

"The young lady, sir?" cried Desmoro, in terror.

"She must be within this apartment, the door of which is locked!" answered the stroller, his shoulder against the oak, using his best efforts to effect an entrance to the chamber,

"To—"

and exerting his whole strength, he dashed at the panel before him, which, yielding, they were admitted to the presence of the terrified Dinah, who was sitting up in her bed, one of the curtains of it in her hand, as yet scarcely more than half awake.

"Fire!—fire!" shouted Desmoro, excitedly. "Miss Dinah, save yourself! Not a moment must be lost!" he continued, snatching up a woollen garment, and throwing it to the soiled maiden, whose face looked pale amid the red glare that filled the apartment.

"My aunt!" she exclaimed, addressing Ralph and springing off her couch—"my aunt! Oh, save her! I will look after my own safety!"

Ralph said not a word, but grasping her hand, hurried her into the gallery—Desmoro following them—then down the stairs, where they found Jellico comforting Miss Tillysdale, who was in dishabille, and tears looking all dilapidation and distress.

In the dead of a winter's night, Tillysdale Hall in flames did not arouse the country neighbors, who were lying comfortably between their blankets; so the old time-honored pile cracked, and roared, and flung out its red tongues of fire wholly unimpeded.

A stable at some distance from the scene of conflagration received the ladies and four of their female domestics, who were all asking one another in hollow whispers where Polly the cook was.

Miss Tillysdale had but few thoughts to bestow on the consuming dwelling; she was bemoaning the loss of her jewels, and her neglected toilette, and casting jealous glances in the direction of Ralph Thetford, who was arranging a sort of couch of straw for pretty Dinah, who did not know how to express her thankfulness for all his attention and kindness to her.

"Oh, if it had not been for you, I should most certainly have perished in yonder flames!" she repeated over and over again. "Heaven surely sent you hither to be our deliverer!"

"What is to be done?" queried Miss Tillysdale, in querulous accents, addressing herself to no one in particular. "Look at our dreadful plight! We must not remain here till daylight! To be gazed at by vulgar eyes, in my present condition, would be the actual death of me!"

"We are strangers: we cannot presume to offer you any advice!" returned Ralph.

"I wish I hadn't parted with my servant-men!" wailed the lady, heedless of the young man's words. "But they were really so insolent, I could no longer endure them; so they were dismissed only four days ago! I'll make you an offer!" she went on, turning to Ralph.

"You have been very kind to us all on this terrible occasion; so, if you like, I will engage the whole three of you, although I cannot say that I wholly approve of, or shall ever confide in, that Red Hand. What say you to my proposals?"

Hearing Miss Tillysdale's speech, Desmoro frowned and gnashed his teeth, while the two strollers quietly shook their heads.

"Well?" asked the ancient maiden. "Is no one grateful enough to make me an answer?"

"You spoke to me, madam, I believe?" rejoined Ralph.

"I did," she briefly returned. "It is my duty, then, to reply to you, madam. My friend and myself are only a pair of poor strollers, very humble personages, indeed—vagabonds, in the eyes of the law—whom it would ill-become to aspire to the service of Miss Tillysdale. To be sure, we have both seen better days; but what of that? We have now donned the soot and buskin, and, by so doing, have lost caste for evermore!"

"Seen better days!" repeated the faded stipster with a burst of sympathetic ardor. "Ah, I thought as much! My delicate and acute perceptions are not to be deceived! I saw, at a glance, that you were a gentleman, just in the same way as I saw, that Red Hand was exactly the reverse! Of course, I cannot offend a fallen man so far as to ask him to become my lackey! Pray, pardon me!"

Desmoro writhed in spirit. Miss Tillysdale's rude remarks galled him to the very quick; and he felt inclined to hate himself and every one around him. He knew he had gentle blood in his veins—blood as pure, perhaps, as that which flowed through her arteries—and he was longing to tell her so. He liked the two strollers who had so kindly befriended him, else he would instantly have flown away, far out of the sound of her detestable voice.

Miss Tillysdale who was very rich, but little regarded the loss of her property. The Hall had been in her family for several past generations, and she thought, that it was high time that it should go out of it. Her jewels and her cosmetics were the treasures whose loss she most deplored!

"Aunt," spoke Dinah, "suppose we were to have the horses put to the carriage at once; we might reach the 'Eagle Hotel,' at Blackbrook, in less than an hour from this—long before daylight appears!"

"And who's to put the horses to it, I should like to know?" answered the relative, wringing her hands. "I never was placed in such a predicament before—never, never!"

"I shall be happy to render you every assistance in my power, madam," responded Ralph. "My companion and I thoroughly understand all that you require doing; and, as our own destination happens to be Blackbrook, I shall be glad to act as your coachman for the occasion."

In gushing accents, Miss Tillysdale returned him a "thousand thanks" for his truly acceptable offer. She could be glad, she said, to get

away from the immediate neighborhood of Tillysdale Hall before the alarm of the fire should attract thither a crowd of idle loafs, to stare at her, and make their clownish observations on her disordered costume. The lady, who was one of the most selfish of her sex, had no consideration for her young and pretty niece; indeed, if Dinah had been left to perish in the flames, her aunt would not perhaps have seriously grieved herself about the matter. There are some natures that cannot possibly be rendered tender or amiable: Miss Tillysdale's was assuredly one of these natures.

Jellico, Ralph and Desmoro now entered the coach-house, and dragging forth an old-fashioned, yellow chariot and the caravan, prepared them for travel. The old Hall was roaring and flaming away, and every object round about it was plainly visible, rendered so by the big blazes which were pouring themselves through every casement and loophole in the building.

The vehicles being in perfect readiness, the ladies and their servants now entered that which belonged to them.

Up to the present moment, Dinah had not missed the hapless girl who had been the unfortunate cause of this lamentable catastrophe. Now she asked anxiously for Polly; but no one could tell anything about her, as she had not been seen since the discovery of the fire.

Dinah listened in terror, and glanced at the burning mass before her.

"Poor Polly!" she cried. "She is lost beyond all hope of recovery—is she not, Mr. Ralph?"

she added, addressing the young man by the name by which she had heard him called.

He shook his head in reply; while Miss Tillysdale, who was now comfortably ensconced in one corner of the equipage, wrapped in a couple of horse-rugs, was beginning to unpaper her hair, and draw out her wily curls, apparently but little concerned respecting the loss of her poor domestic.

Ralph Thetford how took possession of the reins, and mounting to the coachman's seat, drove off towards the town of Blackbrook; Jellico, Desmoro, and the dog, Pinto, following with the caravan.

"I have only just escaped in time," remarked Miss Tillysdale, looking out of the carriage window, and peeping to some men who were hurrying along in the direction of the burning building.

Dinah made no reply. The gentle-hearted girl was thinking of the bright-faced woman whom she should never see again, and tear-were coursing one another down her cheeks.

The town of Blackbrook being reached, Ralph drove up to the door of the "Eagle Hotel;" and, alighting, rang its bell loudly.

The landlord stared when he learned wherefore he had been aroused at this untimely hour; and the ladies were at once admitted, and ushered into an apartment, where Miss Tillysdale, pretending to be suddenly overcome with her feelings, fell into a chair and sobbed hysterically. She perceived that they had been followed into the apartment by Ralph Thetford, and she was trying to get up a scold, in order to excite his interest in herself.

"Oh! I have borne up against it all, until I can bear up no longer!" she gasped forth. "Where is that worthy, noble creature, who has behaved so gloriously towards us all? Where is he?"

"Mr. Ralph is here, dear aunt," replied Dinah, feeling almost ashamed of her relation's somewhat extravagant language.

"Merely to return my grateful thanks for the generous manner in which Miss Tillysdale was pleased to entertain myself and my two companions, and to express my sincere sorrow at the shocking calamity which has just happened," said Ralph, still standing at the room-door, his hand upon the latch, as if about to depart.

"You are not surely going to leave us just yet?" queried the elder lady. "Ah, no, not just yet! Have pity on me, Mr. Ralph! I am a lone woman, without a single friend in the world; with no one by my side save this poor foolish child, Dinah. Pray, pray do not forsake me!"

"Dear madam, what can I possibly do for you?" asked he, in some embarrassment.

"Do! Oh, Mr. Ralph, become my steward, the manager of all my worldly affairs, and leave me no more!" sobbed forth the lady, in imploring accents.

Ralph smiled; he really could not help doing so. If Dinah Tillysdale had asked him to remain with her, perhaps he might have listened to her invitation, and probably have accepted it.

"You forget madam, what I am; and that our worldly positions are widely apart from one another; that I am only a poor stroller, you a rich lady! I have no pretensions to such an appointment as this you propose. Besides, madam, my present roving life suits my peculiar temperament. I was never intended for a sober, stay-at-home sort of existence, for I am a wild fellow, full of wild ways. Adieu, ladies!" he added, making his bow, and about to withdraw from the apartment.

"Whether would you go?" cried the lady, becoming greatly agitated, or pretending to become so. "Whither would you go?"

"To rejoin my companions, madam."

"In the road; and at this hour!" returned the lady. "Pray let your friends and yourself consider this hotel as my own house, wherein you will be welcome to abide for as long as it may suit your convenience and pleasure to do so."

Dinah's eyes brightened at hearing this above; but on Ralph replying that his business would not permit of his accepting Miss Tillysdale's generous and thoughtful offer, the young girl's eyes drooped.