

# THE HEARTHSTONE

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## ON A DEAD ROSE.

May, do not touch that faded flower,  
Albeit both scent and hue have flown;  
For it may still retain a power  
Some gentle heart may joy to own.  
Hidden beneath each withered leaf,  
A chastening spell, to Memory dear,  
May yield that burthened heart relief  
When Hope itself is sore!

There let it lie, 'mid records sweet,  
By feeling prompted, genius traced,  
Type of their fate memorial meet  
Of "young affections run to waste!"  
Left on their stem—(how fugitive!)—  
Those cherished leaves had soon been shed:  
But thus embalmed, will seem to live  
Till Memory's self be dead!

## DESMORO; OR, THE RED HAND.

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

### CHAPTER XIV.

Braymount was full of consternation and horror; the sad and terrible tale had travelled from door to door; and groups of gossips were talking it over at the corners of almost every street, lane, and alley in the town.

The Braymount evening *Advertiser* contained a long account of the robbery and dreadful murder of Mrs. Polderbrant, late an actress at the theatre royal belonging to the aforesaid town, and stated that the man charged with having perpetrated the revolting deed was one Desmoro Desmoro, a young actor attached to Mr. Jellico's company.

On the night following Mrs. Polderbrant's death, although Mr. Mackmillerman was announced to appear in one of his favourite characters, not a creature came near the theatre, the doors of which had to be reclosed and the lights extinguished.

Comfort Shavings was seated by her sick father's bedside, her eyelids swollen with weeping, and her bosom sore with heavy grief. At first she would not credit the frightful story of Desmoro's guilt; but when she recalled a certain conversation she had once held with him concerning Mrs. Polderbrant's probable worldly possessions, her belief in his integrity became somewhat shaken.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" she sobbed aloud. "And it was that he might be enabled to purchase books to read to me that he robbed poor Mrs. Polderbrant!"

But the young girl did not understand that Desmoro's life was in actual danger, that he might be doomed to suffer the extreme penalty of the law for the fearful crime of which he stood accused. Comfort was in ignorance of this, else her anxiety and grief on his account would have known no bounds.

She had no one near her to whom she could talk of Desmoro, no one to sympathize with her feelings in this matter. Her father was lying in an almost imbecile state, scarcely comprehending what was passing around him, and it would be quite useless to trouble him with this terrible tale.

By-and-by Comfort repaired to the theatre, in order, if possible, to hear further particulars relative to Desmoro's position, but she found that there was no rehearsal in progress, and that all theatrical business affairs were at a standstill for the present.

First she questioned one member of the company, then another, respecting her young friend; but those she questioned only shook their heads and remained silent.

Jellico could see nothing but ruin staring him in the face did he remain at Braymount. Mr. Mackmillerman was again announced to appear in one of his favorite characters, yet not a soul troubled the box-office for places or tickets for the approaching night of performance.

There was nothing left but flight for the whole *troupe*, as the late tragical affair had cast a terrible stigma upon each and every one of the members of that *troupe*. Generally speaking, country people have mighty strong prejudices of their own, and in that respect the inhabitants of Braymount were not different from their neighbours. And the theatre had suddenly become a sort of plague-spot; a place of loathsome horror to those worthy but weak-minded townfolk, who, one and all, shunned it, vowing never to yield to its attractions more.

"There's nothing for me to do but to break up the whole concern," said the manager, addressing the members of his company, now assembled in the green-room of the theatre. "I am not a man of means, and cannot pretend to stand up and struggle against this unexpected and terrible circumstance. Jellico's name is disgraced overlastingly; not from his own wrong-doing, but through this most unhappy and terrible tragedy, regarding which I believe Desmoro Desmoro to possess no more knowledge than my own innocent self. There is a mystery in the affair altogether, a mystery I cannot attempt to fathom. Poor Mrs. Polderbrant, I feel convinced, was the victim of a delusion; but she is gone, and heaven can only say how this case will end.



DESMORO'S DEPAIR.

how far this most unfortunate young man will be made to suffer for the crime laid to his charge?

Comfort listened to the manager in breathless agitation and alarm.

What would they do to Desmoro, supposing he were really to be proved guilty?

Oh! she dreaded to ask that question, dreaded even to put it to herself.

She sat silent, a dizzy sensation in her brain, a deadly sickness gathering round her heart. None present surmised the state of her feelings at this alarming moment; indeed, none had time to do so, for each and all had enough to do to think of themselves.

She understood that Jellico's company was disbanded; that the sad and sick father were now without an engagement—without either money or friends, and that understanding had fairly stunned her.

Comfort had known nothing but pinching throughout all her young life, and for her afflicted father's sake, more than for her own, she was lamenting this change in their wretched condition, and the poverty and misery which now threatened them. From her earliest youth the clown's daughter had been accustomed to reflect on many matters—on matters which were far, far beyond her experience and her years—and to content with a host of little trials (great ones to her) with scant, and not unfrequently with positive want itself. She was quite sensible then of what was in store for them, of the troubles which were staring them in the face; and it was no wonder that her young spirit quailed within her as she contemplated the dark present, and the still darker future.

There was a doctor's bill to be paid she remembered, and likewise many other debts; her father's illness had run her into several pecuniary straits, out of which she could not possibly see her way.

She was almost penniless—her parent still ill—what, what was she to do—what could she do?

She quitted the green-room with heavy, lagging steps, thinking of Desmoro—of the dead Mrs. Polderbrant, and of all the distress and disgraces that had been brought upon Manager Jellico and his company.

When she reached the stage entrance Pidgeon accosted her.

His manner was cringing in the extreme. He made her swollen eyelids, and he drew his own wise conclusions as to wherefore they were swollen.

"How's Maister Shavings, Miss Comfort?" he asked, in a whining tone.

"Not much better, I thank you," was the low-voiced reply.

"An' he'd be wues if he on'y knowed about all this sight of moitheration, wouldn't he, m'as'?"

"Yes," was the vacant answer.

"Of course Maister Desmoro 'll be hang'd!" said the wretch.

"Hang'd!" shuddered the girl, leaning against the wall for support; "who will be hang'd?"

"Why, him—the prisoner, miss; Maister Desmoro Desmoro, to be sure!"

"No, no!" she half shrieked; "no, no! He is not guilty!"

"It would be a precious good job for him if ye could prove that he aren't," returned the man coarsely. "Who do you think killed Mrs. Polderbrant, if he didn't?"

"I—I don't know," she stammered in terror, her whole face ghastly to behold. "It is all too terrible to contemplate," she added, making her way to the outer door, her knees smiting each other as she walked, a death-like faintness creeping over her.

Suddenly she clutched at the wall, seeking its support; then her fragile limbs gave way, she tottered forward and sank into a chair.

At this instant a carriage rolled up to the stage entrance, and, for a pause, Mr. Mackmillerman was at Comfort's side.

Poor girl! She was too much prostrated by her sorrows, and her terror to refuse the sympathy of any one. No marvel, then, that she listened to his soothing words, now poured into her ears, and, listening to them, that they afforded her some consolation.

Mr. Mackmillerman was old enough to be her father, and, taking that fact into consideration, she, to a certain extent, suffered him to gain her confidence.

The gentleman who had driven the *Cerberus* into his chimney corner, talked to Comfort in a subdued tone, none of which reached Pidgeon's ears, although these ears were strained to their very utmost in an endeavour to catch a stray word here and there.

"You are far too unwell to proceed hence alone," observed the actor, addressing his companion. "Here is my carriage at the door, and I beg that you will allow me to see you safely home."

"No, no, thank you," she returned. "I shall be better in a few moments. I must not trouble you."

"Nay, it would be a pleasure to do anything for you!" he rejoined in a gallant manner, yet with the utmost respect in all his tones.

"I think I'd better speak to Mr. Jellico first—he might be able to advise me what to do," altered poor Comfort, at a loss how to act or what to say at the time.

"I will not only advise, but assist you," he answered quickly. "I have both the will and the means to do so, if you will not thrust aside the hand of friendship now extended towards you."

"I do not know how to act," was he bewildered reply.

"I will go home with you, see your father, and that is what you will do the best for you to do," he responded persuasively. "Come! Why should you not trust me as you would Mr. Jellico? Am I a bear, that you are thus afraid of me?"

"I am not of aid of you."

"Then wherefore thus reject my courtesies?" She did not answer him. Her bosom was overflowing with an accumulation of sorrow, and her tears were ready to break forth afresh.

At length she let him lead her to and place her by his side within the carriage, which was driven away at once in the direction of Comfort's lodgings.

### CHAPTER XV.

Col. Symore had well-nigh fretted himself to death on his son's account; but it was not until the second morning after the occurrence of the robbery and the death of Mrs. Polderbrant, that a paper, containing a full and particular account of the case, fell into his hands.

The name of Desmoro first attracted his notice; then he read on and on, until he had become master of the whole matter.

He uttered no sound; but the paper was clutched fast in his hands, and his teeth penetrated his lip, and brought forth a gush of crimson fluid.

At this time Caroline was pouring out his

cup of chocolate; and Percy, who was suffering from a slight attack of the gout, which had confined him to the house for the last few days, was eating his breakfast, saying particular attention to a certain dainty French dish, and too much engaged to notice his brother's excited ways.

Col. Symore turned the sheet of intelligence round and round, and always returned to the same terrible frightful article, which he read over and over again, until the printed letters seemed to creep on his eyes and brain, and nearly drove him mad.

"You do not eat your breakfast," remarked Mr. Symore, fixing his eyes on her husband's face.

He started, dropped the paper, and looked at her for a few seconds, before he could find voice to make her any reply.

"My breakfast? Ah, that!" he said hollowly, regarding in session of the ewe paper and staring at his plate like one who is wits were far a tray.

"What all you?" she asked, with some anxiety in her accent.

"Oh? ejaculated Percy, for an instant looking up from his plate. "Take one of those *coquettes de mouton*, they are cooked to perfection; I can recommend them."

"Thank you, I have finished my breakfast," the Colonel answered, scarcely conscious of what he was saying.

"What! finished breakfast before you have even touched it?" cried Caroline. "More mystery, Colonel Symore!" she continued, in taunting syllables.

"Mystery!" repeated Percy, again glancing up from his plate, the contents of which had been rapidly disappearing piece after piece.

"What's it all about, Des, eh?"

Colonel Symore's face was first white then red, and his heart was beating fast and painfully.

Oh, the torture of this hour, and the torture he was yet anticipating!

Once, twice, and thrice his secret was on his very lips, on the point of being recalled to his wife; but the fear he had of her thrust it back again into his breast, and he kept it there.

After the meal was over, Caroline, who had subsided into a fit of listlessness, left the room, and the brothers were alone together.

Scarcely had the door closed upon his wife, when the Colonel sprang up and began to pace the floor backwards and forwards in the utmost perturbation.

Percy had taken up a sitting chronicle, and was lazily inspecting its columns, carelessly humming to himself all the while.

Presently he looked at his brother, put down the sheet, and moved uneasily in his chair.

"What the deuce ails you, Des?" he inquired, somewhat impatiently, his visage assuming a still redder hue. "Can't you sit down and let your breakfast digest its life in peace; but I forgot, you eat none; while, on the contrary, I enjoyed mine amazingly. Do sit down, Des, you give me the fits to see you marching to and fro in that stupid fashion. Ah, you never felt a tinge of the gout or you would understand what I suffer with that villainous complaint, and would avoid worrying me as you are doing now."

"Gout! haven't!" exclaimed the Colonel, suddenly stopping in front of his brother's chair. "Don't be so utterly selfish, Percy, don't imagine that this world was made expressly for you!"

"Selfish! I declare, Des—"

"Remember that others suffer as well as your self; and learn that at this moment I am enduring an anguish most intolerable, an anguish such as you deem not of."

"Bless me, Des! Where do you feel ill?"

"Here, and here!" the Colonel answered, touching first his breast and then his brow.

"Heart and brain together!" cried Percy. "A bad case, I should say. It is strange that I never heard of you lain until now. You'd better consult your medical man at once; I should do so."

"Percy," said the Colonel, taking a chair opposite to his brother, and speaking severely, "Percy, do you think that you entertain a singular notion of feeling for me?"

"Jove, what an odd question, to be sure!" returned the other. "Pon honour, I shall begin to doubt your sanity if you go on at this rate. I recollect now once being told that our father's gr at grandsons was a most eccentric person, who did all sorts of queer things; I hope that you have not inherited this malady, then—"

"Pshaw! Percy, Percy, if I go mad it will be with sorrow for what I have done—for the great wrong I once committed."

"Oh, dear, dear! Is it the old subject brought up again? Why not let it rest—I should say!"

"I know you would," said the Colonel, in a marked tone. "Read that," he added, giving him the paper containing the account of Desmoro's apprehension and the fearful charge preferred against him, and placing his finger on a particular paragraph, "Read that, and then wonder that you see me in as calm a state as I am."

"As sure as I live, there's a fit of gout in store for me," sighed Percy Symore, as he reluctantly prepared himself to obey his brother's wishes.

Then there ensued a pause. Presently Percy gave utterance to a prolonged whistle, and laid down the sheet, his countenance absolutely purple with amazement and horror at what he had just perused.

The Colonel now started up and renewed his marching to and fro—he could not sit still; the tempest in his brain and heart would not let him have any rest.

"The young ruffian!" exclaimed Percy, in great disgust. "Here again have I preserved you from acting foolishly; here again have you cause to bless your stars that you have had such a cool-headed adviser as myself. But for me you would have had this villainous, sanguinary miscreant on your hands; you would have owned him before all the world as your son—as a legitimate Symore. But I felt that he was a scoundrel from the very beginning; and I believe I told you as much—didn't I? At all events, if I didn't express my opinion of him in words, I—"

"Cease, Percy, to congratulate yourself on your boasted foresight!" broke forth the Colonel, abruptly stopping in his walk. "Cease; for I frankly tell you that I blame you, and you alone, for all I am suffering—for all I shall yet have to suffer. You were my elder brother, my monitor and guardian, and you should have counselled me to act justly and mercifully; you should have led my wayward steps out of the crooked path into the straight one, you should—"

"Zounds!" interrupted the listener; but the Colonel heeded him not, and still continued in the same excited strain as before.

"The lad is falsely accused. I could stake my life upon his honesty in word and deed; and I will move both heaven and earth in order to prove his innocence."

Here Percy Symore groaned audibly.

"Say, will you give me your assistance in this painful affair? Will you undertake the breaking of this matter to Caroline, so that I may be enabled to stir freely in the service of my son—will you—"

"Will I lay myself up with a confounded fit of the gout—will I bring upon myself the rage of two vixenish women? Not I, I faith! Though my locks be grey, I value their possession too well to suffer them to be combed by Caroline's fingers. Yes, powers! What a mistake I committed in coming down here for peace! Why, there have been nothing but wars ever since my arrival; I shall run away instantly; I shall, indeed, since I have discovered that I have a madman for a brother."

"Oh, Percy, Percy!"

"Better to be in hot water with Lucy, than to be scalded by the whole family. In other words, Des, if you have resolved upon rushing headlong into disgrace and ruin—of claiming a thief and murderer for your truly begotten son,—I'll tell my man to pack up directly, and I'll be off. I couldn't remain here to go through such scenes as Caroline will create when she hears of the existence of—I shudder to name the wicked monster—but you understand."

"I know well what I shall receive at the hands of my wife, should I ever feel myself compelled to avow to her my secret," said the Colonel. "But did I apprehend from her twice as much, I must do my duty in this unhappy business. But be assured on this point, I will not do anything rashly; I will endeavour to spare the members of my family all useless trouble, disgrace, and pain. Will that assurance content you, Percy?"

"I do not quite comprehend the meaning of your words," the brother returned, very frostily.

"Unless I am absolutely necessitated to reveal to my wife and others the secret of my