

MIGNONETTE

It was a little wood; from curious eyes
It hid its needles, and its needles
When all the lovely flowers which mortal eyes
With red and gold and azure were adorned
"You left a wood," the tiny vegetation said,
And being the dropping hand.

One day the rain, with impetuous air,
Called all the flowers together; then it said
That on the morrow, if the day was fair,
The blessed Virgin would that garden tread
And she who walks, it surely will be meet,
To see us at her feet.

From the morning, when the blessed maid
Walked in the garden where the roses grew,
They opened as they saw her, each one afraid
That it might fall to earth before she came
They bowed their heads and with their vest
And crowded it aside.

"Oh! I grieved the wood," "what can I do to show
The love I bear our lady? For not one
Of all the flowers which in this garden grow,
And share the blessings of the summer sun,
Would do for her a more heroic deed
Than I, though but a weed."

"I say, we are on the verge of a precipice; I must take my woman's wit to carry me safely through the difficulty, and keep my mind somewhat easy, knowing as I do know, that I can put her out of my path if I like. Now, there is my woman's wit," said she with a laugh; "but you see, I am not a laughing matter, I am a serious one." "You are in a hurry say, you, madam, well then wait," she said to herself as she sat on the grass. A little later she was stepped into her own room and saw again, this time it was a loud impetuous entrance which told her she must go immediately.

She opens her door and advances into the gallery without. "Hark, what is that?" she asks, and in a moment she is seized with a sudden panic, and she hears Mrs. Anselm sobbing passionately.

Forgetting all in the curiosity of the moment she rushed down the staircase, crossed the gallery and entered the library.

"Tread gently, woman with a pitiless heart, for death is in the household. Still and stark with features rigid and fixed in the repose of death, leaning back in his chair, as if asleep, in all that remains of good Eglantine Anselm! Eglantine was supporting Laura when Martha entered the room; even the hard hand of the latter was touched in that awful presence.

A man on horseback had gone to Exeter for a doctor. Of what use the healing art now, when death had already stepped in at the door? Eglantine's character now showed itself to her; and then she turned to the aid of Martha who led the scarcely conscious Laura to her own room, and then bore her company for the remainder of the evening wondering why amidst her occasional grief, Mrs. Anselm should occasionally express a fear as to how things would be between herself and her brother-in-law, when he should return on the morrow.

"I will tell you why," said Laura. "The will, when it shall be read, will not settle all the Squire's property on his nephew, as he will undoubtedly expect; his personal property he has left to myself; the estate is left to his sister, and should my son ever be restored to me, that, of course will pass on to his hands also. It is always the case, Ella, when death comes, with such a will; my more than father might be snatched from me, yet have failed to realize the truth; he has suffered so much, has got through so many attacks, and rallied so wonderfully, that I have been wholly unprepared for this blow. You will not leave me, will you?" said she, turning to Eglantine; "you have become as much a mother to me as in the days of your childhood."

Certainly not, dear Mrs. Anselm; I will remain as long as I can in your comfort to you; but the house is perfectly quiet; I am sure the servants have gone to bed, except that model of all attentive women, Martha, whose light is still burning in that room at the left angle of the house," said Ella, waving the blind aside she looked out on the calm moonlight night; "shall I ring for her to undress you, and if you like I will share your room to-night, so you will not be alone should you feel indisposed."

Thankfully Laura accepted the offer, and ringing the bell Martha appeared, her face wearing the outward expression of a decorous and becoming sorrow. Mrs. Anselm soon set her at liberty, and she will accompany Martha to the privacy of her own room, for she did not go to rest that night. A strange revelation had taken place in her thoughts and feelings since her eyes had fallen on that senseless image of clay; now lying stiff and stark in the room in which he had breathed his last sigh. One thought stood prominently forward, and that was that Miss Lester would undoubtedly miss her letter, would guess where she last had it and most probably would seek for it early on the morning of the morrow.

She picked it up with a transport of joy, little thinking what cruel eyes had gazed on those lines since she had so heedlessly dropped it, and, returning to the house, went up and wrote her letter—note to her father and mother; a note to Mr. Bunde, and a long and loving appeal to that lonely sister who, for her dear sake, was working in the Roman studio.

These letters she laid on the hall-table beside in Martha's private sitting-room. Like a cat possessing on its prey, her fingers had clutched hold of those letters, and she had carried them off in triumph. Now she has beside her a basin of boiling water, over which for two minutes she laid the envelope directed to Mrs. Bunde, and the letter is opened, with the intention as the moment of posting it, without leaving any flaw to show that it had been tampered with; but she reads all the hitherto restrained fury of her nature peeps forth.

"We shall be so happy in our future life, My father will not forbid our marriage, I caught the months of your absence, and so on. Ella had written, simply and unreservedly, never dreaming those pitiless eyes that grin woman would fall on what she had written.

Her father will not permit our marriage. Good, very good. I do not mean to give him the chance of permitting it or forbidding it. I would have laid out my whole power, and I swear you shall suffer for it, unless I can stop this fine affair." Such were the thoughts of Martha when she read the letter, and then she laid the letter down, and she was nervously bending the ground with her feet, and rocking herself to and fro in her chair. "He is here," said she to herself, "thinking of the happy change in his affairs; I wonder if I am in his thoughts; if he still intends to marry me. Doubtless he is thinking only of the federal provision, and then will the reading of the will; and perhaps, say, perhaps I had best not take my revenge of that markish girl, I see how he means to act, because, as things are at present, I can punish him if he plays me false. Meanwhile, I will not seek an interview, nor show myself in his way."

As her eyes met his, for a moment leading to them an expression of beauty. "Meet me by the Willow Pool tonight, best of women," said he, "I have much to say to you; at eight in the evening, unless you are prevented. And she turned away ere she had time to speak. Martha was a keen observer; she was by no means aware of much that had come to her knowledge, but she was entering all the pang of the heart's jealousy. She had seen him in the grounds sitting as the devoted admirer of Ella Lester; she had, when standing beside Ella turning over the pages of her music, whilst she sang and played to him, innocent of the passion he was already now rising for one whose whole heart was given to another. "At last the long weary day is at an end," said Martha to herself as she prepared for her walk to the Willow Pool, a lone, sequestered spot some ten minutes walk from the house, and which was voted an uncanny place by the country people in the neighborhood.

"What does he want to say to me that could not be said nearer hand?" thought she, "unless it be to grieve against intrusion; but a horrible sentiment of evil about to happen is on my mind." [TO BE CONTINUED.]

CHAPTER VII. DOWN BY THE WILLOW POOL. Earth to earth! The remains of the venerable Squire are laid to rest in the family vault of Riverdale. The solicitor of the deceased gentleman attended the funeral, together with the doctor and a few of the Squire's intimate friends, and the will is about to be read. The reader is already aware of what his chief provisions consisted of; the deceased gentleman's plate and furniture, together with the sum of £10,000, were bequeathed unreservedly to his beloved adopted daughter and niece by marriage, as widow of his deceased nephew Mrs. Laura Anselm. His horses, wines, and books were left to his heir-at-law, Edwin Anselm, assuming that the long lost son of his sister's nephew was never found to present himself as claimant. Laura had no reason to feel nervous as far as Edwin was concerned; his manner underwent no change, not a muscle of his handsome face quivered, and in a steady pleasant voice, grasping her by the hand, he congratulated her on the honorable mention his uncle had accorded to her in his will. "I can not make him out, he is simply unrecognizable," said she to herself; "who would have expected this after he had tried his best to separate me and the Squire, and had treated me as he did before?" And here Laura stopped, and tried to fix her thoughts on some other subject, for she had made a compact with her own heart, never to allow her mind to wander over that most terrible time of her life, which professed to be a long confinement in the private asylum.

Whatever may have been the ulterior motives that actuated him, it operated well for Laura. As far as she was concerned, he took an early opportunity of begging her to consider Riverdale as her home, and she herself, his mistress, at least, for the present, remarking, "whilst a smile played around his well-formed mouth, that whilst he was a bachelor, if the old man were denuded of his household goods he should seek a home in a London lodging as he had often done before in his comfortless lonely existence, that he saw no reason, in fact there should be any change in their manner of living. Laura listened in wondering surprise, half pleased that things could go on like this. How he wished he could see the now was with this world's goods, through the thoughtful generosity of her old friend and former guardian, she yielded a ready assent. "He was more than double Ella's age, but what then?" said he to himself, and he looked at the reflection of his own handsome face in the pier-glass, and observed how well he had aged, and how close to her fatherly withholding his consent on account of the little matter of the missing man, who might at any hour disturb him in the possession of the estate, he did not enter his mind to dwell upon it. Twenty-two years had passed into the great gulf of eternity and the loss had never appeared, so why fear was that head? How he wished he could once more throw Laura into a magical sleep. "Martha," soliloquized he to himself, "will be dreadfully out of it; but what of that? If she is still rash enough to think she can get me to make her my wife? I have a secret to tell which will make her very hair on her head stand up. Fought! What an ugly woman she is since she had that railway accident; her forehead will retain that terrible scar so long as she lives. I will manage to speak to her to-night and tell her some two or three supposable truths."

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