

MIGNONETTE

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MIGNONETTE.

That low white wicket! As the sun went down,
I bent above it, drawn by such a wail
Of sweet, soft, pulsing fragrance, as is blown
From you small grave. A single golden shaft,
Thrilling the dusky odors, touched a form
Still, snowy-veined, ghostly in the gloom.
Peace, silence, fragrance! In the troubled storm
Of such unrestful life as is my doom,
Those hours at least were halcyon. Let me yet
Steal solace from their memory, Mignonette!

That small soft hand, warm, white, the very dove
Of grace to me, how shyly forth it stole
With its sweet burden. Ah! my little love,
How shouldst thou know the value of thy dote?
A bunch of brown sweet blossoms; and they turned
The current of a life that set to death,
Thou didst not guess the bitter fire that burned
Within my bosom, while thy peaceful breath
Fanned the hot fire, and these sweet dews wet
Brown blossoms made to tremble, Mignonette!

Thou wert not lovely little one, thy face
Was but a simple face with soft brown eyes,
Thou wert but covered with a bird-like grace,
A silver voice low-set to pure replies,
Yet sweet, yet stainless, yet serene and strong,
The spirit that inspired thee, 'thou to me
Art ever as thy flower: to thee belong
Sweetness, and solace, and sure constancy.
My little darling! Would those eyes, tear-wet,
Might see thee through the shadows, Mignonette!

Thou wert no April girl, whose smiles and tears
Were swift as sun and shadow on a plain
Wind-blown in gusty spring. Nor souless fairs,
Nor shallow joys were thine. So didst thou gain
Sweet empire o'er a soul that passion's wars
Had scorched and stained. Oh! darling, would
That I could lift my eyes to yonder stainless stars,
And feel no sting in their calm purity.
Say, dost thou know this anguish of regret
That wrings the heart that loved thee, Mignonette?

And thou didst love me! Doth the bruised flower
Love the black storm that breaks and beats it low?
What had I worthy of that priceless dower?
What brought me near thee? Sweet thy blossoms
blow

And sweetly thou hadst crown, oh! flower of maids,
But for my love, started coming. Were these arms
A nest for thee? If those soft evening shades
Had hid thee from me sweet, thy winsome charms
Full flowering now, though but a lowly form,
Had blessed a happier lover, Mignonette!

I loved thee, but the curse of early years
Clung to me. May he hope for any grace,
Who filled those tender eyes with patient tears,
Who stole the bloom from that pathetic face?
Loved thee and left thee! Not again to see
Thee, my brown blossom; let it fade and fall
Through its sweet soul-healing purity.
That might have won me from a cruel thrall.
Nay, my dear darling, thou shalt win me yet,
For dying thou hast conquered, Mignonette!

And now I sit beside thy lonely grave,
Wealth with the dun-hued flower that was thine
own,
Blest at the heart of grief once more to have
The faint familiar fragrance round me blown.
Sweet, pure, so constant in my darling, bound
From those blue heights, and bless me ere I go;
That dear dead hand shall hold me to the end.
Lo! love, I pluck one fragrant spray. I know
That when we twain shall meet, this purple regret
Shall pass at thy sweet welcome, Mignonette.
All The Year Round.

DESMORO; OR, THE RED HAND.

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

CHAPTER VII.

A whole fortnight had passed away. Ralph Thetford had communicated with the deceased Miss Tillydale's lawyer at York, and her remains had been interred according to his directions.

A few days after the funeral, the man of law called upon Mrs. Thetford, and informed her that she was the sole heir to all her late aunt's possessions: at the same time recommending Ralph to give up his profession, and look after the management of his young wife's affairs.

So it was arranged that Ralph was to quit Manager Jellicoe's strolling company, and become an independent gentleman; to live henceforth at his ease, without the fear of poverty or scant ever visiting his domestic hearth.

"Desmoro," said Ralph, a few hours before his departure from Freshfield, "my wanderings are now all over, and I am a wealthy man, possessed of a loving wife; for which worldly blessings I have to thank you, my friend."

"Me!" repeated the youth, in surprise.

"To be sure! Had we not found you in the snow that night, we should never have called at Tillydale Hall, and I should never have become acquainted with my Dinah. Now do you see how much I owe you, Desmoro?"

"And how much do I not owe you, sir?" responded the other, in a grateful tone. "Have you not been very kind to me always?"

"But now that I have the power, I wish to be still kinder to you, my lad," pursued Ralph. "I want you to abandon this erratic life, and come with me."

Desmoro shook his head, and turned a shade paler than his wont. He did not like to appear thankless, and knew not how to decline this offer.

"I am much obliged to you, sir," stammered he, in some embarrassment, "but I should not like to live a life of dependence. I would rather, for awhile, rough it, as the saying is, and strive to carve out my own fortunes, than be indebted to any one."



THE RECOGNITION IN THE THEATRE.

Desmoro was thinking of the clown's lovely daughter; it was for her sake that he was thus refusing to accept Ralph Thetford's generous offer.

"Is it possible that you would rather lead this wandering existence than enjoy one of respectability, peace, and rest?"

The word "respectability" grated on the youth's ear, and for a few seconds his mind wavered, and he felt quite at a loss how to reply.

It was ten o'clock in the morning; and this scene was passing in one of the dingy rooms of the theatre where Desmoro abided. A comfortable apartment it was, looking out upon the roofs of other buildings, and stowed full of stage furniture and stage properties.

Desmoro was sitting before the fire, his feet upon a rude fender, across his knees a steel breast-plate, which he was polishing, rubbing at while he thought.

The place had a desolate, ghostly appearance, that seemed to make Desmoro's heart sticken in his bosom. For here was a gilded chair, tarnished and broken; there, a sofa, with its cover all faded and torn, with rickety back and crippled legs; in another place, a couple of dilapidated banners, on one of which was painted a crucifix—on the second, a skull and cross-bones. Hanging on the walls were several tin shields, rusty swords, suits of armour, battle-axes, chains, helmets, masks, gauntlets, belts, pistols, daggers, knives, soldiers' knapsacks, guns, sabres, whips, caps, cowls, and gaudinies.

Desmoro glanced around at all these articles; as he did so, a shudder passed through his frame. The youth had an eye for cleanliness, order, and comfort; and there was nothing here but dust, confusion, and discomfort. It was a sad shelter for a proud-spirited boy; but it was a shelter which he paid for by the labour of his own hands, and the sweat of his brow; and therefore it was his own for those hours during which he desired to occupy it.

"Well, my lad?" interrogated Ralph Thetford.

Desmoro roused himself from his musings. "Mr. Jellicoe might think me ungrateful, were I to leave him, sir," he observed, his gaze slowly moving to the embers in the grate, and thence to his companion's face.

"Not at all," was the ready rejoinder. "I have already spoken to him upon this subject, and he will only be too happy to see you better your present condition."

"He is very good to me, and so are you, sir," Desmoro hesitatingly returned; "but—"

Just at this "but," the room-door was thrust open, and Shavings' head made itself visible.

Desmoro's mind was made up in a moment, now. The sight of the clown's face, which was soon followed by that of Comfort, had fixed his wavering resolution. He could not go hence, and see her no more—oh, no! He would rather endure anything than lose the tones of her silvery voice, the soft glances of her eyes, and the gentle touch of her friendly hand. And Desmoro's visage brightened, his breast grew lighter, as he replied to Ralph.

"I think, sir, I'd prefer staying where I am. I ought to work for my bread, and here I shall have to do so."

"Reflect, my lad—reflect!" said Ralph. "Remember, there is a tide in the affairs of man, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune!"

"What's that you're saying about fortune, Thetford?" inquired Shavings, entering the

room, followed by Comfort. "Ah, it's well for you to be able to talk of fortune; I wish to gracious I could!"

"I'm advising Desmoro to quit this sort of life, and to come with me," returned Ralph.

"And very good advisin', truly, Thetford; although we shall be sorry enough to have him leave us," answered the clown.

Desmoro glanced at Comfort during the above speech, and remarked that she had suddenly grown very pale.

Did she fear his going? Oh, then, not for the world's riches, would he forsake her dear side!

"And what's he sayin' to your proposal, Thetford?" queried Shavings. "He's jumpin' at it, of course?"

Comfort's eyes were fixed upon Desmoro's lips, which she was watching in painful anxiety.

"No; he's preferring to stay where he is!" answered Ralph, in regretful accents.

"Ah, he's smelt the footlights!" laughed Shavings, slipping Desmoro on the shoulder as he spoke,—"he has smelt the footlights, and cannot leave 'em! Is that the fact, Desmoro?"

"Perhaps so," answered the youth, with an abashed air.

"Ah, I understand all about it, my lad! I once felt in the same way, exactly."

"And I, also," chimed in Ralph Thetford. "But the stage has ceased to fascinate me, now."

"And very naturally so," responded the clown. "You have grown rich and are married to a woman whom you admire and love; but this lad is poor and ambitious, so we must have some consideration for him!"

"I wish I had time to relate my own history to him," Ralph added, in serious accents.

"Well, youth must have its fling!" exclaimed Shavings, who did not relish the notion of parting with his young friend, Desmoro. "You have had yours, Thetford, and I've had mine; and now we both of us pretty nigh sobered! I know I am; just forty years of age, as I be, a widower, and one of my daughter's children, clapping his hands, and then turning a pirouette in the middle of the floor. 'But never say die, is one of my mottoes; and make yourself as happy as you can, is another! That's your sort—aren't it, Desmoro, my boy?"

"Well, if you should ever stand in need of a friend, Desmoro, whether soon or far hence, send me at York, and your application shall be instantly attended to. I am grieved that I cannot influence you as I could wish; but I trust that you will change your mind by-and-by, and come to me!"

"Thank the gods I am in time to bid you farewell, Ralph!" a sonorous voice exclaimed; and Mrs. Polderbrant, in one of her peculiar costumes, made herself apparent.

"O dear Mrs. Polderbrant, you are just the very person I am waiting to see, and speak to!" returned Ralph.

"Is it possible, I am delighted to hear as much," rejoined she, significantly glancing at the clown and his daughter, who, taking her hint, at once left the room, followed by Desmoro.

"My dear Mrs. Polderbrant!" commenced Ralph, as soon as they were left alone together; "we are no strangers to one another; we have known each other for some years!"

"Five years and ten weeks exactly, Mr. Thetford," was her matter-of-fact rejoinder.

"Yes; I dare say it is that length of time since you joined Jellicoe's company. Well, knowing you all those many years, and always

admiring your good sense and charitable nature, I am emboldened to ask you to do me a real service!"

"I'll do it, Mr. Thetford; I'll do it, whatever it may be?" was her ready and earnest answer.

"Thank you, thank you. I was quite sure that you would help me in this little matter."

"What is it, Ralph—pray pardon me, I forget that I ought not to take the liberty of addressing you by your christian name now?"

"Nonsense, nonsense!"

"But you are now a rich man, you must remember, and, as such, ought to have some extra respect paid you."

"Oh! very well, just as you please, Mrs. Polderbrant!" laughed Ralph, in his usually light-hearted manner.

"Now for the service of which you spoke?"

"I want you to watch over that lad Desmoro, Mrs. Polderbrant—to be a friend to him in every way you can. I place the fullest dependence on you, as you will find on examining this lay-and-by, when I am gone! And so saying, Ralph produced his pocket-book, took thence several bank-notes, folded them, and put them in her hand.

"What are these for, Mr. Thetford?" she asked, greatly bewildered by his donation.

"Do not suffer Desmoro to want in any way; look after the lad, and may heaven bless you. You comprehend me now, Mrs. Polderbrant?"

"Yes; I am to use these, your gift, for the benefit of the boy?"

"Precisely so."

"And I will do so, you may depend on't, Mrs. Thetford. I will not rob the lad of one penny of the money!"

"I am sure you won't, I'm sure you won't!" returned Ralph. "Poor motherless fellow! I feel quite rejected to be able to commit him to such careful hands as yours."

"You flatter me, Mr. Thetford; but I will do my best to merit a continuance of your good opinion."

"Well good-bye, Mrs. Polderbrant; recollect that a line, addressed to me at York, will always meet with a response." And wringing her hand, he left her, and quickly found his way to the stage, where all the members of the company had assembled in order to take leave of their favourite, Ralph Thetford.

The women were in tears, and the men all looked sorrowful at this parting.

Ralph kissed the former, and shook hands with the latter; then, waving his hat, he was gone, and over the threshold of the stage-door, into the street, where a postchaise was awaiting him.

Just as Ralph's foot was on the step of the vehicle, some one touched his arm.

"Desmoro!" he exclaimed, turning and perceiving the youth close to his elbow. "What have you changed your mind?"

"No, sir!"

"I'm sorry to hear you say so. What do you want, then?"

"To shake hands with you again, sir, and to beg you not to think me a thankless fellow. I didn't care to bid you good-bye just now before all the people, because I couldn't have told you as I wished to do how much I like you, and how grieved I am to say farewell to you."

Desmoro was almost choking as he thus delivered himself, and the hand resting in Ralph's palm was icy cold.

"Continue to be a good lad, Desmoro!" returned his friend. "And since you have chosen

your own path in life, let us hope that it may one day lead to fortune. Heaven bless you!"

"And heaven bless you, also, sir," half-sobbed Desmoro, wringing Ralph's hand.

"Change your mind, my lad; it's not too late to do so, and come along with me," said Ralph, touched by the sadness of the youth's looks and tones.

"I—I wish I could, sir!" faltered Desmoro; "but I cannot, I feel chained here!"

Ralph was in the chaise, and its door was closed.

"Carry my respectful regards to Mrs. Thetford!" added Desmoro.

Ralph waved his hand, gave the signal to the driver, and the equipage dashed quickly away, and Desmoro was left with tears in his eyes, and sorrow in his heart, watching the vehicle recede from his view.

For several days after this, Desmoro was very silent and very mournful. He missed Ralph exceedingly, and deeply regretted the loss of his cheerful presence.

Well, time progressed. The *troupe* had left Freshfield, and was now located at a town called Brynmount, which had a neat little theatre situated in its principal street.

Desmoro still continued to be industrious; and Jellicoe, seeing him so, was doubly kind to him, and matters proceeded smoothly enough between the manager and his protégé.

Despite the many discomforts he had to endure, Desmoro contrived to make himself tolerably happy in his position. His chief solace was Comfort, who was fast learning all the lessons he had to teach. Desmoro was very proud of his pupil, and robbed himself of many a meal in order that he might save pence enough to purchase certain second-hand books for her to study from.

One day, Desmoro, seeing a ticketed volume in a bookseller's window, and longing to possess himself of that volume, began to pinch himself in every way he could, on purpose to scrape together money enough to buy it.

The bookseller's shop was close by the theatre, so Desmoro had no difficulty in keeping a daily watch over the much-coveted prize, which had probably been in that same window for half a score of years or more.

Never did a hungry man look upon a loaf of bread with the longing eyes that Desmoro looked upon that shabby dog-eared tome. He was actually ill with longing for it; for he feared that it was far beyond his reach, seeing that, however he scraped and pinched, his pence but slowly accumulated.

One dark morning, as Desmoro was sitting in his room, surrounded by stage properties and playbills, eating his breakfast, and dreaming of his old grandfather, of Comfort, and of the volume in the shop hard by, the door of the apartment opened, and Mrs. Polderbrant entered.

"Surprised to see me at such an early hour, ain't you?" said she, taking a chair opposite to our hero. "Of course you are; I see amazement written in 'her looks!" she continued, in her usually exaggerated style of language. "Well, I will proceed to explain myself. You have been looking very poorly of late, very different from your former self, and I am come to inquire into the state of your bodily health, and to see if I can do anything to benefit you in any way. In the first place, what are you taking for breakfast?"

Desmoro coloured deeply, and looked much confused, for he knew not how to tell her that his morning meal was only bread and water. But he was too honest to deceive her in any way, so he let his visitor satisfy herself concerning his repast.

Miss Polderbrant lifted her hands in surprise.

"What!" she exclaimed; "can I believe my eyes? Only bread and water, as I'm a sinner! Why, Desmoro, do you mean to tell me that Jellicoe does not allow you the means of living in a Christian-like manner? Good gracious! Why, I'm horror-struck! Bread and water! Oh, you may well be looking puny and haggard, thus feeding yourself on prison fare! How much do you get a week—tell me that?"

"Quite enough, ma'am, and more than I deserve!" answered Desmoro, modestly.

"That's not a satisfactory answer to my question. I ask you what sum you receive here weekly?"

Desmoro hesitated. He could not understand wherefore Mrs. Polderbrant was so particularly interesting herself respecting his affairs. He was aware of the actress's eccentricity of character, and he felt some reluctance at gratifying her inquiries.

Now Desmoro's nature, although proud in the main, was naturally confiding and affectionate; and his companion, knowing as much, still pursued her theme, and in a manner which she thought he would be quite unable to resist.

"Desmoro," she went on, in altered tones, her hands clasped in her lap, "I have not always been the lone woman you behold me now. I once had a son, who was handsome in person, and full of bright promise as well. But he is now no more! He is above, above!" she added, lifting up her eyes, which were filled with sudden tears. "And I have an empty heart! Desmoro, will you accept a corner in that heart? It is not all cold—there are warm pulses beating in it yet?"

"You're very good, ma'am!" stammered he, at a loss how to reply to her.

"And you will confide in me, eh?" she eagerly cried.