

What could they do to him in the way of punishment? They could not prove that he had stolen anything! Then with what crime would Miss Tillysdale's venomous tongue charge him? Surely not with any attempt to do her any serious bodily harm?

What would Mr. Jellico say when they missed him? Would Mr. Thetford explain to him the adventures and misadventures of that night, and so clear his name—the name of Desmoro—from all blame?

The company would leave Blackbrook at daylight. Would not Comfort miss him from her side, by which he had promised her he would travel all the way?

Poor Desmoro was most unhappy while all these questions were presenting themselves to him, and he would have done much to have regained his lost liberty.

While the youth was thus bitterly musing, almost distracted with his own thoughts, two constables arrived, and prepared to place his wrists in a pair of handcuffs.

"No, no!" cried the lad, in accents of terror and anguish, scattering at the sight of the fetters. "Don't on those on me—don't, don't, don't! I'll go with you quietly enough without this—I will, indeed! Believe me!"

"No, no, my lad; safe bind, safe find, is my motto!" returned one of the men, with a harsh laugh; "so give here your fists, and let us have no more ado about the matter."

"I—I am not a coward!" faltered Desmoro, his accents suffocating, his eyes full of aching drops; "but I am frightened of those, and beg you not to put them on me!"

And as he spoke, he retreated, and held up his two hands as if to ward off the man's nearer approach to him.

"Nonsense! nonsense!" flustered the constable who had spoken before, advancing towards our hero. "Holloa!" he added, suddenly pausing; "why, one of your hands is covered with blood; what has brought it there, I should like to know?"

Desmoro's fingers closed instantly upon his crimson palm.

"Come, come; none of that youngster! I'm not going to stand any of your tricks!" continued the man coarsely. "Let me see your hand?"

"There!" said the youth, at once displaying it.

The kitchen was full of light, and likewise full of people. All crowded round to watch the examination of Desmoro's palm.

"It's only a mother's mark, sir," quivered he.

"It's the queerest thing I ever saw," responded the limb of the law. "This is a bad trade for you to have taken to, with such a mark as this on you, my lad! It would be bad enough for a honest man to carry about with him such a print as yours; but, for one of your sort—"

"My sort!" echoed the youth, indignantly; "you mistake me quite! I never did a thoroughly wicked act in my whole life, and I trust I never shall!"

At this all the men laughed; while Desmoro, finding that it was entirely useless for him to longer resist, permitted himself to be searched, and yielded his wrists to the iron bonds.

As he did so, a sudden chill seemed to fall upon his heart.

It was infamous and terrible to be thus manacled, all innocent as he was of any crime! Desmoro's pride was now fairly crushed within him. He would have swept the streets, and left no degradation in so doing; but to be thus fettered, and thus accused, was more than he could bear.

Through the dark streets the constables dragged the poor, parentless one, until they arrived at the Blackbrook gaol, which was an old, dilapidated building in an obscure part of the town.

Desmoro was then hurried up a flight of stairs, and thrust into a desolate, fireless room, where he sank upon a wooden bench, overcome quite by his many contending feelings.

"You'll be taken before the magistrate at ten o'clock, youngster," said the man, as he quitted the apartment, and locked the door of it.

With a sob of wild anguish, the youthful prisoner heard the grating of the lock, and then the constable's receding steps along the passage outside the door.

"Oh, Mr. Thetford, won't you—won't you come and tell them the whole truth, and so save me from further degradation at these people's cruel hands?" Desmoro cried aloud, big tears coursing one another down his cheeks.

He was in utter darkness; but, although he could not see the terrible fetters on his wrists, he could feel them; and there was horror inexpressible to him in their touch.

Now Desmoro's hands, notwithstanding their strength, were as small as those of a woman. The men had not remarked that fact, and Desmoro, after much pressing and squeezing, succeeded in releasing himself from the soul-galling manacles, which he dashed to the ground with terror and loathing.

Desmoro now groped round the apartment, which was spacious, and lofty as well, trying to find some outlet. There was a window, a narrow-paned window; but it was too high, he feared, for him to reach.

The youth searched his pockets, hoping that the men had overlooked his knife, but nothing therein could he find.

Presently Desmoro thought of the bench on which he had been sitting. Could he rest that bench on its end, and so clamber up to it to that casement? He thought he could, and after much difficulty, he did so; and there was he en-cased in the deep recess of the window, peering out into grey light of breaking morn, meditating an escape from his prison, and praying that he might accomplish such.

He did not like to run away, because such an act on his part would betoken guilt; but he could not remain, and suffer added stings, and added degradation, while liberty was here before him.

Desmoro opened the casement, and gazed out of it. Immediately beneath him was the roof of a house, with a tolerably high coping around it. After measuring with his eye the distance he would have to descend, he got out and dropped himself upon the friendly sashes, which received him perfectly unhurt.

Our hero breathed freely, now; and his heart—which was beating fast—was filled with hopeful anticipations.

Trembling with grateful emotions, and with fear lest he should be intercepted in his flight, Desmoro now approached the coping, and examined his position.

He was not at any considerable height from the ground. He would risk the descent; for, nothing venture, nothing gain, he thought.

Yet he was not rash, and his agitation was taking away a great deal of his strength; so he paused awhile, and strove to collect his energies, and all his courage as well.

He saw that he had no time to lose. The grey light of opening day was growing brighter and brighter, and the people around would soon be awake and astir.

Desmoro flung his body over the coping, then dropped from his hands to the ground, upon which he lay for sometime, stunned, and almost senseless.

But he had broken his bonds; and he was free again, with the broad sky above him, and the firm earth under his feet.

As soon as he was able, he arose, and quickly moved away from the spot, anxious to put distance between himself and his late gaolers. He was thinking of the clown and his pretty daughter, and wondering whether he could reach their lodgings before they had set forth on their proposed journey, which had, perforce, to be performed by them on foot.

Desmoro was shaken, weary, and heart sick. Want of natural rest, together with the late scenes of excitement he had gone through, had nearly worn him out. Nevertheless, he bravely struggled onwards, doing his best to forget his sufferings. He did not look either this way or that; but sped along as fast as he could, with his hands thrust deep into his trousers-pockets, his bare head (he had lost his cap somewhere) exposed to the wintry blast, and the now sharply-descending rain.

All at once catching the sounds of footsteps behind him, Desmoro quickened his pace. He was dreading pursuit, and dared not cast a single glance across his shoulder.

On and on he flew, his feet seeming scarcely to touch the earth; yet still he could hear the rapid footfall of one who was apparently in as great haste as himself.

Desmoro's face was bathed in a profuse perspiration, and every pulse within him was throbbing violently. He thought that he was about to fall again into the hands of the law, his terror knew no bounds.

Clatter, clatter, clatter over the rough stone pavement, the narrow, old-fashioned street echoing every sound; and, presently, a hand was laid on the lad's shoulder, and his onward progress at once delayed.

"Let me go—let me go!" shrieked he, struggling to free himself.

"Desmoro!" spoke a voice.

And turning round, the youth recognised his friend, Ralph Thetford.

"Oh, Mr. Thetford—Mr. Thetford! I thought you wouldn't desert me quite!" broke forth Desmoro, in panting syllables. "I have been placed in handcuffs—think of that, Mr. Thetford!—carried off to prison, accused of heaven alone knows what, by Miss Tillysdale, and—"

"My poor boy! And how have you escaped? I was at your heels. I have been to the hotel to inquire after you, and learning there your fate, I was on my way to the prison, in order to see what I could do for you, when I caught sight of your flying figure."

"Oh, I am so thankful to see you again!" half-sobbed Desmoro.

"Dinah would not permit me to know a moment's rest, until I started off in search of you," replied Ralph. "I ran a great risk in presenting myself at the abiding-place of Miss Tillysdale; but I could not leave you to suffer for no fault of your own; so here I am, to render you all the assistance I can, under the trying difficulties of your new position, which is one quite dramatic, to say the least of it, eh, Desmoro?" asked the stroller, with one of his old gay airs.

"Were they to overtake me, could they put me back into the gaol?" asked the lad, his mind still in terror of the law and its agents. "I have more to dread at the hands of Miss Tillysdale than you think for," proceeded he. "She accused me of attempting her life, or something like it; and her evidence against such a poor fellow as I would be condemnation to him, no matter what defence he might have the wit and power to make."

"Tush, my dear lad!" laughed Ralph. "You seem to forget that Dinah's evidence would entirely prove your innocence! The old lady might make whatever charges she chose against you; and we could quash them all!"

Desmoro was reassured; and he now walked on by Ralph's side, feeling as if his breast had been suddenly relieved of a weighty load. But he was far too delicate to harp upon the subject of his late troubles; he merely described the manner in which he had effected his escape from the gaol, and then dismissed the affair.

"What a brave lad he is!" praised Ralph. "I shall like you better than ever after this, Desmoro," he added, his voice slightly husky as he spoke.

"When shall you be married, sir?" inquired the youth, purposely changing the subject of conversation.

"To-morrow, after we have arrived at Freshfield. Dinah is travelling in company with Mrs. Polderbrant."

"I am already so tired, that I fear I shall not be able to get to Freshfield to-day," observed Desmoro, very faintly.

"Nonsense, nonsense! I'll have you there sooner far than you expect. I've ordered a horse and covered cart for our use, and Shavings and Comfort have arranged to be of our party. What say you to all that, my lad?"

"That you have been very thoughtful and kind, as you ever are," returned Desmoro, his veins quivering at the mere mention of Comfort Chavving's name.

CHAPTER VI.

The little party in the covered cart, now jolting over the rough, muddy roads, seemed a very happy party indeed, to judge from the laughter under the tarpaulin. Ralph was the gayest of the gay; Shavings was simple and quaint, as usual; and Desmoro and Comfort were amused listeners.

Ralph knew that Dinah was safe under the care of Mrs. Polderbrant, and that the morrow would see the damsel his own for life; and his felicity was brimming over; and he sang merry songs, related droll tales, and made the roads resound with his joyous and melodious voice.

"This is to be an expectant bridegroom," remarked Shavings, winking at Desmoro. "Do you observe, my lad?"

"Ay," smiled he, as he quietly glanced at Comfort's sweet face, hid under a gipsy hat of black beaver. Then he began wondering whether, when he came to man's estate, Comfort would care for him as wealthy Dinah Tilly-

sdale had proved she cared for Ralph Thetford, the poor stroller.

And thus reflecting, Desmoro's head drooped forward upon his breast, and the wearied boy slept profoundly.

Comfort, who had been made acquainted with all her young friend's late mishaps, here touched the sleeve of Ralph, who was warbling forth one of his most hilarious ditties.

In a moment Ralph was silent.

"Ah, poor lad!" he said, as he spoke arranging the straw at the end of the cart, so as to form a sort of pillow for Desmoro's head. "He has done me some good service, and must not be neglected."

And then Ralph himself leaved back amongst the straw, and soon dropped into slumber.

Shavings now drew closer to Comfort, and gathered her to his breast. It was intensely cold, and the father and daughter were but thinly clad; and, therefore, the closer they could get to each other the warmer they would be.

On the following day, Ralph Thetford, with a wedding-license in his pocket, and accompanied by Jellico and Desmoro, repaired to a certain church at Freshfield, at the door of which he met the trembling Dinah, and Mrs. Polderbrant—the "heavy lady" of the strolling company—who had mistaken the time, and arrived at the church a whole half-hour too soon, an event which Mrs. Polderbrant declared she wouldn't have had occur on any account, if she could possibly have helped it.

Mrs. Polderbrant, who had her own peculiar notions on points of etiquette, was a tall, bony, hard-faced woman, still in manner and as laughly as the proverbial lady in the land. "Nature had intended her for a duchess," she used to say, "but cruel fate, like a spiteful jade as she was, had foiled the great mistress's intentions."

Mrs. Polderbrant was, moreover, a strong-minded female, who never allowed herself to be imposed upon, never, never!

Mrs. Polderbrant kept the whole company in awe of her superior birth, superior learning, superior mental qualifications, superior talents, and superior strength of mind.

She was a widow. Her late husband had been a weak-brained fellow, whom people had kindly said she had tormented into a galloping consumption. But such was not the case, for Patience Polderbrant, peculiar as she certainly was in many things, owned a heart as soft as that of any other woman. Nevertheless she had much strangeness about her, and few persons liked her, or sought her acquaintance.

She was odd in her attire too, and disregarded fashion entirely, often wearing her stage dresses in the streets, appearing in the costume of foreign climes, of ages long gone by; now as a Russian peasant, then as a Spanish lady; at another time as a Scotch lassie, afterwards in some other strange garb equally out of place and absurd.

On this occasion, although there was snow on the ground, she wore a dress of thin, white muslin, made exceedingly scanty and short in the skirt, a fur-trimmed black velvet hat, and a long veil of snow-white.

By the side of Dinah Tillysdale, who looked very elderly and venerably, she looked one of the oddest creatures in the world. But few persons paused to remark the singularity of her appearance, as every eye of interest was directed towards the bride, who was looking as pretty as any bride had need to look, even were such bride about to wed a king.

"I ought to be ashamed of myself, Mr. Thetford," she commenced, gushingly greeting the bridegroom with a pair of outstretched hands, which he received and heartily shook, "I really ought; but it wasn't my fault for all that! I should not have trusted to my watch, which, having been my late grandmother's property, often takes wild freaks into its head, stopping or going just as suits its capricious fancy. Behold your bride, blushing as a bride should, eh?" she continued, moving aside and showing Dinah's timid, shivering form. "Ah, happy pair! Etcetera, etcetera!" she added, with an extravagant air; and at once taking possession of the maiden, she led her up the aisle of the church to the altar. Ralph, Jellico, and Desmoro following close behind, without observing any order.

Jellico had given away the bride, and the priest's benediction had just been pronounced upon the newly-wedded pair, when a voice, shrill as the squeak of a penny trumpet, sounded through the sacred building, and sent terror to the hearts of all those who recognised it.

Every one paused in blank consternation, as, rushing up the centre aisle, was seen the quaint figure of Miss Tillysdale.

"Stop the ceremony—stop the ceremony! I forbid the marriage taking place!" she half-screamed, nearing the altar, around which the wedding-party was still standing. "Where is she—my niece—Dinah Sophia Markland Tillysdale—and that rogue who stole her away? Where is she?—where are they both?"

Dinah clung into her husband; Desmoro kept in the background; while Mrs. Polderbrant, who was acquainted with Dinah's story, swelling with importance, boldly confronted the enraged Miss Tillysdale.

"Stay, madam!" she said speaking in a solemn tone, and holding out her arms, in order to arrest the further progress of the lady. "Remember where you are, and do not disturb the sanctity of this place!"

Miss Tillysdale gaped in astonishment.

"Do you know who I am, and wherefore I am here?" she demanded, at the same time endeavouring to push her way onward.

"Perfectly, madam!" was the stiff rejoinder. "You are Mrs. Thetford's aunt, whom I would take the liberty of advising to behave as becomes a prudent old lady—"

"What!" screamed the spinster, recoiling in horror. "Old lady!" she repeated, in a perfect fit of angry agitation. "And who are you, insolent creature?"

"Creature!" bridled Mrs. Polderbrant. "Oh, shade of the departed Frederick William Polderbrant, look down and hear your widowed wife abused!"

"Gracious!" exclaimed Miss Tillysdale. "Is it possible that I have stepped into a lunatic asylum by mistake? Where's the clergyman? Is it thus that our English churches are conducted?"

And, with these words she dashed past the "heavy lady," and stood before the minister and the wedding-party, darting venomous looks on all around.

"Am I too late?" she gasped, addressing herself to the parson.

"If you will please to accompany me to the vestry, madam, I will there answer all your questions," was his reply.

"Are they married?" she repeated. "Are they married—tell me that?"

The minister was on his way to the vestry, and did not heed the lady's impatient queries.

Turning to Dinah, who was still clinging to her husband, Miss Tillysdale, flinging high her arms, once more reiterated her inquiry.

"Are you really married, Dinah, and to that parson at your side?"

The bride winced, and Ralph reddened.

"This lady is my wife, madam," he rejoined, pointing to Dinah as he spoke. "But the son of one of his Majesty's servants, wild though he has been, can hardly be termed a parson."

"Eh?" exclaimed Miss Tillysdale, at a loss to comprehend his speech.

"Excuse me, madam, at some more suitable opportunity than the present I will reveal to you who and what I am."

And with those words, Ralph drew Dinah's arm within his own, and led her away towards the vestry, where the minister was awaiting them.

Mrs. Polderbrant, who had been standing by during the above, now advanced towards Miss Tillysdale, and gravely curtisied to her.

"I will show you the way to the vestry, madam," she said, in mysterious accents.

"You!" exclaimed the ancient spinster, indignantly. "You? Go away, you fright—go away!" she added, waving the "heavy lady" off. "I never before was brought in contact with such a person as yourself, and I'm perfectly disgusted with you!"

"Disgusted, madam, and with me?" repeated Mrs. Polderbrant, firing up. "Oh, that I should live to hear a conceited old maid breathe such syllables against me! But I can read you through and through, madam, although you think I can't! You are jealous of your pretty niece—ah, I can see—and you only object to her marriage with Mr. Thetford, because you want to marry him yourself! There! that's the truth, and you can't deny it—you know you can't!"

Miss Tillysdale's countenance was of a bright purple hue, and her whole body was in a quiver. She was conscience-smitten, and did not make any reply.

Mrs. Polderbrant rubbed her hands together, and laughed triumphantly, but quietly; never forgetting her accustomed dignity of demeanour. Then she swept past the antique maid, and disappeared through a narrow doorway at the extremity of the aisle.

Miss Tillysdale's whole frame shook with excitement and choler. She was frustrated, and exposed, and she knew not how to be revenged on those who had defeated her. She now hated Ralph Thetford as much as she had before admired him; hated her niece, and likewise Desmoro. Indeed, she seemed to have bitterness in her heart against all around her.

She stalked towards the vestry, and entering it, once more presented herself before the clergyman and the wedding-party. She was looking deathly white, and grimmer than ever.

She stretched out her arms, as if about to anatomize some one, and raised her sharp voice, which had now a strange, hollow sound in it.

"Dinah Tillysdale," she said, addressing the quaking bride,—child of my dead brother, serpent whom I have nurtured in my breast only to disgrace and sting me in return,—from his moment I disown you, and cast you off for ever! I cannot deprive you of your inheritance, but I can strike your name out of my own will, and forget you. And I will do so, depend on't. Ha, ha! I will be revenged upon you and that beggar by your side. So I leave you, leave you with my everlasting curse!"

At this moment, Miss Tillysdale's voice was suddenly arrested; and her extended arm fell powerless by her side, her eyes started almost from their sockets, her mouth was dragged all awry, and her limbs refusing to bear her, she dropped all in a heap upon the vestry floor.

"My aunt, my poor aunt, she is dead!" cried Dinah, rushing to the prostrate figure, which Mrs. Polderbrant was already attempting to raise into a sitting posture.

"A doctor, a doctor! Fly for a doctor at once!" said that lady.

Jellico was gone on the instant.

All was now consternation in the vestry, and everybody was endeavouring to assist Miss Tillysdale, who made neither moan nor movement of any kind; but lay with her eyes and mouth wide open.

Presently, Jellico returned, accompanied by a doctor, who after a slight examination, pronounced Miss Tillysdale to be dead.

This awful event, so sudden and unexpected, was a shock to all present. Dinah swooned away; Mrs. Polderbrant burst into tears, and the utmost confusion and terror reigned amongst the wedding-party.

"It was the judgment of heaven on her, because she was about to curse one of His creatures," whispered Mrs. Polderbrant into Jellico's ear. "I am sorry now for what I said to her."

she added, in a regretful tone, as she wiped her wet eyes. "But I did not contemplate such a tragical event as this!"

(To be continued.)

THE RED MARK.

BY MARY KYLE DALLAS.

"Is this Mr. Rushton's?"

It was a handsome young man who asked this question—a stylish fellow, with plenty of light whiskers, and the latest style of tie and collar. And the girl who had opened the door for him, in that pretty country place where the richest people were not very fashionable, was not a servant, but a young lady—Mr. Rushton's only daughter herself.

"What a pretty little soul!" he thought. Then, as she turned her head, he wondered for a moment whether somebody had just slipped her on the left cheek, there was such a singular mark there, exactly like the scarlet print of a palm and four fingers.

But that mark had been there all Fanny Rushton's life, and it was her one grief, her perpetual tease and torment. She had grown morbid about it in those early days of womanhood, and would willingly have been flayed all over to be rid of it. But there were no cosmetics and no arts of surgery that could remove it.

There the red slap must be as long as she breathed, its hateful scarlet attracting the first glance of every stranger.

"Mr. Rushton at home?" said Luke Robbins, with a bow.

"Yes," said Fanny. Then she ushered Mr. Robbins into the parlor, and went away; and in a few moments the mill owner sauntered in.

It was a business call, though made not ex-

actly in a business-like way. There had been some delay of a train, and the factory was closed when Mr. Robbins reached Mill Hollow; but those few words about woolen stuffs were easily said, and the confidential clerk of the New York firm of Ink & Hawley knew that the manufacturer was a man of strict integrity. The business was easily completed, and then Luke Robbins rose to depart.

"But you're put out of your reckoning by this delay," said the old gentleman, "and the hotel is a long way off, and I should be pleased to have you stay over night with us. The wife always has one or two spare bedrooms, and supper will be ready in fifteen minutes. Let us have the pleasure of your company."

"Thanks," said Luke Robbins. "You are very kind, I feel tempted."

Then he thought of the pretty face with the red slap upon the cheek. Despite that slap, he wanted to see it again.

It sat opposite to him at supper time.

"The best and kindest face in the world," he said to himself a dozen times. And he did his best to win a little chat from the shy girl, who could not forget her tormenting mark until they sat in the twilight on the piazza afterward. Then he discovered that she could talk. As it grew dark, and the crickets chirruped in the hedges, she grew morrier and morrier.

Mrs. Rushton had a call from some neighbor, and so left her company.

Mr. Rushton, after many rambling attempts to rouse himself, went soundly asleep.

Through the evening shadows Luke saw the girl's finely cut profile and exquisitely shaped head; and the moon turned all to black and white soon, and blotted out the red mark. And he sat close to her as he dared. And her robin-sweet voice charmed him; and in what she said was bright and fresh, and he fell in love, as men do, for an hour.

Men actually do fall in love for an hour. Women cannot do that. They pretend to be fascinated very often, but it is real or nothing with them at heart.

Poor little Fanny gave away her heart that night in one whole lump. It is always best to keep a little piece, if one can; but sometimes that is impossible.

"Oh, what a beautiful night!" said Fanny, as she stood on the porch with her mother after the gentlemen had retired. "Such a fine breeze, and such a bright moon!"

"The mosquitoes do bite so dreadfully, though," said the mother, "and it's quite damp. We'd better retire. I wonder whether your parrot will be suited with to-morrow's breakfast. He does ask visitors so unexpectedly."

Married forty and single twenty take different views of life sometimes.

Fanny went to bed to dream of Paradise; and the next day was all happy in memory of a parting pressure of the hand, and a whispered hope that they might often meet again.

"What a pity that mark is," thought young Robbins. "She's a darling little thing. And I suppose that Rushton is a very rich man. A young man might do worse than be his son-in-law." Then, as the ear whirled him away, he said to himself, "What a pity that mark is."

Nevertheless he went down to Mill Hollow very often after that, and he was with Fanny a great deal of the time. Fanny's mother felt that though this suitor was not rich, he was eligible; and she knew that that red mark was a disfigurement to her Fanny. Fanny's papa was an honest, kindly old man, who loved his daughter dearly.

Along together the old people spoke of the probabilities.

"He certainly means something," said mamma.

"And they could always live with us," said papa; "we need never part from our only one."

Our eyes grow used to everything after a while. Luke Robbins forgot that there was any mark on Fanny's face, unless something particularly called his attention to it. At Mill Hollow every one knew Miss Rushton, and no one stared at the sweet blushing face.

He loved her very much at times, though there were long hours in which he never remembered her existence. I suppose none of us ever quite believe that the men we are fondest of work us into their bargaining and ledger keeping, as we work them into our sewing and preserving. If he only thinks of you after dark, you are a happy woman. If he takes your memory out with his dress coat and evening tie, consider yourself blessed.

Twice a week, at