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1	Milton	Wm. Panton	29	26	28	9	24	26
2	Oakville	R. Balmer	6	3	5	3	11	8
3	Georgetown	L. Grant	12	16	11	7	17	9
4	Acton	J. Matthews	13	11	13	8	15	11
5	Campbellville	S. R. Lister	11	8	10	0	9	6
	Burlington	W. J. Bastedo	5	2	4	2	10	2

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County Court Sittings, without Jury, Tuesday, 6th April, and 5th October, at 10 a. m.

County Court Sittings—Formerly Terms—Monday, 4th January, 5th April, 5th July, and 4th October, at 10 a.m., each day.

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VOLUME 25. MILTON, THURSDAY, APRIL 15, 1886. NO. 43.

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VANITY HARDWARE.

By ALAN MUIR.

"Am I worthy of you, Vanity?" he went on. "Could you trust me with your happiness? Or is there any one better than me whom you love?"

Why did she not make any answer? Why did her eyes look about piteously, as if she were a deer hunted to the death, exhausted with the fury of the chase, and, in the last despairing love of life, gazing here and there, if there might be a way of escape? She could restrain herself no longer. A sob, which appalled her lover, broke from her ashy lips. For another moment she struggled with irresistible grief; then all her frame shook with crying, and she hurried her face in her hands.

"Oh, Willie! my heart is breaking to-night! Breaking—breaking! forever broken!" Awe-struck, and scarcely knowing what he did, Willie took her hand in his. But she cast him off impetuously, and drew away from him, as if there must be a space between them.

"It is hopeless, Willie—hopeless," she cried. "I love you—more, far more than you love me. But you can never marry me."

Willie remembered the story of the stranger, and his heart died within him.

"Vanity," he asked, with a faltering tongue, "are you—*married?*"

"Married!" she exclaimed, her excitement arrested, as it seemed, by sheer surprise. "What made you think of such a thing?"

She spoke as with indignation, but the tone was music in Willie's ears.

"If you are free," he said joyfully, "if you can return my love, nothing else shall stand between us."

He advanced toward her, but she suddenly bounded across the brook that ran beside them; and so they stood facing each other, he on this side and she on that.

"Is marriage the only bar that can come between us?" she asked.

"I know no other," Willie answered, wondering and fearing. Then, with gathering boldness, he cried, "I fear no other!"

"Poor boy," she answered, shaking her head. "We have lived in different worlds. Listen!—her voice became low and deep—"there runs between you and me (like that stream) something which must divide us forever. It is red as blood, hot as fire, cruel as death. I love you, Willie. Who could help it! I might have lived for you. God knows, this moment, I could die for you! But you must see me no more. There is something better in store for you than my love. Good-by!"

She turned to go, and he would have followed her; but, with an urgent gesture, she motioned him back.

"If you love me—if you pity me—let me go alone!"

He stood on the other side of the brook, afraid to follow, yet unwilling to remain. He watched her as she ran, with rapid steps, she hurried across the field to their own little gate; it swung back as she went through, and when she turned into the plantation, and no doubt thought herself hidden by the trees, he saw her bury her face in her hands. Upon the peaceful evening air another heartbroken sob was borne, like the last cry of one drowning in some quiet, cruel sea; and then she disappeared.

CHAPTER VI.

MISS AND I TALK THINGS OVER.

Just at this point we stopped in our reading. Perhaps my young lady was tired; although, you observe, she did not say so. We begun to chat; quite accidentally, I do believe.

"I think doctor," said my young lady, "people will like the story. Do you know, I am quite interested in Vanity's secret."

"You see, miss," said I, "the young woman is in a fix somehow."

"I wonder what her secret is?" my young lady said. "I suppose it must be—" She shook her head and sighed.

"It must be *what*, miss?"

But, do you know, I could not get another word out of her! So I changed the subject.

"Tell me, miss, what you think of Willie Snow."

My young lady made me an odd lift of her eyebrows. Now, for money, I could not tell what she meant by it.

"Willie Snow, doctor! Let me see. An amiable young man; but he must do a great deal more before I like him."

"Dear me, miss," I remarked; "now, I thought him so steady and so respectable."

"No doubt," said my young lady; "very steady. Perfectly respectable."

"And when you say that of a young man, miss," I continued, "you say almost everything."

Somehow we did not seem to be getting well with this part of the talk, so I turned to Vanity Hardware

"I am quite interested in Vanity's secret," said my young lady.

"What are we to say of that young woman, miss?"

"We must wait and see," was all she would reply. "She has something very sad in her heart."

"Trying to entrap Willie, ain't she, miss?"

"I think she loves him, doctor."

"Loves him!" I cried, indignantly. "What love have women like Vanity Hardware to give! They lead men the dance to ruin, just to gratify their pride, or their greediness, or both."

"And so, if a woman misplaces her affections once," said my young lady, gravely looking out of the window, "all is over. She can love and be loved no more!"

"True, miss," I answered. "So it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be."

"It is a hard world," she said, with another sigh—"a hard, hard world."

"Granted, miss," I replied. "And being a hard world, it does not get on very well. But if it was a soft world, mark my words, miss, it would not get on at all."

"Well, doctor," she said, turning round from the window and facing me, with her large, clear eyes of gray, "if you must have it, at this moment I like Vanity Hardware better than Willie Snow."

"Well, now, miss," I said, "you do astonish me."

So we dropped the matter and began to read afresh.

CHAPTER VII.

GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY?

Vanity was gone. Willie Snow was struggling with a rush of feeling, violent and turbid, like a millrace; and yet he weighed his sweetheart in the balance more carefully then he could have weighed her in his quiet set mood. In common conversation she was frivolous and malapert; against this fault he put the tremulous earnestness of her voice in this last supreme moment. Her eyes mostly dazzled him with anguish, as she flew from his side. The insinuations against her character were grave, and not more grave than reasonable; he rebutted these by recalling her manner of reply when he had asked if she were married. For in his ears—deluded boy!—the ring of truth and the light of honor were in her tone, and look. Whereupon I remark that, when a young woman is in the habit of receiving a matter of, let us say, ten-and-six-pence a night for making faces to order, she can look demure or heartbroken at very short notice. But this never occurred to Willie. Vanity was a true woman, after all; and "worthy of his affection. Thus he analyzed his own deepest doubt; and then he turned to other matters. She loved him; she could not marry him; and yet her hand was free! What could these things mean? The brook babbling on at his feet picked up her words; and repeated them as it chattered over the stones—"Something runs between us that must divide us forever; it is red as blood, hot as fire, cruel as death!"

"Oh! groaned poor Willie, "*What* can her sorrow be?"

Chatter went the brook, brawling against the stones, and rushing in twenty noisy little rapids, but answering still as it hurried by—"*It is red as blood, hot as fire, cruel as death!*"

"But she *is* good," pleaded poor Will, judge, jury and advocate all in his own breast. "She must be good. And she loves me! Never was voice like hers without true love!"

But the brook replied, as before, and ran off into the gray and ghostly distance, busy and inexorable.

Willie soon recovered his spirits. Counsel for the prisoner has tolerably easy work when beauty is at the bar and love is on the bench.

"Vanity loves me!" quoth the deluded boy. "That much is sure. Vanity loves me—loves me—loves me tenderly!"

Repeating the words over and over, you observe, which we all know makes the fact more of a fact than over. What, then, about the unknown obstacle? Why, he had taken heart, and the more he scrutinized it, swathed as it was in mystery, the less he feared. He would unroll this dread secret, and find it something commonplace enough—something to laugh at, say five days ago, or even two days ago. Vanity was a coquette, and he could not measure the power this beautiful girl gained over him in that brief space when she melted into womanliness! A little while after their parting, his conflict of feeling had settled down into two thoughts: "She is good," which built him up, being a respectable young man; "She loves me," which set him on fire, being a combustible young man. And between "She is good" and "She loves me," swing went that lad's mind, to and fro, to and fro, regular and steady as a pendulum.

He was a fine fellow, as I have said many times, but, perhaps, a little wanting in judgment of others. He must have seen that he kept out of her way, but she took no notice of the alteration in his conduct, being, as I have already pointed out, a long-headed girl.

However Willie's purpose might waver before an adverse opinion his affection soon returned to what was now the natural quarter. Vanity Hardware had won his heart. In point of fact, nothing but diffidence and the fear of being thought foolish kept him from making confessions of his love to his friends. But Tumbledown Farm being still a mystery to the whole village, and none knowing whenever the Hardwares came, or how they managed to live, Willie felt afraid to mention his sweetheart's name openly. So he dallied with Nancy, loved Vanity, and spoke not a word to anybody, except to me. After their parting at the brook ten days elapsed without his seeing her again. Evening after evening he paced the same road, watching eagerly at every turn for the flutter of Vanity's white dress, but all in vain. Meanwhile, by every honorable means, he tried to learn something about her, and her father, but when the information he picked up was put together with that which I had learned myself elsewhere, we remained, for all practical purposes, as much in the dark as ever. Now, with what can a chapter end better than a big note of interrogation?

CHAPTER VIII.

FROM WEEPING TO LAUGHTER.

The Hardwares kept no regular servant. An old charwoman was engaged to do the housework, and she cooking, coming in at seven in the morning and leaving punctually as one. At five she returned, and did such further turns as were needful; and at eight she left for the night. Of old Mr. Hardware this woman saw little or nothing. He never came down to breakfast, and he would not suffer her to enter any room where he might happen to be. She had the strictest orders from Miss Vanity never to speak to him unless he first spoke to her.

"Which," the old lady said, "no one would want to, neither. Catch I speaking to he! But Miss Vanity do run after an upstairs *and* down, morning *till* night."

Cross-examined, the old lady declared that no visitor ever came near the house. Further cross-examined concerning the strange man whom I had seen with Miss Hardware, she alleged that she knew nothing of him. It was impossible he could be often at the Farm without her knowledge. "Did Miss Vanity write many letters? No. Nor receive many? No. (Miss Vanity read a deal, and would sing as she went about the house for all the world like a thrush. Volumes bound by vellum.) Was the old gentleman a kind father? She dared say; it was all coughing and wheezing and groaning morning, noon and night. Did the old gentleman drink? Poor old soul! not a drop—lived on gruel and dry toast. Did Miss Vanity seem happy? Well, sometimes she was all for laughing, and sometimes all for crying, and more times neither laughed nor cried, and there you were! So the old lady's evidence did not go for much. We knew that the Hardwares dealt with the village tradespeople, and paid their bills regularly, which is the best safeguard against slander. I knew of! And when Miss Vanity took the fancy of having the garden done up, Billy Ditcher, who had the job, declared that gentry were all very well, but give him the folk that could hand you half a crown where two shillings were due, and tell you to keep the change.

At last the lovers met again. One evening, as Willie looked, with scarcely hopeful eyes, across their favorite field, he saw Vanity standing at the gate, waiting, as she had so often waited before. She was gazing pensively at the distant hills, and did not see Willie until he was at her side. He touched her gently on the arm.

"What brings you here this evening?"

Vanity fixed her eyes upon him.

"Fate!" she answered, in a composed voice, as if she had prepared the reply a week before.

This was a grave beginning, but suited Willie's mood better than the cheeriest greeting. He took up the thread of their former conversation just where Vanity had so abruptly broken it.

"The last time we met you said you loved me—did you not?"

"I did."

"Vanity," Willie cried, "I want nothing more in all the world!"

She looked up.

"Nothing more in all the world?" she said, turning his words into a question—"*nothing* more?"

Willie felt thankful for the blundering speech in which her wit found for him so graceful an opening.

"One thing more!" he cried; "guess what it is."

"Willie," she said, looking at him gravely, "I have told you we can never marry."

In his excitement he had forgotten all she said when they last met. Now her manner recalled that scene to his mind, and convinced him afresh that a real bar lay between them.

"You love me—you are not married; yet you cannot marry me! What can the reason be? I leave it!" he cried. "You have promised to marry some one else."

"I have not."

"Then why may we not marry?"

"The fact is all you need know," said Vanity, "the cause is my affair."

"To get rid of the cause shall be my affair," replied Willie pluckily. "And surely, Vanity, you cannot think it improper curiosity if I press you to tell me more about this secret difficulty."

He pleaded with her, and he soon saw in her manner some fruits of his entreaties. She softened, she warmed; but still she would say nothing. For all that, she seemed to feel a pleasure in being pressed to speak; and Willie, finding that he had power to move her, and that her resolution wavered more and more, besought her to trust him. At last, much as if she felt that his caressing speeches were giving her a dangerous pleasure, she drew herself up, and her firmness returned.

"You must ask me no more."

But, having accomplished so much, was Willie likely now to despair? He renewed his entreaties.

"There can be no obstacle to our marriage!" he cried, vehemently, "no possible obstacle which my love and energy will not overcome."

Vanity fixed upon him a searching look, trying to gauge his sincerity.

He understood what the look meant.

"Yes, you may believe me!" he cried. "Nothing could alter my love—nothing in the world!"

"Are you sure?"

"As sure as that I live."

There was a grassy bank beside the gate, and there Vanity sat down, Willie standing hard by, and she plucking at a few tall blades of grass growing at her side. She did not look up.

"Willie, if I loved you—"

"You have told me that you do."

"If I let my liking for you grow into love," she went on, in a low voice. "I would love you till I died. You would take me out of myself and hold me as your own. Do what you would, be what you would, I could never take back the heart I had given."

She paused. He felt she had more to say.

"Well, Vanity, what then?"

"You could never love me so."

"Why do you say that?" asked Willie, wondering.

"Because you are a manly, affectionate boy; but you are afraid of what the world says. You would make your love for me second, and your love for the good opinion of your friends first."

"I should not. What do you mean?" said Willie—two matters in one breath.

Vanity sat plucking the grass. She spoke with the most curious air of preoccupation, frivolity and disdain. Who could read the secret of her subtle manner?

"If you knew that there was a fact in my life—an ineffaceable fact—which would leave me open to a sudden reproach, that children ought never to know about a mother; that friends ought never to know about a friend; that a husband ought never to know about his wife, unless her loved her with a love that was unquenchable—what then?"

"I don't quite understand you," Willie replied. "My love is unquenchable."

"If all that were true of me, would you still say what you said just now—that nothing in the world could alter your love?"

"Y-e-s," answered Willie slowly; "I believe so." Then, after a pause, he added, "Of course it would be nothing really disgraceful."

Vanity rose with a sad smile. She touched him on the cheek. She seemed the elder and the stronger of the two.

"Good-bye, Will. We must see each other no more."

"Vanity—what do you mean? Have I offended you?" All these exclamations came in a breath; he could not interpret her manner.

"There is some one waiting to marry you—that girl, Miss Steele. I know all about her," said Vanity, trying to smile, with her eyes full of tears. "She is respectable; you will get a good wife and run no risk. Everybody will say how sensible you are, and praise you and look up to you. That will be nice you know."

There was a touch of scorn in her "That will be nice"—oh, such a fine, delicate, stinging scorn! Quite right, Mr. Shakespeare; the mocking wench had a tongue with a razor edge.

"I see how it is," Willie said, with a sorrified air. "you never really cared for me."

"Listen," she answered in a tone that sunk into his very soul. "If you had been brought up all your life long amongst people who were somethoughtless, some vicious, some selfish; until you hardly knew there was such a thing as goodness; and if, all of a sudden, you saw somebody who seemed to live a higher life and breathe a purer air, who had grown up surrounded by truth and virtue so that nothing was wanting to make him desirable—" She paused.

"Who are you speaking of?" asked Willie. She went on impetuously.

"If you found that you had drawn forth a pure and noble love, which flowed out for you like a delicious stream, promising to gladden a hard, scorched life; and if, just as you were going to drink, something told you that you had no right to that love—that you had awakened it only by coming to be what you were not; that the dreams of your life were as fair as heaven, and the realities base and wretched; that, Willie, Willie!" she cried, starting up wildly, "if the veil were torn off me, you would hate me! If you married me, and the veil were torn off *then*, you would curse me! Go, and let me go! Tell nobody what I have said; let it be as secret between you and myself forever. Don't write to me—as you value my life, don't write to me! O Willie, Willie, my heart is broken!"

The forced calmness with which she began had changed to frenzy, and the frenzy now changed to weeping. Vanity turned away, and, resting her hands on the gate, bowed down in a fit of crying.

Willie had listened to her with amazement and fear; but whatever prudential motives may have been at work in his breast gave way at the sight of her great sorrow.

"You are nervous and excited," he said, soothingly. "You must be thinking of yourself without reason. There is no nothing so bad as you describe. If I heard this secret, depend upon it I should say you had made a mountain of a molehill."

"His words did not comfort her, but they recalled her to herself. She dried her eyes, and, opening the gate, stepped quickly through.

"It is not much to ask that you will never repeat this conversation to any one," she said, trying hard to speak calmly; "Don't mention my name; that will be the greatest kindness you can do me. I must go home now, for my father expects me."

"Are we to part in this way?" Willie asked.

"We are," she replied, grown more composed. "I have been foolish, and I must pay the penalty. Perhaps I have been over exalted, too; perhaps I said more than I meant. That is little matter, so long as you don't repeat anything. Forget me, Willie; forget all about me!"

"Forget you!—is it likely, after what I have heard?"

"Then remember me as a boy remembers his first love."

"And you—how will you remember me?"

In a marvelous way her gay, wild manner reappeared. There she stood before him, tossing her head daintily, smilingly, mockingly—just the old flirting Vanity of their first interview.

"Remember you—you! My pretty boy! As a flatterer! As a young lover who came to me reciting pretty speeches by the yard, like fancy ribbons! As a curious impertinent, who played at question and answer, and got mystified and lost the game! Do I know now to remember my Willie?"

Was ever laughter like hers? Full of mockery, full of heedlessness, full of wild frivolity and reckless disdain! Willie was petrified with surprise.

"You're an angel, quoth he. Tra la!"

"Dye think so? quoth she. Tra la!"

She caught up a snatch of a song, and with a gay, almost impudent, air, but with the most sparkling execution, she trilled off these roofing lines. Then she stopped, considered Willie for a moment with mock gravity, and she plucking at a few tall blades of grass growing at her side. She did not look up.

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"You have told me that you do."

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