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1	Milton	Wm. Panton.	29	26	28	9	24	25	10 a.m.
2	Oakville	R. Balmer	6	3	5	3	11	3	10 a.m.
3	Georgetown	L. Grant	12	16	11	7	17	9	9.30 a.m.
4	Acton	J. Matthews	13	11	13	8	16	11	10 a.m.
5	Campbellville	S. R. Lister	11	8	10	9	9	8	9 30 "
6	Burlington	W. J. Bartello	5	2	4	2	10	2	11 "

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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., early day.

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LADY ISABEL'S ATONEMENT.

A SEQUEL TO EAST LYNNE.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TIGHTENING SNARE.

My lady was a true prophet. The engagement between Lord Beresford and Isabel was made public that very night, and for nine days nothing was talked of, nothing was so sincerely regretted by the scheming mammas as the sudden stepping down and out of the greatest prize the matrimonial market had known for three generations, and Isabel, the fashion before, found herself the rage. There was the Isabel hat, the Isabel gloves and parasol, the Isabel coiffure, and, heaven knows what else, until one enterprising fruiterer capped the climax with the "Isabel apricots" and the "Carlyle plums."

Everywhere the country solicitor's daughter appeared, she produced a perfect *furor*.

Artists painted her in Spanish robes and called her the "Gitana," others drew her in flowing Grecian drapery as the model Juno, with "dark brows bound with midnight hair, and eyes that spoke the queen," till one more poetic than his colleagues immortalized her in a glowing fancy called the "Passion-Flower."

He had caught the regal contour of her face to perfection, the queenly dark head was held proudly erect, the olive face was flushed with the faint rose bloom of nature, and the light sifting down through trailing vines shone delicately on the *spiritelle* figure clad in soft black lace looped with crimson passion-flowers. Her dainty little hands were full of them, a few lay scattered at her feet, and others peeped from the tender leaves of the bower on whose threshold she stood—half in the light, half in the shade—with a smile of unspeakable happiness lighting her lovely olive face.

It was a pretty fancy, and my Lord of Beresford bought it at a fabulous price and hung it in the great picture gallery at Ravenswood.

In after days he liked to go and stand before the picture, and recall the beautiful original, painted so truthfully on that wonderful canvas that she almost seemed to speak to him and say "Lionel, I love you!" as she often did with just that expression on her lovely dusk face.

It was a glorious night that Lady Lexhoro had chosen for her "drawing room"—the sky all gemmed with sparkling stars and the moon sailing serenely by through racks of pearl and silver clouds.

My lord's splendid equipage drove up to No. 10 Belgravia square just as all the clocks in London were striking nine, and Tristram, answering his ring, ushered him into the sparkling *salon* where the ladies sat ready and waiting for his coming—her Grace of Arleigh gorgeous in ruby velvet and flashing diamonds, Lady Rosamond daintily perfect in the peach-blossom silk with pond lilies and pink pearls for garniture; but Isabel, as ever, outshining them both. She wore a trailing robe of tea-rose satin looped over an underdress of embossed velvet of the same delicate shade. The low corsage was filled in with soft ruchings of point d'Alencon, clasped at the throat with a circlet of opals and pearls. Half blown tea-roses crowned the dark magnificence of her blue-black hair; opals and pearls encircled her ivory arms and pinned the great corsage bouquet of delicate tea-roses that trailed down the left side of her robe until the bursting buds looped up, and seemed to lose themselves in a mass of glimmering drapery, where the Vandyke overdress was lifted from the embossed underskirt, and showed velvet roses trailing over a satin ground shot with golden threads. Lord Beresford walked over to her with a beaming face and held both hands.

"Ah! how beautiful you are, sweet," he murmured, bending over and lifting the tips of her starry fingers to his lips. "Half England would lose its head could it see you standing here this minute. Oh, love! I am so proud of you! Never a lord of Beresford won so fair a bride before."

The lovely color flushed her olive cheek and her eyes sparkled like ebon stars.

"Try always to be as proud of me as now, Lionel," she murmured, as they went out to the carriage, with her Grace of Arleigh and Lady Rosamond bringing up the rear. "I shall ask nothing but to be beautiful in your eyes, and to feel that no matter what the world might say, to you I cannot fade."

"You never will—you never can, sweet," he answered, with the fervor of happy youth. "All for love and the world well lost."

She lifted her eyes and looked at him as they went down the steps under the shining lights.

"Shall that be the motto of our after lives, Lionel?" she murmured, sweetly. "Will you always think the world well lost, so that I am yours and you are mine? Will you, Lionel?"

"Always," he responded, fervently. "The world holds nothing for me but your dear face. When I doubt you or tire of you, Isabel, I pray Heaven I may die."

She made him no reply. Her Grace of Arleigh and Lady Rosamond Mount Severn had already reached the flagstone, and he turned to assist them into the carriage.

In another minute the vehicle had rattled off through the soft September night, and my lord and his beautiful bride-elect had time only for a few social pleasantries before their destination was reached.

Lady Lexhoro's splendid mansion was ablaze with lights when they reached it; a dance was in progress, but the entrance of the country solicitor's daughter brought it to a speedy termination, and a thrill of admiration ran down the crowded drawing-room as she glided softly in—

"Queen rose of the rosebud garden of girls!"

And the memory of that night, when all men bowed down and worshiped at the shrine of the woman he had won, sweetened many a remorseful hour in my lord's after-life.

She was belle and queen by royal right. That night, as on every other, she shone down the beauties of her time, and when the soft music of "La Sirene" tinkled out way she affected behind the footlights on the gummed and flower-scented *salon*, "Then we may consider the engagement closed. I presume, and I'm not to go back to the ballet no more?"

"You may consider it closed, and you are to return to the stage no more," responded my lady, sweetly. "You are to keep in the strictest seclusion until the time I need you. I will send you a draft for the first thousand pounds to-morrow. Withdraw from your old associates at once; seek some new home where your identity may not yet be discovered, and wait until you hear from me. Pierre has been instructed in his *role*—he will explain yours fully before you are called upon to enact it. But hark! The band is playing the promenade. The guests are retiring to supper. I dare wait no longer. Adieu, mademoiselle, and God bless you for this night's work."

She bent over and pressed a cool little kiss on La Sylphine's rouged and powdered cheek.

"Adieu, faithful Pierre—the path is clear at last," she added, shaking his hand and smiling at him. "All arrangements are concluded, and you can proceed at once to East Lynne and the work marked out for you."

"And the grave, my lady."

"It stands in the furthest corner of the churchyard, marked by a simple cross bearing the letters, 'I. V.' Waste no time, and write immediately the work is done."

"You shall have word within a fortnight," he responded, as my lady dropped his hands and hurried back to the drawing-room.

So they parted; but he kept his promise well, for the noon train, rushing into the little station at East Lynne next day, deposited Monsieur Pierre Blonshar on the wooden platform, and one brief week later the following letter found its way to my lady's hands:

"All is done. I found the grave marked 'I. V.,' with little difficulty—the grave of one Marian Vane, a governess who died in Arlingham Carlyle's service, the sexton told me—and I have worked secretly and well since then. All that remained of the body has been at least removed. The Lady Isabel Carlyle's grave is empty, and there is nothing left us but to wait for Lord Beresford's wedding, and then strike for revenge.

"Yours in confidence,

"PIERRE BLONSHAR."

And my lady reading this letter with a wicked malice on her fair blonde face, pressed it to her lips, and then bore it straight to Annette Varnelli.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOW THE OLD YEAR ENDED.

It was gone at last, the golden autumn weather. September had flamed itself out with the russet skies and wrathful sunsets, October had drowed itself away with whining blasts and showers of withered leaves, November had howled itself in and snowed itself out, and Christmastide was here.

How they passed those charmed months, Isabel scarcely know. In my lord's presence they seemed like so many brief days—a string of splendid yesterdays that passed without a sorrow or a sigh all glorious with his smiles, all tender with the recollection of his love.

True, there had been balls and *fêtes* and operas innumerable, where her rich dusk loveliness had won her new laurels—prized only for Lionel's sake—and where she had reigned belle and beauty without a peer, and brief as they seemed, looking back upon them, she would always remember those happy months as the brightest in all her young life—always thinking of them as something she could not be robbed of, as something made sacred and beautiful by Lionel's perfect love.

The wedding was to take place in the Raveuswood Cathedral where a hundred Lords Beresford had been wedded before; the court was to be thrown open to the public, the tenantry to have a feast and a merry-making under the old ancestral oaks, the charity children were to have a special holiday with freedom to rove where they would, and the verical pauper in all the country-side was to be feasted like a prince, and welcomed to Ravenswood in the name of its bright young countess.

All this he had laid out when he told them that he should like to keep up the old family custom and have the marriage solemnized in the old cathedral where so many Beresfords had been christened and wedded and buried, and her grace the duchess had foreseen the necessity of the bride elect dwelling near, as well as the notoriety it would give her—and had kindly tendered Arleigh Towers for the wedding feast and offered to chaperon Isabel until she was surrendered to her husband's charge.

It had been the only difficulty in the fulfilment of my lord's desires, but, happily, it had been overcome, and Mr. Carlyle accepted of her grace's hospitality with thanks. My lord had chosen his groomsmen, eight ladies of title were to act as bridesmaids, and her Grace of Arleigh, foreseeing a chance to further distinguish herself, had invited the entire bridal party to reach the Towers in time to say "Merry Christmas," and make a week of general jollification.

So the twenty little cards had gone out, stamped with the ducal coronet of Arleigh, and Christmas-day broke over the grond old Towers and found the bridal party there.

Her grace had not forgotten my lord's most unhappy mother, living in strict seclusion in the far-off dower-house. A special messenger had ridden over to Crown Leighton with the elaborate invitation, and two hours later her grace received the Countess of Beresford's card bearing this inscription pencilled across its back:

"Lord Lionel Beresford is a stranger to me. I regret I cannot, therefore, attend."

It was a glorious week, but it slipped away at last. December closed its final day and ushered in a wonderful night—the moon swinging high like a globe of frozen pearl, the purple sky all crisp with frosty stars, and snow lying piled in drifts on the face of the sleeping earth—and this was to be the night of nights at Arleigh Towers, where they were to see the old year out and the new year in, and then, after to-morrow, to scatter and meet again when and where and how Heaven willed it.

So the glorious night wore on. Eleven o'clock came and went. A band of music, stationed in the gilded gallery, played waltz, and schottishe, and quadrille, the happy party cast aside restraint and gave full rein to enjoyment, and the ballroom tinkled with the rhythmic patter of light feet.

Five minutes of twelve.

My lord called Isabel's attention to the clock as they floated down the room to the time of a quaint, sweet waltz by the Strauss, and murmured soft, low words over her blushing, bowed face; her grace mentioned it to Mr. Carlyle as they waltzed under the shining lights where mistletoe and holly wreathed the sparkling chandeliers; the duke spoke of it to his partner and to the partners of others as they whirled by, there was a general peace, general happiness, and so the old year ended.

Twelve o'clock rolled out on the starry night, all the bells began to clash and ring with a wild delirium of joy; the dance broke up. "Happy New Year," passed from lip to lip, and then there was hand-shaking and light laughter and flashes of brilliant wit, and scarcely had the last stroke of midnight ceased to peal ere the *portiere* glided back from the arch of the great dining-hall, and flooded in a white sheet of gaslight, stood a laden table sparkling with crystal and silver and blooming with fruits and flowers.

The laughing party passed through the arch and crowded around the table.

Champagne corks popped and flew, toasts were drunk to the bride elect; the great boar's head was carved away, salads and *pates*, and mountains of sparkling ices disappeared like magic, and through laughter and happiness, and the battery of *bon mots*, some one called out for a song.

Lord Beresford sprung to the piano and dashed off a sparkling prelude, and then in a full rich baritone, pealed out Tennyson's "Death of the Old Year" over the sounds of laughter and the noise of popping corks:

"He trothed his bumpers to the brim—
A jollier year we never shall see—
But though his eyes are waxing dim,
And though his foot speak ill of him,
He was a friend to me.
Old year, you shall not die;
We did laugh and cry with you,
I've half a mind to die with you,
Old year, if you must die.

"He lieth still: he doth not move—
He will not see the dawn of day—
He hath no other life above.
He gave me a friend, and a true, true love,
And the New Year will take them away.
Old year, you must not go;
So long as you have been with us,
Such joy as you have seen with us,
Old year, you shall not go.

"How hard he breathes! Over the snow
I hear just now the crowing cock.
The shadows flicker to and fro—
The cricket chirps—the light burns low—
'Tis nearly twelve o'clock.
Every one for his own!
The night is starry and cold, my friend,
And the New Year blithe and bold, my friend,
Comes up to take his own!"

A storm of hand clapping greeted him as he struck the last chord and arose; the band played the "Good Night" waltz, the gentlemen whirled their laughing partners down the glittering rooms and back again, and then "One," rang out from the jeweled clock on the mantel.

"Good night," took the place of "Happy New Year" the ladies fluttered off to their couches to snatch a few hours' sleep before to-morrow; the gentlemen shook hands with my lord and wished him all manner of good things for the coming year, and Isabel, holding his hand, followed him out to the steps where his sleigh stood.

"Good-night, my darling," he murmured, as he took her in his arms at parting. "Kiss me and say 'I love you, Lionel.' I want those to be the last words I hear."

She put up her lips and kissed him tenderly.

"Good-night," she said sweetly. "I love you, Lionel—I always shall."

He put her from him gently and ran down the snowy steps.

A moment more and the silver sleigh-bells went tinkling off through the white vista of distance, and Isabel going up the staircase to her own room with perfect peace shining out of her lovely eyes, wondered how there could be sin and sorrow and suffering in a world where Lionel Beresford lived.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW THE NEW YEAR BEGAN.

There never was such a wonderful sunburst as the one which ushered in the new year. Long afterwards people talked of how the sun came up floating in purple haze, and how in the darkness of the west, where the shadows of fading night yet lingered over Ravenswood Court, the reflected glory of the sunrise drew a gleaming cross that shone down on the frozen waters of the mere as perfectly as though a cross of gold lay on the thin silvery ice where the Oak Walk ended at the water's brink.

"That means trouble if ever anything was meant before," sagely predicted the housekeeper when the gardener drew her attention to the phenomenon, and as good Mrs. Fleck's predictions were held in high favor by her companions, a cold shiver crept down the backs of all who listened to her words.

"You needn't tell me, Eric; love match or not, Lord Beresford is going to suffer for this marriage," she added in a tragic whisper to her sepulchral voice. "You just mark my words: There's going to be a heap of sorrow and suffering come out of it, as sure as lyou live, and the spot where that cross shines will be the scene of something awful! You just wait and see, now. Mark where the cross is—right in there where the pond-lilies blow in summer, and just at the end of the Oak Walk. You'll stand here and look at that spot some day and remember my words."

Eric's ruddy face grow a shade paler and his pale blue eyes widened.

"I—I hope it won't be nothing against my lord or—or the bride. She's such a sweet lady, I'd be sorry to see aught go hard with her," he said, in an awed voice. "It is queer how the cross shines just there, for it's the deepest part of the mere. But then it mayn't be anything after all to them as has oddication to understand such like. Signs don't come out, you know, Mrs. Fleck, and this might be a very natural thing if we only knowed what caused it."

"A pig might fly, but he's never a likely bird," sniffed Mrs. Fleck, contemptuously. "Signs is from natural causes, Eric, and natural causes is from nature. Don't display your ignorance. What is to happen will happen."

"Worry like," admitted Eric, solemnly, not seeing the logic (?) and not caring to say so. "I'm not so well lettered as some, to be sure, and then you *do* tell true things sometimes, Mrs. Fleck. "I'd be werry sorry to see anything go wrong with this wedding, and—and p'raps it wouldn't be amiss now of you'd speak to Lord Beresford about this thing. He's oddicated, and he might know how to take the warning and fight shy of the trouble that's coming."

"I think I see myself doing of it now," responded Mrs. Fleck. "Much grace I'd get from his lordship for predicting evil to him on his wedding-day. Trouble comes to us soon enough—let him find his. But there, good lord! we can't stand chattering here all morning. We must get things ready. The tenantry will be here at eight, then there'll be bustle and confusion up to the hour for going to the cathedral to witness the marriage."

"Will my lord and my lady come right back here, Mrs. Fleck?"

"Good lands, no! They go straight to Arleigh Towers for the wedding breakfast, then there's to be a little 'to-do' there, which her grace has got up, and after