



CHAPTER IV.

About this time an incident occurred of which I can speak freely, for I witnessed it.

Have I said that for years my favorite walk ran past Tumbledown Farm? One evening I had strolled gently there, and before I turned my steps homeward it was quite dark. Just as I approached the garden gate I saw a woman in a light-colored dress come up the hill, and immediately I heard a strong, harsh voice say:

"Is that you, Vanity?"

"Yes," replied another voice, which I recognized.

Walking as I was on the grass at the side of the road, my movements were noiseless, and the deep shadow of the hedge must have quite hidden me from view. My next step brought me close to the garden gate, and here I could see a tall man beating the ground with his walking stick in a violent way.

"Late again!" he said, more severely than before. "Night after night you go wandering off, why or where I can't imagine. Do you know the hour?"

"Know the hour? Not I!" Vanity replied, in a tone thinly disguised by affected gaiety. "Time passes quickly."

"When you are not with me, mean," replied the tall man. "You selfish, willful jade!"

"Don't be cross," interposed Vanity.

The white figure drew close to the tall dark figure, and, as well as I could see, she laid her head against his shoulder. He pushed her off, with a savage oath, and I saw him stalking back to the house. Went the great strong form, after followed Vanity's slow white figure; bang went the door, and somehow to him the scene I had witnessed a few evenings before.

"It is surprising—very surprising," said he, like a man trying to disbelieve what he knows must be true. "But this stranger may not be a husband after all, doctor."

"Quite true; he may not be a husband; let us hope he is," I replied, determined to give him my whole mind. "Oh, Will, she will make a fool of you. She was born to deceive hearts like yours."

Up he hastened with a beating heart. Somehow, as he drew nearer to the spot where he and Vanity stood, I saw the girl seemed to renew her enchantments.

If she had any deep hidden trouble might not he be her friend and comforter? He was pondering that question in a warn transport, when he saw Vanity standing before him.

"I am glad to see you this evening," she said, with a serious air. "Thank God you are here, Will."

"Why are you so glad?" he asked.

"I have something to say to you, Will," she murmured. "Something very serious."

Her voice was not the voice of love, Sad, timorous, full of foreboding, intimating a dark uncertain future. Willing stopped her.

"And I have something to say to you! Let me speak first!"

She raised her eyes, and read in his face what was coming. For a moment she seemed irresolute, not knowing whether to speak or be silent; and he seized his opportunity. He drew her to his side, and in a few low words told her how much he loved her.

She could restrain herself no longer. A sob, which appalled her lover, broke from her as lips. For another moment she struggled with irresistible grief; then all her frame shook with crying, and she buried her face in her hands.

"Oh, Will! my heart is breaking now!" he cried.

"Awe-struck, and scarcely knowing what he did, Will took her hand in his. But she cast him off impatiently, 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 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."

"I will marry the only bar that can come between us," she said.

"I know of 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 a line that stretches from the earth to the sky. It is a line of 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-bye! If you love me—if you pity me—let me go alone!"

"Well, they're at fault in this case," returned the stranger. "Did you think I wanted them to buy it for curiosity? Did you have some sort of an idea that I froze this ear so as to sell it for a mantel ornament? I froze it waiting for a train at one of the company's stations."

"Why didn't you stay in the waiting room?"

"There wasn't any waiting room, and that's what I'm kicking about. It was one of the suburban stations where they haven't anything but a platform, some ice and a north wind. Now, can you tell me what the ear is worth?"

"Not a cent," replied the clerk promptly. "You are guilty of contrived negligence in exposing yourself. You should have walked to the next station and waited there."

"Boy Train Wreckers."

An epidemic of train wrecking seems to have broken out among the boys of the Eastern States. One day last week a New York policeman saw a gang of about ten young boys in Douglas street. They went directly to the Brighton Beach railroad cut. Then they scaled the hill and began rolling down rocks. When the stones reached the railroad tracks the boys arranged them carefully on the tracks in a solid pile and then traced them on each side with nails and sticks of wood. Next they placed an oil can on the top of the pile.

The policeman chased them and followed Thomas Plunkitt, aged 16, to his home. The next day he obtained a warrant for the boy's arrest. In court Plunkitt swore he did not mean to wreck a train, and as the policeman's testimony was uncorroborated, Justice Steers discharged the boy with a reprimand.

Courting was over for that evening. Willie felt dashed by the sudden appearance of Nancy. Vanity, too, assumed an expression new to her—half angry, half reflective; and there was a coldness in their parting such as might have signified that their commanding tenderness was ready to vanish.

What thoughts were in Miss Vanity's mind I cannot conjecture. As for Master Will, I know he went downhill hanging his head, repulsed, baffled, foolish, ready to abandon this pretty Vanity, as Nancy's forgiveness, marry her, and live like respectable man.

CHAPTER V.

Heavy was Willie's heart that night. He was ashamed of himself, and dreaded the thought of meeting Nancy Steele, but events hurried him forward. Next morning when on his way to his place of business he met Nancy at a distance coming toward him. She held her hand out in a friendly way.

"That was your Cousin Alice I saw with you last night, I suppose?" said Nancy, with a face of perfect gaiety.

"Certainly not," Willie replied. "What

Concerning the strange man whom I has seen with Miss Hardware, she alleged that she knew nothing of him. It was impossible he could be so often at the farm without her knowledge. Was the old gentleman a kind father? She dared say; it was all conching, 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.

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. He did not see Willie until he was at her side.

"What brings you here this evening?" he asked.

"I saw Nancy, laughing still. 'I had rather not have seen it, Willie.' Now she looked sad. 'Never mind,' she cried, with a smile, and a sigh, passing on: 'I have no more in the world.'

She looked up.

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

"I have not."

"Then why may we not marry?"

"You must ask me no more. If I let you tell me—'you are not married; yet you cannot marry me! What can the reason be? I have it!" he cried. 'You have promised to marry some one else.'

"I have not."

"Then why may we not marry?"

"You could never love me so."

"I should not. What do you mean?" said Willie.

"If you knew that there was a fact in my life—an infallible fact—which would leave me open to sudden shame; something 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, were he loved her with a love that was unshakable—what then?"

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

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

"Y—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.

"Listeth," she answered, in a tone that sunk into his very soul. "If you had been brought up all your life amongst people who were some thoughtless, some vicious, some selfish, until you hardly knew that there was such a thing as goodness; and if, all of a sudden, you saw somebody who drew forth a pure and noble love, which flowed out for you like a delicious stream, promising to gladden a hard, searched life; and if, just as you were going to drink, something told that you had no right to that love—Willie! Willie!" she cried, starting up wildly—"if the veil were off me, you would hate me! Go, and let me go! Tell nobody what I have. Go; and let me be a 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!"

"You are nervous and excited," he said, smiling. "You must be distressing yourself without reason. Are we part in this way?"

"We are," she replied, grown more composed. "I have been foolish, and pay the penalty. Forget me, Willie, for all about me! Remember me only as a boy remembers his first love."

"Never except at this gate," said Vanity decisively; "and never unless you find me here, without asking me to come."

(To be continued.)

WOULDN'T PAY FOR EARS.

A Company Draws a Line at Frozen Aural Appendages.

He had one side of his head bandaged when he entered the office of the railroad company and approached one of the clerks, says a Chicago exchange.

"Say," he said confidentially, as he leaned over the desk, "how much is a frozen ear worth?"

"A what?" exclaimed the clerk.

"A frozen ear," repeated the stranger.

"I can show you the loveliest frozen ears you ever saw."

"But it's of no use to me," protested the clerk.

"Of course not," replied the stranger; "but how about the company? How much does it generally pay for them?"

"Not a cent," answered the clerk in desperation.

"No, I don't," retorted the stranger, angrily.

"I think it's a railroad office, where they pay damages for broken legs and such things as that."

"They do that only when they're at fault," said the clerk.

"Well, they're at fault in this case," returned the stranger. "Did you think I wanted them to buy it for curiosity?"

"No, I don't," retorted the stranger, angrily.

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