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Better a Peasant Than a Peer.

CHAPTER XXII.
 WOUNDED LOVE.

Jeanne gathers up her creased work-robe. Clarence is attention to the last; gives her her fan, and, with a humble look, holds out the flower he has ravished from the egerne.

"Won't you take this?" she says. Jeanne takes it with a smile, and Clarence goes back to the table and drains a goodly glass of the yellow seal, with a heart fluttering like a man in love.

While dinner has been in progress, the servants have thrown open the doors of the conservatory adjoining the great drawing-room, and the faint forest of ferns and flowers is lit up with daintily-shaped, grotesque lanterns.

Jeanne, Jeanne like, makes straight for this, and seats herself in a low chair beside a marble faun, that leans down at her as he throws a spray of water from his scuffed hands.

This meeting with Lady Lucelle and Lord Lane is so unexpected that she scarcely yet realizes it. Lady Lucelle's prophecy had come true; they had met again, and with every appearance of good will.

With an inward mortification, Jeanne reflected upon the consummate presence of mind with which the fashionable beauty had set aside the fact of their having seen each other previously, of the exquisite well bred air of composed pleasure with which she had smiled; and, as Jeanne reflected, she sighed.

Three months ago she expressed a wish to enter the great world. How could she have guessed that it was so false and treacherous? Scarcely had those thoughts fitted through her mind than a soft voice says in her ear:

"Well, Lady Jeanne!" and looking up, Jeanne sees the blue eyes bent on her with a smiling audacity. Jeanne looks up with a sudden flash of color, but there is nothing more than the usually delicate tint on Lady Lucelle's fair skin, not a trace of confusion or embarrassment. Rather one would say an air of delicate enjoyment, as if the situation amused her.

She even laughs softly as she watches Jeanne's expressive face.

"Lady Ferndale," drawing a chair close to Jeanne's, and leaning forward with the most graceful ease—just as she did, Jeanne remembers, on that afternoon in the little drawing-room at the Gate House. "I wouldn't give a

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penny for your thoughts, for I know already."

Jeanne raises her eyebrows, but does not speak.

"Yes!" says Lady Lucelle, fanning herself slowly, and smiling into Jeanne's steadfast eyes, "you've been thinking ever since we were introduced," and she looks softly—"what a bold, wicked creature I am!"

"Wicked?" says Jeanne, as if she wouldn't deny the bold.

Lady Lucelle looks at her with more softness in her sharp eyes than her admirers would deem them capable of. "Oh!" she thinks, "then he hasn't told her about the letter?"

"Dreadfully bold and awfully deceitful; now, confess!"

Jeanne smiles rather coldly.

"Confess you meant to cut me whenever you saw me—that you would have done it to-day if you could! My dear, I saw it in your face when you heard my voice! Jeanne—may I call you Jeanne?—don't say no, or look cold! We two can't possibly quarrel, we're too great a contrast. Fair women and dark never do quarrel. Let us be friends!"

Jeanne smiles.

"Do you think my friendship so desirable then, Lady Lucelle?"

"Desirable? I couldn't get on without it!" says Lady Lucelle, with the most frank and charming smile. "My dear Jeanne, we shall meet nine months out of every twelve; we move in the same set, know the same people, I detest—I cannot endure situations in which the awkward and embarrassing predominate. I never had a quarrel or a coolness in my life."

"Never?" says Jeanne.

"Never!" says Lady Lucelle. "I see what you mean, my dear Jeanne, but you are wrong. One may get weary of one's best friends, but quarrel with them! Life is too short for anything so foolish. Why, my dear, there's scarcely a woman in this room—excepting some of the very old ones—that doesn't dislike me, and would quarrel with me, if I were silly enough to humor them. And some of them have better cause than you. You've got your plumcake, you know, where some of them have lost theirs—through me, or so they think. Come, what harm have I done to you?"

"I don't know," says Jeanne, and, indeed, she does not.

"There!" exclaimed Lady Lucelle, with a soft triumph. "I thought not! Why, if you consider it, it is I who ought to dislike you, but I don't; honestly, I would if I could, but I can't—I don't think any one could. Oh, I'm not flattering. You are too clever to be won by such poor chaff as that, especially when it comes from a woman's hand. And, besides, you are too happy to remember my old scores. Lady Jeanne, honestly, I liked you that first time—which we will never speak of any more—that first time I saw you; I was a little jealous, perhaps, for you were most exasperatingly pretty in that white dress; but I liked you, and I do want you to like me. Let us treat our friendship, as the man says in the play."

Jeanne smiles. What can she say—what would any one say in answer to the appeal, made in the sweetest and most liquid of tones, and with a frankness which seems truth itself? Lady Lucelle takes the smile as an assent.

"That's all right," she says, with a little fluttering sigh of satisfaction, "and I am quite happy. Candidly, my dear, I couldn't have afforded to quarrel with so great a person as the Marchioness of Ferndale! Why, I cut direct from you would have socially ruined me! See now how wholly I trust you! Is there any one of them who would be so honest? They all profess to love you, but they don't. They all say they love you, but they hate you. There isn't one of them," and she looked toward the room full of women with a placid smile, "but would have gone on their knees to get what you got without the asking. My dear, there is nothing so deceitful as a man! Did you ever notice how grave and sedate they come in, just as if they had been learning the shorter catechism, instead of chuckling over doubtful bon-mots and scandals? All

the life goes out of them as they enter the drawing-room, where we sit like same cats in a cage, lapping out tea or lounging at the piano. By the way, does Lord Ferndale sing now?"

The question was not an abrupt one for Lady Lucelle never asked an abrupt question in her life—but it is so unexpected that Jeanne winces. Vane has not sung since the wedding-day.

"I think not," she says, trying to speak cheerfully.

"Really!" says Lady Lucelle, glancing through her half-closed eyelids at Jeanne's averted face. "That strikes me as a dreadful waste of fine material. I have often thought it was a great shame a tenorist should have such a voice and such a talent for painting; it is rather unfair to other men who have neither title nor anything else. I'm afraid he doesn't paint much, does he?"

Jeanne smiles. As a fact, Vane has done little else but paint; but she is spared a reply, for the countess, who has made several attempts to get to her, reaches her at last, and Lady Lucelle is induced to go to the piano.

"Oh, yes, I'll sing if you want me," she says; "that is, until Lord Ferndale comes into the room. He once told me that I sang without any heart, and I vowed never to open my lips in his hearing again."

A small circle incloses Jeanne, plans are being made for the morrow. There is some talk of meeting the shooting party at luncheon; would

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Lady Ferndale like that? and how would Lady Ferndale like to go? Would she like to go in the saddle, or drive?

One and all consult her choice on every point, each hanging on her decision as if she were an empress. Jeanne smilingly refers it to the majority—anything will please her, and the matter is still under discussion when the gentlemen, looking as Lady Lucelle prognosticated, very grave and sedate, come clustering in.

Charlie and Clarence made straight for the little group, others spread about in search of comfortable seats; Vane, after glancing in the direction of the conservatory, goes across to an old friend, and takes his cup of tea, standing by his chair.

"Luncheon is the word," says Charlie. "Right! Go Lady you like! Just so! I'll ask Vane to run through the stables and find a horse for you. If he can't, we can send for your own."

Clarence is standing near.

"I shall use to carry a lady, Charlie," he says, with suppressed eagerness. "I'll answer for her quietness. Will you try her, Lady Ferndale? My sister used to ride her. You will be quite safe at anything."

Jeanne looks up.

"I shall deprive you," she says.

"He can ride anything," says Charlie. "Take him at his word, Lady Jeanne."

And so it is arranged, by tacit consent, that Jeanne is to ride Clarence's own horse.

Meanwhile, Lady Lucelle finishes her song, notwithstanding Vane's presence. If it be true that she sings without heart, she sings with plenty of art. Like everything else she does, she plays and sings artistically, and with that charm which grace alone can yield.

Vane looks up from his cup to give the general murmur of thanks, and meets her eyes fixed on him.

"Do you remember that song?" she says.

Vane tries to look as if he did not. "Will you come and sing for us?"

"You refuse?" says Lady Lucelle. "I must go and ask Lady Ferndale to intercede, then," and she looks around.

But Jeanne is not in the same place. At the end of the conservatory, leading to the terrace, there is the glimmer of an embroidered dress, and a tall figure remarkably like Clarence's.

"Rather than you should think that trouble necessary," says Vane, and he comes to the piano as he speaks, but reluctantly.

"What will you sing?" asks Lady Lucelle, with a direct gaze.

A small circle incloses Jeanne, plans are being made for the morrow. There is some talk of meeting the shooting party at luncheon; would

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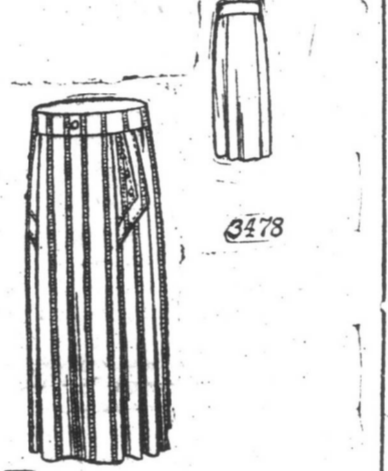
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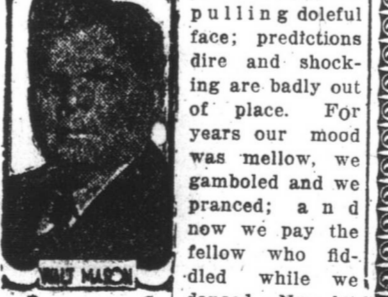
Pattern 3478 is portrayed in this model. It is cut in 7 Sizes: 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34 and 36 inch size requires 3 1/2 yards of 44 inch material. Striped or checked suitings, heavier mixtures, velours, serge, satin, taffeta and velvet could be used for this model. The width of the skirt at the lower edge with plaits extended is about 2 1/2 yards.

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