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CHAPTER XLIII.

"Yes," she said, stifling a sigh, as she regarded the little heap of invitations which very soon appeared beside the breakfast table. "We must go, of course. I must not forget that you do not belong to me altogether."

"Oh, indeed!" he said. "And to whom also do I belong, pray?"

"To these, and these, and these," she said, turning over the notes from the Roberoughs and the Ferndales and the Regs. "We must do our duty, dearest. Besides—"

"She hesitated, and looked at him wistfully.

"Out with it," he said, with a smile. "I was thinking what a nice quiet time we would have down here, you and I; but if you're got an idea that it's your duty—duty with a capital D—to drag me into a round of dinner-parties, I'm quite certain that you'll do it. But go on: What were you going to remark?"

"I was going to say that I didn't want you to get tired of me—of living a sort of Darby and Joan existence."

Gaunt laughed with an affectation of mockery.

"My dear Decima, that's a little too thin. As if I didn't know that you are dying to get about among these people and be petted and made much of; as if there were any special merit in being pretty to look at and having pleasant things said about you by other people."

She rose and put her arms round his neck and her fingers on his lips.

"You'll have the servants come in and see you," he said, pretending to be alarmed.

"And if they do," she retorted. "They all know I'm weak enough to be in love with you still!"

They did the round of dinner-parties, and, as Gaunt had prophesied, Decima was petted and made much of. In due course they returned the hospitality extended to them, and dinners, and dances, garden-parties, and impromptu luncheons for a time "ruled firm" at Leafmore.

It was after one of these quiet luncheons, which was eaten in the dining-room and on the terrace indifferently, that Decima, who was seated on the lawn beside Lady Roberough and Aunt Pauline—that lady had long ago forgiven Gaunt, and had grown absurdly attached to him—saw a fly coming up the drive.

"Who are these, dear?" asked Lady Roberough. "More visitors? If so, it is to be hoped there is some lunch left."

"I don't know whom it can be," said Decima, looking at the middle-aged and rather nervous-looking lady, and the very pretty little girl who sat beside her in the carriage.

At this moment Gaunt, followed by Lord Ferndale and the other gentlemen, came down the terrace and joined the ladies.

"There is some one coming—who is it?" said Decima. Before she could fin-

A little later when the other guests had gone—with the exception of Lady Roberough, who was staying in the house—Decima and she were sitting at tea with Mrs. Watson on the terrace. Maude was on Gaunt's knee and Mrs. Watson was telling the other two ladies of the child's marvelous recovery.

"And how well you look—how well and strong!" Maude was saying to Gaunt. "We read all about the fire and what you did, and mamma said she was afraid you'd die; but I said no, that you were too strong. Do you remember how you used to lift me, chair and all, and carry me—just as if I were a baby; like your dear little one in the nursery upstairs?"

"You're a very big baby now, Maude," remarked Gaunt.

"Yes; am I not? And I'm so strong, too. Oh, do you think I ought to have any more cake? Well, just this piece. What a pretty lady Lady Gaunt is!" she said, after a quiet munch.

"Yes; I think so too. I'm glad you agree with me."

"And how—how happy, how very happy she looks!" remarked Maude, contemplating Decima thoughtfully.

"Yes; I think she's fairly happy. Maude," he assented. "I don't beat her very often. Yes, I think she's happy."

"I know why," said the child, with a quiet laugh.

Lady Roberough heard her and looked round.

"Because she hath 'Her Heart's Desire,'" she quoted to Gaunt.

Maude looked from one to the other, rather puzzled for a moment or so, then she smiled up at Gaunt triumphantly, as if she had guessed the riddle.

"She means you!" she said, shrewdly.

THE END.

**Better a Peasant Than a Peer.**

CHAPTER I.

Then followed a silence, broken at last by Georgina with a giggle.

"We are getting gay in Newton Regis, aren't we, Jeanne?"

"Are we?" says Jeanne, placidly. "I didn't know it. Why?"

"Haven't you heard, really?" says Maud. "We've got a visitor—a real genuine visitor. Fancy, in the winter, too!"

"Who—where?" asks Jeanne, with culpable indifference.

"Well, we don't know who he is," answers Georgina; "but he has taken rooms at Mrs. Brown's, the carrier's, you know. Maud thinks he's a gentleman, but I say it's so unlikely—I don't know."

Jeanne shakes her head indifferently; she does not quite follow.

"There's no hunting, and no fishing now, nothing, in fact, to bring a gentleman down to Regis, is there?"

"No," says Jeanne. "I suppose not."

"We can't make it out," continues Maud, with that injured tone which the busybody always assumes when balked of his prey. "He means to stay, for he has taken Mrs. Brown's room for three months. Isn't it strange?"

"Is it?—I mean yes," says Jeanne. "Quite mysterious!" echoes Maud; "of course mamma doesn't know what to do. If he is a gentleman, papa would call—he has been here four days; surely you have heard of him?"

"Yes," said Jeanne. "I remember Hal saying something about it, but I had forgotten it." But the Misses Lambton smile rather incredulously.

"Of course, dear," murmured Maud. "Well, there he is, and of course we must find out who he is! Doesn't Mr. Bell know?"

"I haven't asked him," replied Jeanne, simply.

"Really!" exclaimed Georgina. "We thought Mr. Bell, being the curate—the clergyman—would be sure to know. The clergyman ought to know everybody in the place, oughtn't he?"

"Not if he doesn't want to. I suppose," said Jeanne, coolly. "But he will be here directly—then you can ask him."

"Oh, no," said Maud, promptly, and with a slight dash of color. "It is really of no interest to us—is it, Georgy—not the slightest. Would be quite too ridiculous to ask Mr. Bell."

"Quite too ridiculous!" murmured Georgina. "We only thought you might know, dear."

"I don't," says Jeanne, in her direct fashion, which equally means: "Also I don't care."

At this the two Misses Lambton rise, smooth their muffs, and mince forward on their high heels to say adieu, and almost get clear of the room, when Maud, being foremost, is nearly knocked off her high heels by Hal, who, rashly concluding that they have taken their departure, comes bursting into the room.

"I thought you'd gone!" he blurts out, boy-like, adding insult to injury.

"Hal," says Jeanne, reprovingly, "be more careful."

"Very sorry," says Hal, with a deep tone, and expressive of injury. "Hope I haven't hurt you!"

"Oh, not at all," responds Maud, smiling with her brigand hat knocked on one side by the concussion, and her whole thin frame tottering on her high heels—just in the very slightest. You'll come to the park to-morrow, with Jeanne, won't you?"

Hal's frank face at once grows dark with dismay.

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