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Better a Peasant Than a Peer.

CHAPTER XX.
DECEIVED.

Jeanne does not cry for long, the very violence of her grief forbids that, and almost as suddenly as she threw herself on her knees, calling on "Hal," she is upright again and facing her position. With a little tremor of shyness and alarm; she looks at the strange richness of her surroundings, upon the decorations of the dainty little rooms, the rare hangings and exquisite furniture, the costly appointments—where is she?

As she goes to the table, her hands fall on a magnificent dressing-case, and her gaze rests on the coronet and initials emblazoned on each of the brushes, upon the golden tops of the scent-bottles.

And here Jeanne remembers that she is the Marchioness of Ferndale; it is not all a strange and fevered dream. The man from whom she has fled, whose hard, cruel words ring in her burning ears is her lover, is the great marquis, and she—is his wife.

Jeanne hides her face in her hands, and thinks—thinks as she never thought before, staring at the sweet, pale face which stares back at her in the glass.

Every word of that bitter accusation she calls up, sparing herself not one. She has deceived him—yes; no matter with what motive. It is true that she has deceived him! How could she tell him of the doubts and fears which kept her silent on all concerning that hateful visit of the Lady Lucelle. She had deceived him, and lost his love—

shall see how she can play the part which he has set her.

And as this resolve is made, Jeanne is a girl no longer, but a woman—proud, contented, and injured!

If he could see her now, surely it would recall to him the lithe, upright figure, standing so so often he has seen it stand on the beach, with the clear eyes looking out to the sea; and he would take back the bitter words and angry looks that have built up the barrier between them.

If he could see her now, her white little forehead puckered in her endeavor to solve the problem of her future course, he would himself solve it there and then. But while she fights for courage, struggles against the dull anguish that beats at her heart, he is moodily, remorsefully wasting the precious moments of reconciliation in the night air; and thus wasted they vanish, to return, who shall say when?

CHAPTER XXI.
UNDER A VENEER OF COURTESY.

"Oh, yes, 'tis now September, the harvest has begun. The golden-headed barley is ripening in the sun."

So hums a gentleman, who, leaning on his gun, stops to wipe the perspiration from his face. Tramping by his side in a companionable sportsman. Both of them we know, for the man who is singing is that Lord Charles Nugent, who, nine months ago, said farewell to a certain Vernon Vane on the platform of Marly Station.

There is the same careless, happy-go-lucky expression on his face, and as he whistles and hums the old English air and quaint words, he looks more like a schoolboy than a man whose name is famous votaries. His companion is no other than our old friend Clarence, Viscount Lane. Now, Lady Lucelle had said in her letter that Clarence Fitzjames was very much changed since he had become Lord Lane, and she had only spoken the truth.

He had spent the last three months in travel and in losing that languid, lackadaisical air, upon which, as Clarence Fitzjames, he prided himself pretty considerably, but which as Lord Lane he felt ought to be abandoned. He had cast off the self-affectedness, and, as no one can travel and move about in the world without acquiring a little information and increment of knowledge, he was rather more sensible than of yore.

As a finishing touch I should like to be able to add that his morals had improved, but—well, she has said so, and so shall it be. There shall be no moan, no wall, no complaint made by her. As he reminded her, she is the marchioness, and not plain Mrs. Vane, for whose incomings and outgoings the world cares nothing; she is the marchioness, whose every word and look will be noted. "Well!" and she confronts her glass defiantly, "he

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"Lucky beggars, most of you are," says Lord Charles, with light envy. "Never was hit in my life; don't know what a grand passion is. Seen plenty of pretty women, too, in my time. Suppose my day will arrive perhaps when I'm old, and have the family gun? One generally gets knocked over by a schoolgirl, doesn't one? and acquires a past fondness for bread and butter, and marmalade."

"Chaff away," says Clarence. "If you don't know what it means, you are the lucky one. But about the marchioness?"

"Eh? Oh, I was going to observe that everybody says she is to be the new beauty. Two or three of the fellows in the smoking-room last night had been staying at Ferndale, and they swear she's the most beautiful young creature they've ever seen, and as charming as she is beautiful. Rather wonderful that, isn't it? For my part, most of the lovely women are confounded bores. It's the same with horses; if ever you see anything on four legs as pretty as paint, you may lay your life there's something wrong—deuce of a temper, splint thrown, or something. But, of course, the marchioness is the exception that proves the rule, and Ferndale's a happy man!"

By this time the two men had made their way into the grounds, and were crossing the lawn.

"Well, I'll go and make myself fit," said Clarence; and Lord Charles, throwing his gun and bag to a servant, inquired if any visitors had arrived.

"Lord and Lady Ferndale, my lord," said the man. "The marquis is in his dressing-room."

Charlie sprang up the stairs two at a time, and knocked at the door of one of the dressing-rooms attached to the suite set apart for the marquis and his newly-married wife.

"Come in," said Vane's voice, and the next moment the two friends were hand in hand.

"Well, old man!" exclaimed Charlie, cheerily, "awfully glad to see you—awfully! How are you? Let's have a look at you." And with a laugh he took Vane by the elbows and turned him around to the light.

Vane laughed, but with an undertone of uneasiness that the other noticed instantly.

"Hem!" said Charlie, dropping his hold and flinging himself into a chair, "I've seen you look chipper, old man."

"I'm well enough," said Vane, catching up the hairbrushes and brushing away like mad; "in fact, I'm quite well."

"And the marchioness?" asked Charlie. "I ought to have asked after her first; always forgetting my manners. Avely good of you to come to us so soon. And now, old man, I'll congratulate you. Jove! I was a prophet when I prophesied mischief would come of that hermit business at Newton Regis."

"Mischief?" said Vane, with a slight smile.

Charlie laughed.

"According to all accounts, you're the luckiest of lucky men, Vane. We've had no end of reports of her beauty and popularity. Not always were fortunate, old fellow!"

"Yes," says Vane, and he turned to tell Willis, the valet, who had entered, that he might go again; "yes," he said. "So they say she is very beautiful, do they?"

(To be continued.)

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