

JOAN LEACOTT

*A short story  
from the Author  
of the  
Clarence Bay  
Chronicles*



Second  
Chance  
Dress



*To my husband Victor and to Gina Grant.*

*You both make writing so much easier and so much fun.*

*Thank you.*



# Second Chance Dress



I AM A WEDDING DRESS.

The pinnacle, the apogee if you will, of the span of a woman's life. I symbolize the transformation of a woman from single to married, from an ordinary Miss to a beloved Mrs. I am worn with hope and the anticipation of a rosy future, secure in the knowledge that proclaims this woman to be loved and desired by that man.

But I am no ordinary, run-of-the-mill, wedding dress. I am not one of those puff-sleeved *jejeune* things that attempts to disguise a young woman as a fairy-tale princess.

No no.

I inform the world that here walks a woman grown. A sophisticated woman who strides with confidence through her life. She's had her knocks but stands strong, chin high, ready for anything and everything.

The label I bear announces my creation in one of the exclusive ateliers along that divine Parisian *rue*. Bespoke for one very particular lady of exquisitely refined taste.

I am made of the finest materials available. An underskirt of satin glimmers through gossamer chiffon and whispers along the floor. The finest Belgian lace lays over a boned satin bodice and the creamy skin of the bride's shoulders and arms like a lover's breath. Pearls gleam upon my lace roses like morning's dew.

I fit my bride like a glove. Ah such lovely breasts, such luscious hips. Well, a little more of the former and a good bit less of the latter would be much appreciated to display me in all of my resplendent glory.

Did you think I was white? How common. I am the colour of the *brût*-est of *brût* champagne, the faintest wash of cream with a blush of rose.

I am accompanied by delightful silken underthings, the sheerest of stockings, the most elegant of dyed-to-match shoes. My high lace collar dictates that a necklace is superfluous; interfering even. Though pearls and diamonds on wrist and ear are most suitable. No expense has been spared on my luxury.

On that most important day, my Bride and I do not march down the aisle to that oh-so-ordinary Wagner wedding tune. We float down the aisle on the wonderful strains of the glorious *Water Music* by the divine Handel.

Father very proudly escorts us on his arm.

Mother happily weeps in her pew. Sister weeps as well;

green with envy. Ha! Still single, poor thing.

That's the groom? Oh dear. What was Bride thinking when she agreed to wed the fellow? Maybe Sister shouldn't be so green, after all.

The ceremony proceeds without a hitch. The vows are exchanged in clear voices, no choking up.

Well done.

Until that impudent veil refuses to release its grip on one of my precious pearls. Jealous to the death it is, the little cretin.

But I digress. My apologies.

The opening waltz at the reception is flawless, well-practiced, beautifully executed.

Delicious bubbly flows like the river Thames. The toasts are made. Thank you, thank you. Yes, we are beautiful, aren't we?

Oh dear God! It's all gone to hell in a hand basket.

The groom's pea green waistcoat is revealed in all its horrid vulgarity. There are erotic dancing pigs embroidered on its back!

We were *not* informed. We *should* have been informed. We would *certainly* have had something to say about those horrendous pigs.

How very *déclassé*.

And speaking of death grips—the wrinkles on my bodice are unforgivable. Those sweaty palms and thick fingers are all over me.

If I could shudder, I would.



WHO COULD EVER HAVE IMAGINED to what depths my Bride has sent me?

Wrenched from my quiet resting place at the back of the wardrobe. Stripped of my protective cover and padded hanger. Stuffed ignominiously into a bin liner.

Relegated to a charity shop window for all the world to gawp at.

Hung on a plastic hanger, of all things. Not even a mannequin to show off my magnificent figure.

What an ignoble end to such a glorious beginning!

Why couldn't Bride have passed me on to Sister or a dear friend? Why the charity shop?

What have I done to deserve this treatment?

On offer for a mere fraction of my original cost.

Hung here amongst the hoi polloi by the do-gooder assistants.

One of those puffy, fluffy things is here. And just look at the one-shouldered style on that one. It's a pity there are so few people left in this world with any real taste.

The only glimmer of light in this Stygian gloom is that I'm rid of the attentions of that vulgar waistcoat. I *knew* those pigs were a bad omen. Nothing but trouser trouble.



“BUCK UP, GELS. I know the heat from that relentless sun is



intolerable. Ah, relief is in sight. Here comes the gentle assistant Susannah to draw the shade and cut the glare.”

“Thank you, my dear. Very good of you to attend to us. We all of us appreciate it, even the fluffy little Sweetie.”

“Why is it they think that hanging us in the window is going to bring in the punters? We are but a pathetic reminder of failure, of the should-have-been. Why must we be pilloried in this fashion?”

“What’s that you say? Speak up, my dear.”

“Oh yes, my little ray of sunshine, I suppose it is better than rotting in a garbage tip somewhere. Yes, yes. You’re quite right. Susannah really does look after us very well. And perhaps we will have another go at it all.”

But it really doesn’t bear thinking about, does it?



“UNHAND ME! If you think I’m going down the aisle on you—think again! Aaah! I knew it! Now look what you’ve done—you great ham-fisted wench! You’ve split one of my seams! And leave my pearls alone! Get away from me!”

“Help me! Somebody! Anybody!”

“Oh, thank you Susannah, thank you! I feel a spasm coming on. Take me away from that creature.”

I thought the first one was bad, but now I know better. All the hands that have been on me.

Never mind, I shall close my eyes and think of England. Stiff upper lip and all that.



I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT ANY of us would be required unless it was to be dumped into a dress-up box. Or worse, made into net curtains. A christening gown, now that would be an acceptable reincarnation.

Thank goodness for dear Susannah's constant care of us. My silk would surely have begun to deteriorate if not for her delicate stitch. I could feel the dust getting into my lace. It was frightfully itchy. And she's so good at keeping those people away from me.



“GOODBYE, SWEETIE DEAR! Better luck this time! Well, Nanette, just you and I are left from the original group.”

That young woman looked quite ridiculously happy to take Sweetie away. And her young man looks a charmer. I do hope they'll be happy together – at least longer than I was with those pigs. It's been weeks now since anyone came to have a look at us. Do you believe there is a second chance for everyone?



“GOODBYE, DEAR NANETTE, GOODBYE! Better luck this time! Your lady looks scrumptious. I think she deserves a lovely dress like you.”

Well, old thing, you're on our own now. They've all gone.

Just some denim jeans and jackets to share the window. They're American, are they? Well at least they speak English, of sorts. And they are amusing. More so than those

stuck up designer togs that have just joined us. Let's see how long *they* last. No stamina, I'll wager.



AH, THE LOVELY SUSANNAH. Come again to lower the shade? A relief, as usual.

What's this? Off the hanger? Ohh, I didn't realize how stiff I'd become. Oh my! That shaking feels positively sensual.

Mmm.

Am I to be given another go 'round? Surely not on that buxom lass? I'll split another seam for sure. I mean, I have extra allowance, but surely not that much.

"What are you doing, my dear Susannah? I'm to be yours? My dear child, you give me new hope."

"Well, I must say I do like your proportions better than that hateful creature who slung me into that bin liner. Yes, I've plenty of room to spare for you there. And I'd much prefer skimming over your hips than straining to cover those great...Heh hem."

Decorum, my gel. Remember your origins.

"Susannah! You do surprise me. Who knew you had such a naughty side to you? These satin knickers are really quite *risqué*. And the matching corset? Oh my, you're making me blush."

A string quartet plays for Father II and us as we go down the aisle. I don't recognize the lovely tune. The groom wrote it? Enchanting!

No Mother II – how terribly sad, Susannah must miss her very much today. Sisters II look so happy for us – such a pleasant change.

Groom II barely pulls his handsome self together to declare his vows.

Susannah quivers at the hot sweet kisses that declare the newly made husband and wife.

So romantic!

This delightful dove gray waistcoat is ever so much more refined than that bumptious green thing. No pigs or other hideous creatures lying in wait to horrify us all.

“I applaud your taste, Susannah. Your groom knows just how to treat a woman at the dance, charmingly audacious, but no pawing us about.” No matter that it’s just a simple box step. It’s smooth and well executed. He does us both proud.

“Now you two run along and have a good honeymoon. Yes, of course the corset and knickers are going with you. I wouldn't expect anything else.

And see that you come back smiling. Knackered and smiling. I know, I’m sorry.”

Snorting isn't ladylike.



WELL, HERE I AM RESTING again. This time I’m carefully stored in a show box, nicely cleaned, supported by tissue paper, and placed at the top of the wardrobe.

I wonder for how long this time?

They *did* come back smiling. More like grinning, wholly besotted, as they should be.

I shall just have to wait and see.



‘STRUTH, I KNEW IT! Torn from my peaceful slumbers to be exposed to the aging sunlight again. How long will I hang in that blasted window this time? These young people – absolutely no sense of commitment.

“What’s that, Susannah? Renew your vows? Your twenty-fifth anniversary! Has it really been that long? I do most sincerely apologize.”

Look at this, I still fit! A wee bit snugger ‘round the tummy, but childbearing will do that to one. Nothing that can’t be accommodated however.

A new corset? The other’s worn out? Naughty, naughty! I’m surprised it’s only four children.

How delightful! There’s that gray waistcoat again. As deliciously yummy now as he was then.

My, we have learned to dance divinely. A lovely evening, I must say.

“Enjoy your second honeymoon. I’ll be here when you return.”



CLEANED AGAIN AND BACK INTO the box.

“See you in ten years’ time, Susannah.”

Ah, quiet bliss.



“OH MY GRACIOUS! Has it been ten years already, my sweet Susannah? How time does fly. I’m looking forward to meeting that waistcoat again.”

“What? Not your anniversary?”

“Not the gray waistcoat? Horrors! Not at this late date! Susannah, what have you done?”

“What’s that you say?”

“Your only daughter’s wedding?”

“Oh my goodness! Such an honour! You’ve made an old lady so happy.”

I think I’m going to cry.







# *Thank You*

Dear Reader,

My husband and I were on the airplane home from London, England to Toronto, Canada after a wonderful trip to celebrate our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. I was staring out the window at endless puffy clouds, wondering what do for the next seven hours, when this voice sounded in my ear. A very posh, very British voice with an unusual story to tell. Out came my trusty pen and notebook and away flew my boredom.

I hope you had as much fun reading my short story as I did writing it. I enjoy hearing from my readers. You can contact me via my website at [www.JoanLeacott.ca](http://www.JoanLeacott.ca).

To be notified of my next release, pop over to my website and sign up for my newsletter.

Thanks ever so much,

*Joan Leacott*

P.S. While we're chatting, I'd love to introduce you to a place that's very special to me. Clarence Bay, a small Canadian town on the eastern shores of Georgian Bay, is surrounded by deep forest laced with water and filled with wildlife. The folks of Clarence Bay are a gossipy group. Nothing escapes their notice, especially romance.

# *Welcome to Clarence Bay*

*Where the neighbours will keep your secrets.  
Or will they?*

## **Above Scandal**

*Instant family: just add daughter.*



Three generations of Rossetti women are hoarding secrets.

Cathy Rossetti's secret is Hayley, an outspoken ten-year-old who's about to meet her family for the first time. Sadly, it's taken a terminal illness to bring Cathy back to her hometown.

The elder generation of Rossetti women guards a thirty-year old secret with the power to rock Cathy's world. Will her mother take their secret to her grave, or will her aunt break her punishing vow of silence?

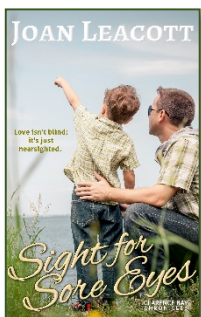
Hayley hates secrets, so she's sleuthing around Clarence Bay looking for her daddy. Is it her new BFF's father or mayoral candidate Ryan Chisholm or Ryan's handsome campaign manager?

Ryan has a secret, too. He's still in love with Cathy, his high-school sweetheart. For a man running his election campaign on a platform of honesty, this could cause problems. Will dumping his popular fiancée cost him the election? And if Cathy still loves him after eleven years absence, she's not telling.

*Available for purchase as ebook or print book at Kobo, Amazon and other fine online retailers.*

# Sight for Sore Eyes

*Love isn't blind; it's just near-sighted.*



Emma Finn once dreamed of being a photographer, capturing exotic landscapes and poignant vistas. Then a series of tragedies tore her life apart. All she craves now is stability—reliable, boring, safe.

Ophthalmologist Asher Stockdale left big city life when his ex-wife took his young son away. When he met Emma, he pictured her as the centre of his new life in Clarence Bay. So why is he encouraging her to resurrect her old dream and go gallivanting around the globe? Dare he ask her to stay?

If Emma goes to India, will she be able to heal, or will she regret her choice?

Carpenter ants, a rescued Pirate, and a pair of scheming seniors help Emma and Asher to see what really lies before their eyes.

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