

# THE BELLE OF RUBYWOOD.

CHAPTER VII.

So they parted, these two—Muriel Holt and Wynter Leigh—and for them it is scarcely too much to say the whole face of nature was changed.

Muriel, with that silent joy which the heart feels when it has met its mate, trod lightly home and entered the house a woman, with a woman's passion and purpose. Her father looked up as she entered and nodded admiringly, thinking she grew more beautiful every day, and counted her in his heart well worthy to be the mistress of the house.

Wynter Leigh tramped home, most of the way bareheaded, his heart full of love, the very air odorous with 't the landscape itself smiling hopefully and encouragingly, and his own steadfast mind teeming with his new idea.

The old woman who acted as house-keeper was nearly startled by the sun light on his face, and quite so when, in a higher tone than he had yet heard him use, he said:

"Dame, I am going on a journey to-morrow."

Then he drank his draught of ale, took a crust of bread and a slice of cheese in his hand and tramped off, again.

Everything about the farm was right or if not, with a word, or with his own hands, he set it right, then strode off to his sheep, and, seating himself by his old shepherd, said in his curt kindly way:

"William, I'm going North to-morrow. Have you any message to the village folk?"

"Nowt, I thankee, Maester Leigh," returned the old man gratefully. "It's uike thee to think o' me. Heaven speed thee, Maester Wynter, on every path, north or south."

"Amen!" said young Leigh, with that simple reverence for the blessings of the aged which wins reverence for itself in return.

"May an old servant ask what takes thee North, maester? Is it cattle?"

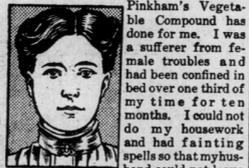
"Aye, rather more important business, of what I'll tell you all in good time, Old Will. Look you after the sheep, though I know you will do that as if they were your own. We're fighting a hard fight, Will, but we'll conquer."

"That's like you, Maester Leigh," returned the old man, with a flash of enthusiasm. "Thee looks brighter tonight than I a' seen thee since that dark day. You be brave and strong, and I don't fear the fight, not I, hard

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tho' it be. And so good night, Maester Leigh."

"Good night, Old Will," said the young maester, gently, but heartily and away he went, looking at his sheep from right to left of him with a respectful eye.

Early in the morning his light dog-cart rattled up the avenue with him, and Muriel Holt, from behind her curtain, saw him cast a long, eager look toward the spot where, unseen, she stood, then lift his whip hand to his lips.

Though no one else could have understood his gesture as a caress, she read it aright, and flushed and thrilled all through with the answering leap of love, she could not find voice for a moment to answer the stentorian tones of Farmer Holt calling her to breakfast.

"Leigh's started off early this morn," he said, mopping his face with his large red handkerchief.

"Yes," said Muriel, behind the urn. "Aye, an' looking as happy as a young throistle. He was whistling, I think, which is an uncommon gal' thing for him. Wonder where he's gone?"

"I don't know," said Muriel. "No, I don't suppose you do," retorted her father, innocently enough though the remark made Muriel pale.

"He's as close as a badger to his own men; 'tisn't like you'd know, my lass—'isn't that young Jaffer there? Why don't the oaf come in? Come in, Jaffer!" he roared, nodding at the boy's face framed in the window with a gorty grin.

"Come in," said Muriel, more gently, opening the door as she spoke. "What is it—a letter?" she added, at Jaffer, having ventured beyond the threshold, paused irresolute, staring at the table and grinning violently.

"Eees, Miss Mur!"

"Who's for—?" asked Farmer Holt. "It be for you farmer," said Jaffer with a most appalling guffaw.

"Give it me, then; the lad holds it as grip as a hawk."

But as Jaffer, who had no doubt been earnestly admonished to take care of the epistle, seemed reluctant to part with it, even to its rightful owner, Muriel took it from his hand and passed it to her father.

"Hem!" growled the farmer, after reading it. "From young Alf; obliged to go on to London to see one of them lawyer tieves. Something the matter with the will, and the rascal's want to pluck him. They'll do it if he shows a feather they can lay hold of; trust the lawyers for that! What's this at the bottom? The lad can farm better than he can write. Heaven be praised! Read it, you lass, for, if I'm not mistaken, there's your name amongst it."

Muriel took the letter and read out the illegible scrawl:

"Ask Miss Muriel not to forget me if I am compelled to remain away for a week or two."

"Ah! ah!" laughed the farmer, not ill pleased. "That's the way the wind blows, is it. You can write him back, 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder,' lass, and set the boy's mind at rest." And he laughed again, awakening a terrific echo in Jaffer.

Muriel hid her embarrassment by cutting a huge slice of bread and bacon for Master Jaffer, and, setting his cap on his head, which she knew would get otherwise remain uncovered until he got home, started him off by leading him to the door and whispering:

"Good-by, Jaffer." The farmer then said: "I'll just go up to the Howe and see that things are straight—it's only neighborly, and you may as well come along, too, lass, and look after the fowls."

All the way farmer Holt expatiated on the wealth of the Howe and the excellencies of its young master, and once, as they approached the awkward corner, he stopped and, raising his stick, pointed to it with some inaudible remark, which he did not repeat, though Muriel, breaking silence for the first time, asked him to.

The preceding night she had several times regretted that she had prevented Wynter Leigh from coming to her father and asking for her openly and without delay. She had called herself hard names, cried, even, over her "unmaidenly conduct;" but now she knew that she had acted rightly, for her instinct told her father had set his heart upon her marrying the master of the Howe.

In five days Wynter Leigh returned. The dogcart met him at the nearest station, which was six miles off, and brought him back as quickly as it had taken him.

Muriel did not know that he had returned until later in the evening, when, going to the milking, she met him face to face at the corner of the avenue.

It was the first time they had met since that eventful night, and for a moment they both stood silent, she showing her emotion by a sudden flush and as sudden a pallor, he by a quick, eager light in his expressive eyes and a tremor of the lip.

She gave him her hand, and, without a word, though his eyes spoke plenty and eloquent ones, he pressed it, relinquished it slowly, and strode on.

She saw him go down to his sheep, and envied old William, who could sit beside his master and hear his deep, icy voice without let or hindrance.

"Well, Will," said Leigh, laying his hand on the old man's shoulder, but looking wistfully to the corner where Muriel's slight, graceful form had disappeared. "I am back, you see."

"Aye, Heaven be praised!" said the old man. "It be a long journey."

"Yes," said his master, raising his hat and brushing back his hair with an abrupt gesture, habitual with him when he was thinking deeply; "yes, did not take it for nothing, Will. The sighs were never good at asking favors, were they?"

"No, no," said the old man with a hearty smile; "you were always a proud lot, father and son, Maester Wynter."

"Ah, that accounts for the difficulty I found in getting about it now. Well, 've been favor begging."

"Not you!" said the old man, half-neredulously. "Yes, I," said Wynter Leigh. "You remember old Jonah Leigh, of Crew-terne?"

"Aye, I do," said the old man. "A regular Leigh Maester Wynter—close as oyster."

"Well, I have asked him to lend me three thousand pounds, and— he has done it."

"I'm gettin' to believe in most 'strange things in my old age," said the old man simply.

"Yes, though I'm fain to believe it."

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was pride, Will—Leigh pride. "You can do so much, you say, if I lend you the money?" he said. "Well, the Leighs should uphold the name in a strange place. There's the money. Go and do it."

"Three thousand pounds!" repeated the shepherd. "It's a miracle, Maester Leigh, and he'll repent him and kill himself."

"And now, Will, for the modus operandi, in other words, the way in which the three thousand pounds are to raise a Leigh from the bottom to the top of the hill. This is good pasture, but in bad condition, you know. It's no use grumbling at the bad; beat turn it to good, so I'm going to feed a hundred prime cows, Will, and go in for milk."

(To be continued.)

## On Second Thought.

BY JAY E. HOUSE.

When a woman wishes to go the limit in criticising another woman she says: "Why, she doesn't even make her own bed."

Another theory, which does not work out in practice is the one to the effect that the collar button rolls under the dresser. Instead, the collar button drops at your feet, and you step on it while hunting it.

Woodrow Wilson was in the bath room when news of his nomination reached him. When there are women in the family a man must do his bathing when opportunity presents itself. He can't wait until Saturday night.

When a woman is granted a divorce she nearly always construes the incident as an opportunity to make a speech.

Inez Haynes Gilmore wants to know if women should propose. Well, that, we believe, is the custom.

What, by the way, has become of the old-fashioned woman visitor who brought a few jars of fruit with her?

Speaking generally, an optimist is a man who can extract consolation from the fact that the home team lost by one run.

The farmer continues to be misrepresented. A current magazine writer places him in the position of referring to the "pesky corn." No farmer says "pesky." It is a town word used almost exclusively by women.

There is as yet no law to prevent a man sitting cross-legged, but that is about the only privilege the men have left.

Public taste changes a good deal from year to year. This time fifty years ago the favourite indoor recreation was abusing General Grant.

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