

The Snake Scotched AND Justice Done.

CHAPTER XXXIII
(Continued.)
"My friends—thank God with me—my son was lost and is found. My son—my dear son!"

As he turned away to hide the tears that did not shame his manhood but proved it, his hand sought Ralph's and held it.

When Ralph and Veronica came back from their honeymoon—they had been married three months after the day of his acquittal—there were, of course, great doings at Lynne Court. It shall be left to the local newspapers to describe those doings, and extremely well the local newspapers accomplished their pleasant task; but it may be added by him who has set down this much of the history of Veronica and Ralph Denby to recount one little scene which occurred on the night—the culminating night of the prolonged festivities.

The people, gentle and simple—and they mixed as one class on this occasion—had gone and Veronica had thrown herself upon the settle before the blazing fire in the hall—it was winter when they returned from their honeymoon—Ada, who was almost a permanent visitor at the Court, was lying on the bear-skin on the hearth. She and Martha had joined in everything that day, and the child had quite exhausted herself and was fast asleep with her head resting on Ralph—Lord Big Man she called him now—and for the first time for several days quiet reigned in the huge house.

Veronica leant forward, her hands clasped round her knees, her eyes gazing dreamily at the huge log whose ray it up her lovely face with a rosy hue.

"Tired, dearest?" said Ralph in a low voice so that he should not wake the sleeping Ada.

"No, only a wee bit. I was thinking."

"Of what?" he asked. "Not sad thoughts, Veronica?"

She raised her lovely eyes and looked at him with the look that never failed to thrill him, then her expression grew a little piteous.

"Must I tell you, Ralph?" she pleaded.

"Of course!" he responded, mercilessly. "You belong to me, thoughts and all, dearest!"

"Yes," she assented and she stretched out her hand. He took it and kissed it and still held it as she said, slowly, almost reluctantly, and in a low voice that is and always will be the sweetest music he can hear:

"If I must—Ralph, I was thinking that perhaps, after all, I should have liked it better—Ah, no, I won't say it! It seems ungrateful, childish!"

"Speak! I command you!" he murmured, with mock solemnity.

"I was thinking how—how it would have been if—if you—You will laugh at me, Ralph! You always do, you know, when I want to be very serious!" she broke off, with the air of a martyr.

"They have all gone?" Ralph asked, where are you?"

She turned from Ralph, and, putting her arms round the old man's neck, kissed him.

He looked down at her tenderly, fondly, then he said, in the voice that had grown so soft and gentle:

"Tired, my dear? Why—why—you are crying. Ralph—What are you crying for, Veronica?"

She forced a smile as her violet eyes looked from one to the other.

"For sheer happiness!" she assented.

(Continued.)

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He shook his head, but he laughed softly.

But the laugh, instead of discouraging, impelled her.

"If you had remained just Ralph Farrington, if you had gone to Australia, and I had followed you—should have followed you, Ralph! No thing, nothing would have prevented me, you know!"

He nodded.

"I can well believe it; there was never so stubborn a person as Miss Veronica Gresham when she had made up her mind."

"Not always, Ralph!" she murmured, remorsefully. "You forget: I yielded once. I let you go—that day in the arbour."

"The one exception that proves the rule," he said. "But you soon repented, dearest!"

"Yes," she admitted, with a sigh of satisfaction. "I soon repented. I did follow you, Ralph!" piteously. "But suppose—"

she rose and stole to his side and hid her face against his breast—"suppose we had been married—we should have been married, Ralph!"

"Without a doubt, I should say," he returned, with a smile that only showed his love and pride. "You are the sort of young person who will have her way at all costs."

"And we had been very poor, and had had a struggle, you and I, just Mr. and Mrs. Farrington, do you think you would have—have cared more for me? Oh, wait! Sometimes I think Heaven has been too good to me, made it too—too easy for me. I gave up nothing for you—I am back here—"

she looked round the hall almost regretfully—"I shall reign—not for a long, long time, I hope!—where once I served. I have gained everything by my love for you; and—sometimes—to-night, for instance, now that they have all gone—I think that I should have liked—that it would have been very precious to have sacrificed something for you, to have worked with you for our daily bread, to have starved for you—ah, Ralph, that would have been sweet to me! But Providence laughed at me and all my dreams of sacrifice and self-denial. You have given me so much—everything!—and I, Ralph, have, after all, given you nothing!"

He set the child's head gently down on the soft bear-skin and rising, took Veronica's hand and led her up to the antique mirror gleaming in one of the oaken panels.

"Look, dearest!" he whispered, and he made her look at the lovely, blushing face reflected there. "That is what you have given me. Do you count it nothing. To me it is the greatest prize, the most precious treasure—"

A step sounded in the hall behind them, and the earl, leaning on his stick, came forward slowly.

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THE BELLE OR RUBYWOOD.

CHAPTER I.

Farmer Holt was the squire of Rubywood, and there was no more comfortable homestead than Rubywood House in England; the Holt cattle carried the highest price in the Monday Sherwood market, and the Rubywood grain always rated at sixpence a bushel more than the neighbouring growers.

The reason for all this lay in Farmer Holt himself as much as in the excellence of his land. He was squire, but he disdained, or, at least, ignored the title. The appellation of "farmer" smacked in his ear of the majesty of "emperor."

"I'm a farmer, that's what I am," he would say, striking the thick oak table in his dining room, "and I'll trouble you to call me that. Squire is for them as like's it: I don't. My father was Farmer Holt before me, is father was Farmer Holt before him, and if Farmer was good enough for them, I'd like to know why it ain't good enough for me?"

Farmer by name and nature, no man threw himself so heartily into the routine of his business, no man put so much of himself into his work as did Farmer Holt.

"Want a thing done, give it to somebody else and pay another man to stand by and watch him not do it. Want a thing done well, do it yourself, or stand by and see that it is done."

On this principle Farmer Holt walked through life, sowing, reaping, rearing, shearing, selling. He always did what was to be done himself, or saw that it was done.

Though hard featured and sharp of eye—sharp, too, of tongue sometimes—he was kind of heart, and his people—man, woman, and child—loved him.

Farmer Holt was a wealthy man, and of all his possessions, he rated his daughter, Muriel, the highest.

She was the farmer's "widest and only daughter"—indeed, his only child, and next to his farm, perhaps before it, her father loved her best of all things on earth.

Mrs. Holt had died five years after Muriel's birth. Muriel kept house for her father, and was called "mistress" by the servants, and obeyed as such, pretty nearly as implicitly as was the farmer himself.

It was a revelation and a liberal education to the finer senses to see the young girl at her duties of the breakfast table, and the farmer, as he strode into the small parlor which did duty as a morning room at the farm, paused at the table with his hand in his hand to look at her.

It was a fine spring morning, and the sun poured in through the window and lit up the golden-bronzed braids of Muriel's hair.

"Well, lass, you look as fresh as fields," said her father as he helped himself to a huge slice of the ham, then as bountifully served Muriel, received his cup of coffee with a "thankie, my dear lass," and set to work heartily, as a man should do who has been trudging over thick fields for two hours.

The bird, a pet canary, chirped loudly and cheerfully.

Snip, Muriel's dog, who could do

everything but speak, sat up and began, and occasionally gave vent to a sharp dismal howl.

The fire crackled and the kettle hissed in accord; all was harmony and comfort.

Presently the farmer looked up, and wiping his mouth on an immense silk handkerchief, that would have served as a flag for a matador in a Spanish bull fight, said:

"Lass, I just met young Heatherbridge."

Young Heatherbridge lived at the Howe, and was one of her lovers.

"Yes," said Muriel. "And what has he to say?"

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"You don't say!" exclaimed Muriel. "After remaining empty so long! Poor, deserted old place; how glad it must be!"

"Stuff and nonsense! D'ye think the old house can feel, lass, like a human creature?"

(To be continued.)

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