

# THE BELLE OF RUBYWOOD.

CHAPTER II.

"No, she hasn't," replied Jane smiling at the absurdity of the question, considering that, unless her mistress had been up the wide chimney, Mr. Heatherbridge could not have failed to have seen her had she been in the kitchen.

"Will you tell her I want—that is, I should like a word with her?"

"Yes, I'll tell her," said Jane, and leaving Mr. Heatherbridge standing at the gate, she ran upstairs to acquaint her young mistress of the arrival of lover number two.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Muriel. "I wish they wouldn't come in the morning, when I'm so busy. It's rather nice in the afternoon, because one can sew and work on while they are fidgeting; but in the morning—Oh, Jane! don't you think he'll go if I say I'm very busy?"

"That I'm sure he won't, miss," said Jane, shaking her head. "I know it by the looks of him. Besides, he's just run up against Mr. Vandike, and it's made him angry-like. He do look as obstinate as the old peabird pig."

"There! I'll see him; and do you make this bed. If I don't come up in five minutes, call me—jolly, mind," and, laughing at the obstinacy of the human peabird pig, she ran down the house stairs into the kitchen.

Mr. Heatherbridge came forward with his hand outstretched and a look of undisguised admiration on his still rather flushed face.

"I'm afraid I've called you away—I'm afraid you're busy, Miss Holt."

"Well, I am, rather," she said candidly, but not coldly.

"Oh," he said; then, smitten with lovers' nervousness, hesitated, struck his leg with his walking stick, looked at the ceiling, and then, as if in desperation, at her waiting face again. "I've looked in about the calf," he said.

"The calf?" she repeated. "What calf?" Then, seeing the look of great disappointment, which her forgetfulness had produced, she added quickly: "Oh, I remember! Thank you so much."

"Yes, it's doing well, and looks healthy, and I just came in to say that I've driven it into the yard, and if you will be kind enough to accept it—"

"Oh, thank you! That I will," said Muriel, accepting the gift as freely as it was offered. "How very kind of you! Such a dear, prettily-colored thing, and an Alderney, too! I did so long for an Alderney. How very kind of you! I'll run down and see it directly."

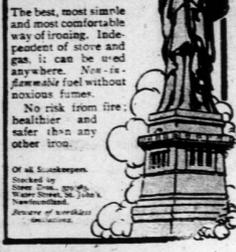
"Now," said Mr. Heatherbridge eagerly.

"Well, no, not this minute," said Muriel, knowing or dreading if she ran down to see the yard with Mr. Heatherbridge to see the gift that she might say "good-by" to all work for the remainder of the morning. "No, not directly. I am at work. You won't mind, will you? Father's gone down to the sheep."

But Mr. Heatherbridge had not come to see father, and he stood staunchly and stared at her.

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"I'd hoped you would come down, Miss Holt, for I wanted to say a word to you."

Muriel leaned against the table, and looked up into his face. As yet she had no idea of what the something was.

"Yes," she said; and then, quickly: "Oh, will you not sit down? It is so rude of me not to have asked you before. Do sit down."

So Mr. Heatherbridge very unwisely sat down, for to commence a proposal on your feet, and then to change your position is to lose the thread of your argument. Besides, you are at a disadvantage sitting in a low chair and looking up pathetically at a girl's bright face above you.

He had come down to the house half inclined to say the momentous something—only half inclined; but Mr. Vandike, and Mr. Vandike's impudence, had tilted the balance, and now he was determined to go through with it and snatch his mistress from every such jackanapes.

"I wanted to say something to you," he commenced. "Indeed"—indeed was a favorite word with Mr. Heatherbridge—"indeed, to ask you a question. Now—I mean Miss Holt—cannot you guess what it is?"

Indeed Muriel could, and she turned first hot, then cold. Was the man actually going to ask her to marry him? With the rapidity of a flash of lightning she asked herself the question: "Do I love him?"

And with the rapidity was she herself answered: "No, you do not."

She stared at him with a pained expression growing on her face, which intensified as he continued, rising now, and so bringing his good-looking face above hers.

"Muriel, I came to ask you the most important question a young fellow can ask a girl. We have known each other for a good many years—no, not that exactly; for of course you're not very old—not old at all, indeed," he stammered. "I mean to say that we have known each other since we were children. We know each other's tempers, and we know each other's—that is—not faults, for you haven't any—"

Here Muriel shook her head sadly, but very decisively.

"And I came to ask you, remembering all this, if you think you could—"

"Miss Muriel! Miss Muriel!" shrieked the obedient Jane.

Muriel blessed the simple hand-maiden from her very heart, and drawing a long breath, put out her hand to stop him.

"Forgive me! Don't say any more. Let me go back. Jane is calling—she wants me, perhaps." It went much against her to tell a direct falsehood like most women; she did not scruple at the whiter kind of deception. "Let me go, please. I—"

"Miss Muriel! Miss Muriel!" shouted the dutiful Jane.

"There, I must go!" said Muriel; and, with a pleading glance of forgiveness, she darted away from him and sped up the staircase.

Mr. Heatherbridge sighed, put on his hat, and, like a sensible young man, walked out.

"Little witch!" he muttered. "I don't know whether she loves me or she doesn't. Thought she didn't at first, but then girls are so coy. Aunt Betsey says they want a lot of wooing; and then she'd have given me the 'no' straight away instead of bolting. Little witch! Oh, I feel all right! She can't make a better a match and I've got the old boy on my side, too. Yet

I wish she'd say yes; then I could come it over that other idiot of a painter. By Samson, when I want her I'll let her understand I want her to give the cold shoulder to such chaps as him. There he is, the idiot, making a study of the trees. Trees and horses and cows on canvas! He'd be a better man if he'd got 'em in his pocket," and, with a sneer quite lost on the artist, who was wrapped up in his work, and whistling the scenery out of countenance, Mr. Heatherbridge trudged past on his way to the Howe.

As for Muriel she sank upon the newly-made bed and gasped for breath.

Alfred Heatherbridge had actually asked her to be his wife—or very nearly!

What was to come of it? How could she say no? and yet she felt that she could not—nay, would not, say yes.

And her father? Though she had never mentioned the subject directly, or by way of hint, still she had a presentiment that a "Yes" would please him and a "No" give him disappointment.

"And yet I can't say 'Yes,' can I Jane?" she sighed.

"What to, miss?" queried Jane, who utterly ignorant of wondering why she should be so beautiful while other folk—she herself, for instance—were so plain.

"To—nothing; there, run away, girl! I'll tidy the room, and—"

Here, as Jane took her departure she broke off and burst into silent tears.

"Tears, idle tears," says Tennyson, and very thoughtfully. No tears are idle; to women they are the channel for the relief of all sorts of vagaries and passionate emotions. Tears are women's best weapons, and in some cases—Constance's, for instance—her greatest charm. Tears are good for fretful children and sulky women, but to men they are more agonizing than the spear thrust of a Roman centurion.

When the tears were over and the flushed cheeks dried, Miss Muriel attended herself properly and put on her hat.

She'd go and see the calf before she sent it back, for of course she'd send it back; she wouldn't throw Mr. Heatherbridge's love back to him and keep his love offering.

Looking marvelously pretty and fresh in her dainty yet well-worn hat and tweed cape, she tripped over the farm court and into the yard.

Yes, there was the calf, and very lovable and acceptable it was. She stroked its neck and kissed its nose, murmured a "good-bye," and then, with a sigh, wandered through the lane of well-stocked barns and water-light outhouses on to the avenue.

The avenue was the pride of Rubywood, and Farmer Holt valued its possession very highly—the more highly for that possession having one flaw.

It was not an exclusive right of way to Rubywood, but served as a high road to the Holme, which lay in the hollow to the left of Farmer Holt's farm.

So long had the Holme been unoccupied that Farmer Holt had grown to look upon the broad, elm-sheltered road as entirely his own, and had almost forgotten that soon another man's carts and wains, cattle and sheep must be driven down it.

Muriel passed into the avenue and looked up and down it.

Mr. Heatherbridge might, be still lingering about, and it behooved her

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to be careful of him. She did not want to fall into the hands of her tormentor. The other swain was lost in his picture and dead to his mistress' near proximity.

Seeing the coast clear, Muriel made her way, with Snip at her heels, to a green lane which ran down to the brook and was a favorite walk of hers.

At the end of it, by standing on the stile, she could see both Rubywood and the Holme; one looking so prosperous and well-to-do, the other so deserted and dilapidated.

At the stile she stood on tiptoe and looked at the two places, and, listening to an unhinged shutter that flapped against the walls of the empty farmhouse, she naturally fell to thinking of it and its new tenant.

"Poor young fellow!" she sighed. "How lonely and miserable he will feel, his mother and father just died, leaving his native land and old friends and coming to such a dreary, uncanny place as that. I wonder—"

She got off the stile as she spoke and broke off suddenly, for, close at her elbow, so close that he made her start, stood a gentleman, young, tall, and grave-looking.

(To be continued.)

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**No More Kissing On These Trains**

Munich, September 26.—The Bavarian railway has placed a ban on kissing on trains, platforms, or the premises of the companies. The decree issued by the railways is due to the innocent behaviour of a man and his wife who boarded a train after a cycling tour.

The woman, who was fatigued, laid her head on her husband's shoulder, and the husband placed his arm around her. The other passengers on the car did not like this, and summoned the conductor. They accused the couple of kissing, and asked the conductor to make them behave themselves.

The husband complained to the authorities of the action of the conductor in interfering with him. He denied the kissing charge, but the officials seem to have assumed that he was guilty, and issued the decree prohibiting kissing on trains or railway property in future.

**Rev. R. B. St. Clair Is Found Guilty.**

Refuses to Give Bond, and is Given One Week to Consider.

Toronto, September 26.—After hearing argument of counsel this morning, Judge Denton found the Rev. R. B. St. Clair, secretary of the Toronto Vigilance Committee, guilty of circulating obscene literature, and allowed him to go on suspended sentence on his agreeing to furnish a bond.

The Rev. Mr. St. Clair declared that if he was guilty of a crime he wished to pay the penalty by a term in prison, and refused to furnish a bond.

He was given a week to consider, and in the meantime is not in custody.

The conviction is the result of a circular issued by the Rev. Mr. St. Clair, in his official capacity, purporting to give a report of a performance in a local burlesque house, and calling on the authorities to use their influence to have such performances banned.

The question fought in court whether the public good was served in the reports publication. The finding of Judge Denton was, in effect, that its publication was not in the best interests of the public.

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**Kidney Pains in the Back**

Mr. Thos. D. Walsh, Picton, N.S., writes:—Two years ago my wife took to her bed after suffering for a long time from kidney pains in the back. She was not able to stand on her feet or even turn herself in bed. The doctor's medicine was no benefit whatever, that we could see. Sometimes her legs would swell considerably. Reading about a woman in similar condition being cured by Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills, we purchased two boxes and when these were used she was able to sit up. With three more boxes she was restored to health and doing her own housework.

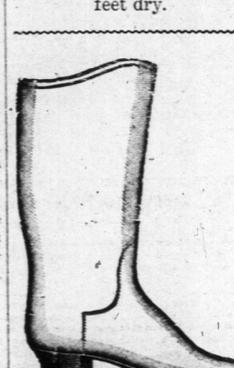
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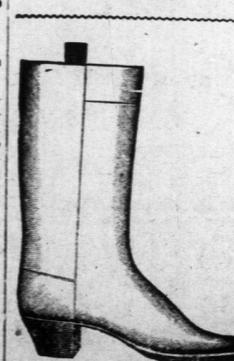


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