

# Beautiful Jean.

IN TWO INSTALMENTS.

## CHAPTER I.

JEAN.

You might have searched through a long summer day, and not have found a prettier spot than Braeside Farm.

The house was of red brick; but the red had that rich mellowness which only Time can give, and moreover, it was half smothered with ivy, clematis, and great Gloire roses.

It was a very, very old house, dating back to the time of the Tudors, Farmer Morton declared, and certainly its appearance well bore out the assertion, for it had great stacks of crooked chimneys, and many gables, and the great hearth place in the kitchen was just such a one as might have belonged to the days of Queen Bess.

The Mortons had held the land from time immemorial.

They had been gentry in the old days, squires who had owned the goodly acres they farmed, but the troublous times preceding the Common-wealth had changed them from squires to plain yeomen, and now, in these practical days, John Morton was only a farmer, though as good blood as any in England flowed through his veins.

The farmhouse looked delightfully cool and pleasant one June day when the farmer entered it, hot and tired from a long walk into town.

Jean, the farmer's niece, sat at a table near the window, picking a great pile of ruddy cherries from their stalks and Jean's face was the very loveliest thing about Braeside Farm.

She looked up from the cherries at the entrance of her uncle and greeted him with a smile.

'You're red, uncle.'

'Ay, lassie, and a bit bothered too! Read that. I called at the post office when I was in the town. It's from Mr. Beverley.'

Jean read the letter slowly.

Thus it ran—

'Dear Mr. Morton.—I have had a pretty sharp attack of illness since I saw you. My doctors insist on my getting away for change of scene and pure country air. Braeside Farm is the only place that I feel I could be at home in. We should not quarrel as to terms, and I promise to give as little trouble as possible. I must tell you, however, that I should like my niece to accompany me. I think you know her. My kindest regards to Miss Jean.'

'Awaiting your reply with some little anxiety. I am yours sincerely,

'WILLIAM BEVERLEY'

'Well, Jean, what do you say?' asked the farmer. 'I don't like refusing the old gentleman, and yet—'

'And yet you don't like the idea of taking lodgers, which it would really amount to,' said Jean, with a grave sweet smile. 'I know just how you feel, uncle. But I think Mr. Beverley will have to come. He has such a true regard for you, and was always so kind. You simply couldn't refuse him when he asks like that.'

'Yes, that's how I feel about it,' said Farmer Morton, unknitting his brows, and looking much reassured by his niece's sympathy.

Mr. William Beverley, a man of easy fortune, who devoted much of his time to art, had years ago visited Braeside Farm, and formed a warm regard for its master.

His home was in London, and, during the last year, a niece, presumably his heiress, had made her home with him.

'Mr. Beverley would be little or no trouble,' remarked the farmer, after a minute or so of deep thought. 'It's the young lady I'm afraid of.'

'Then don't be afraid, uncle. Trust me to manage everything,' said Jean in her calm, decisive manner, and yet with a very bright smile.

'She is a very fine lady, Jean.'

'Is she? Well we must do our best; and I don't doubt we shall be able to please her. What is she like, uncle? I remember you saw her when you went up to town at Christmas.'

'Wonderfully handsome, not haughty at all, but very splendidly dressed, and, I should imagine, very fond of gaiety. It beats me to know how she'll amuse herself at Braeside Farm. Well, I'll answer her letter. Am I to say 'Yes,' Jean?'

'Stay one moment, uncle. There's just one thing we were forgetting.'

'What's that, lassie?'

'Phil. I don't think we ought to say 'Yes' without consulting him. He mightn't like it, you know.'

'And pray what is it Phil mightn't like?'

'He demanded a jovial, pleasant voice; and into the kitchen there strode as fine a specimen of manly beauty as one could reasonably desire to see.'

This was Philip Morton, the farmer's son, a young man of five and twenty, six feet two in height, with his father's clear cut features, and fine, grey blue eyes.

He was to be a doctor, had passed his various examinations with high credit, and was at present spending a summer holiday at Braeside Farm.

'I certainly don't like the idea of Braeside Farm being turned into a lodging house,' said Dr. Phil, when the situation had been explained to him. 'Still less do I like the idea of Jean's having to wait upon any haughty London lady.'

Jean hastened to protest that there would be no need for her to 'wait upon' the visitor.

'Bessie can do everything of that kind,'

she said. 'And they really will cause but little trouble. I imagine Mr. Beverley will prefer to live with us; they will not want rooms of their own.' The only question is will you mind, Phil?'

'That question is easily answered. I don't mind a bit, if you don't. Only, you must be prepared to see me give Miss Beverley a wide berth. I know what fashionable young ladies are, and I must confess I didn't care very greatly for them.'

And thus, simply and naturally, it was settled that Clare Beverley should come to Braeside Farm, none of its inmates dreaming what havoc she would work in their peaceful, happy lives.

## CHAPTER II.

MISS BEVERLEY.

Jean, in a pure white dress, and with her lovely hair arranged even more carefully than usual, was bending over the great strawberry beds, picking the luscious crimson fruit and the fresh green leaves.

Mr. Beverley and his niece were to arrive that afternoon, and the strawberries were for their tea.

Everything else was prepared; and the flowers were gathered for Miss Beverley's room; the tea-table was spread; the tea was ready to be made.

A tall shadow fell across the strawberry beds.

Jean raised herself, and met the laughing eyes of her cousin.

'What time will the company be here, Jean?'

'Uncle started for the station half-an-hour ago. I expect them in about ten minutes.'

'Jeanie, I wish they were coming.'

'Do you, Phil? Well, it's too late for that now. But why?'

'Miss Beverley will be a nuisance—all ways in the way, always expecting a fellow to 'play pretty,' I suppose.'

'And why shouldn't a fellow 'play pretty'?' said Jean, with a pretence at reproof, though her eyes were smiling.

'I could—to you; but I don't like strangers. I'm morally certain this girl is going to turn out a nuisance, Jean. Shield me from her as much as you can.'

'I wonder what she would say if she could hear you, Sir Impertinence?' cried Jean, with a happy little laugh; the next moment she held her hand up warningly. 'They're here, Phil; I hear wheels.'

'Are they? Then I'm off. Time enough for me to see them at the tea-table.'

And away bolted Dr. Phil.

Jean made her way to the big, old-fashioned hall, deliciously cool, and bright with ferns and roses.

Farmer Morton's gig had drawn up in front of the door, and there was alighting from it a very lovely and elegant young woman, gowned in pearl gray, with a pale blue toque resting on fluffy, silken masses of pale golden hair.

Mr. Beverley had already alighted.

He was a tall, thin, aristocratic looking man of nearly seventy, with kind brown eyes and silvery hair and beard.

He greeted Jean with almost affectionate cordiality.

Then he turned to his niece, and said— 'Clare, to know Miss Emerson is one of the pleasures coming to Braeside Farm.'

A little grey-gloved hand was put into Jean's and the sweetest of voices murmured how pleased Miss Beverley was to meet Miss Emerson.

'You will like to go up to your room at once?' said Jean, with the air of simple dignity which sat so well upon her. 'Please let me show you the way.'

'Thank you so much,' murmured Miss Beverley, following Jean up the wide oak staircase, while Farmer Morton took charge of her uncle.

It was a lovely old room Jean had prepared for her guest—a room with casement windows and a southern aspect, commanding a magnificent view of the hills from which the farm took its name.

All within was purity and order, from the white curtained bed to the pin cushion where the pins formed the words 'Welcome to Braeside Farm.'

'How sweet!' said Miss Beverley, sinking into a downy chair, and daintily sniffing at the roses and carnations on the dressing table. 'How perfectly charming! Such a change after London, Miss Emerson.'

Inwardly she was bewailing the absence any full length mirror, and she was wondering how on earth she should manage without one—wondering, too, how she should bear the solitude of this country farmhouse.

'Can I do anything for you?' asked Jean with gentle courtesy.

'Thank you, I think not.'

'Tea is quite ready. I presume you will be down in a few minutes. You will only need to take off your hat and gloves and wash your hands.'

'Oh! indeed, I couldn't come down in this dress. It is quite covered with dust. One simply can't drink tea in one's travelling costume. If you'll excuse me—if you don't mind—I shall ask you to be so good as not to have tea for at least half an hour.'

'Just as you please. It is our wish that you make yourselves quite at home. I will send one of the maids up to you. Perhaps she will be useful, as you intend to dress.'

Jean spoke quietly, and with the most perfect courtesy; but her heart swelled a little with rising anger as she walked out of the room.

It seemed to her that it was only an affectation of fine ladyism which made Miss

Beverley declare it was an impossibility to sit down to tea in her travelling dress.

The roads had not been dusty at all, and it seemed to Jean that in any case a true lady would have hesitated to put back a meal in any house at which she was a guest.

Jean had her own notions as to what the conduct of a lady should be, and it is to be feared Miss Beverley did not come up to them.

The half hour asked for lengthened into fully three quarters.

Mr. Beverley's brow knitted its frown as though in displeasure, and even good natured Farmer Morton was beginning to feel impatient.

The clock had struck six before Miss Beverley made her appearance; but then it must be admitted she looked charming enough to almost compensate for the delay.

She was dressed in white—billowy white muslin, with foamy laces; a belt, with a gold clasp in the shape of a butterfly with turquoise for eyes, encircled her waist, and two or three of Jean's lovely Malmesbury carnations nestled at her bosom.

She looked all airiness and grace, a quite dazzling vision of feminine loveliness.

At least, so thought Dr. Phil as he strode into the room, just in time to be introduced.

A very dainty loveliness was that of Clare Beverley, a loveliness of the kind which wins its way to masculine hearts with surprising swiftness.

Her skin was delicately rosy, like the lining of a sea shell; her eyes were of a watching violet; her mouth—though a fastidious critic might have found fault with it as too small—was like a half-blown crimson rose.

She looked at Phil with the sweetest, most radiant smile, and with a charming little air of surprise.

She certainly had not expected to find anything so congenial to her tastes at Braeside Farm as this young and handsome doctor.

Jean, of course, presided at the tea-table, and Clare Beverley was forced to admit that the appointments of the table were such as would not have shamed the finest lady in the land.

The damask cloth was of satin smoothness, and the driven snow could not have excelled its whiteness; the teapot and cream jug, and sugar basin were of solid silver of Queen Anne's time.

The trailing wreaths of white and purple convolvuli were the very prettiest decorations that could have been devised.

As for the viands—well, one must go to a farm house such as that of Braeside to find the like.

Such glorious dewy strawberries, such thick yellow cream, such golden honey, made by heather fed bees, such plump, juicy fowls, such bread and butter, such tongue and ham.

After tea Clare floated to the piano, and of course Dr. Phil had to be her attendant cavalier—had to stand beside her and turn the music over, and, as he parsed it, 'play pretty' generally.

She was a brilliant player, and, as she enjoyed displaying her accomplishments, there is no telling how long the exhibitions might have lasted had not Mr. Beverley disturbed it by asking for a song.

'Clare sings but little,' he remarked; 'but I think I remember that Miss Jean has a very fine voice. Will you oblige us, my dear?'

Jean obeyed at once, with her usual simple grace.

She sang 'Robin Adair,' and her singing of it was quite enough to disgust Miss Beverley with musical performances for the remainder of the evening.

A voice so rich, so pure, she had rarely heard—never, certainly, off the operatic stage.

Farmer Morton was proud of his niece's voice, and had had it carefully trained, hence Miss Beverley could find no fault with it, ardently as she longed to do so.

The moment the song was concluded she rose from the piano, praising the singing, indeed, with affected enthusiasm, but tactfully preventing Jean from being asked for more.

Someone proposed a walk in the garden. There was a lovely moon, and the scent of new mown hay filled the air.

It was so much pleasanter to be out of doors on such a night, even though all the windows were thrown wide open.

Miss Beverley had secretly intended to monopolise Dr. Phil; but somehow or other, she found herself to her chagrin, between her uncle and the farmer, and, in a distant shabby, she could see Phil's tall figure beside Jean's white gown.

Jean had felt a little dispirited almost without knowing why, and she had stolen away to the shrubbery to indulge her sad thoughts in solitude.

Her heart leapt with sudden trembling joy when she heard a well-known step behind her, and an equally well known voice whispering in her ear—

'Why, Jeanie, are you here, dear? I've been hunting everywhere for you.'

He drew her arm through his, and pressed it tenderly.

But was it the mere affectionate tenderness of a cousin who has learned to feel as a brother towards a girl who has lived beneath his father's roof for years, or was it the deepest tenderness of all?

That was what Jean wanted to know; that was what caused her heart to palpitate with delicious hopes, made all the sweeter by an occasional doubt or fear.

'Well, Jean, and what do you think of Miss Beverley?' asked Phil, with the freedom of perfect sympathy and confidence.

'She is very pretty—beautiful almost,' said honest Jean; 'but—but I'm afraid I shall not like her. I think she is selfish and not quite true.'

'By Jove! I believe you're right, Jeanie. She somehow gave me that impression, too, in spite of her wonderful prettiness—and she is pretty I must admit that. But do you know, I don't like her way with you at all; it's a deuced sight too patronising. I can't bear to see anyone showing that sort of manner to my Jean.'

'My Jean' was uttered in the softest, most caressing of voices, and at the same time Phil's arm was stealing round the girl's lissom waist.

Surely this was not mere brotherly affection; surely it was that some hing deeper, which Jean longed for with every fibre of her being.

Another moment, and the blissful hope would have become certainty.

His arm was tightening round her waist; he was drawing her so near to him that his moustached lip, as he bent to whisper in her ear, almost touched her cheek.

Another moment and he would have said—

'Jean, I love you! Will you be my Jean, in very truth! Will you be my wife? But it was not to be.'

The Fates had written something far different from that, and they had chosen Clare Beverley as the instrument which should carry out their purpose.

Just at that critical moment a white hand pushed aside the branches, and a gay voice said—

'Oh! Miss Jean, are you here? and Dr. Morton, too! I have had such a hunt for you! My uncle has sent me. He wants you to give him another song.'

Dr. Phil muttered a 'Confound it!' beneath his breath.

Jean's cheeks—ay, and her lips, too—turned a little pale beneath the greatness of her disappointment; but she repressed all other signs, and walked quietly towards the house, seeing clearly that Miss Beverley did not intend to relieve them of her presence.

That declaration of love, for which her heart so longed, must wait.

Ah! could she have dreamed for how long!

That night Clare Beverley sat up late in her room to write to her very dearest friend and this is a part of what she said—

'I think I told you, Lillian, that I was going to a country farmhouse with uncle. Imagine me in such a place! Isn't it quite too dreadful? I nearly screamed with horror when uncle first proposed it. However, there was no escape. Rich uncles must have their whims humoured, be they never so unreasonable.'

'Well, I am here, and I must tell you I am agreeably disappointed. The house itself is nice—one of those handsome old farmhouses which have been manors in bygone days. Our host's name is Morton, and uncle declares he has some of the best blood in England in his veins.'

However, that is of little consequence, for he is nothing better than a farmer now. He is a widower, and an orphan niece acts as his housekeeper. Her name is Jean. I don't like her. She is cold and unapproachable, and, if it were not ridiculous, considering her position, I should be inclined to say she is proud.

'She is handsome, in a certain way, and I darestay would be thought quite beautiful if only she knew how to dress. But of course she doesn't. How should she, indeed?'

'But now I must tell you there is one person here who promises to keep from dying of ennui. This is the farmer's son. A farmer's son! I think I hear you saying, with a turn-up of your impertinent little nose. 'Fancy Clare Beverley descending to a flirtation with such a thing as that?'

'But let me tell you, my dear, that Mr. Philip Morton is no ordinary farmer's son. In the first place, he has had a university education, and is at all points a gentleman. Then he is really splendidly handsome. I wish you could see him. Such a figure! Such a nice mouth! Such, pleasant handsome eyes! I know quite well you would fall in love with her.'

'Just at present he has no eyes for poor me, being in love with Miss Jean. I verily believe I came upon them tonight just as he was on the point of making her an offer. Wouldn't she be wild! Farmer Morton tells uncle nothing is absolutely settled yet, but he believes 'the boy is fond of the girl'—that is how he phrases it—and that nothing will make him happier than to see them man and wife.'

'However, all that must be postponed until after I am gone, for I intend 'the boy' to fall in love with me. I know my own powers, and mean to use them.'

'It will be such fun to make Miss Jean jealous. She looks calm and dignified, just as though nothing on earth could move her. I owe her a grudge or two already. I don't know why on earth the creature should think so much of herself. Farmer Morton says her father was a gentleman, but she hasn't a penny of fortune. It will take her pride down a little to find she can't keep her lover. She's welcome to him when I've done with him—not before.'

'Good-bye, dear Lillian. I shall let you know how my little flirtation progresses. Wish me good luck in it!'

'Yours forever and a day,

'CLARE BEVERLEY.'

## CHAPTER III.

THE BEGINNING OF THE FLIRTATION.

The next morning, Dr. Phil was on the lawn, smoking an early cigar, and refreshing himself further with an occasional sniff at the rose which bloomed in such glorious abundance at Braeside Farm.

Through the open windows of the breakfast room he could see Jean moving about

in her white dress.

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with her graceful unhurried step, dusting the ornaments and arranging great bunches of roses in antique china bowls.

She looked sweetly fair in her pale-blue cotton gown, which in spite of Clare Beverley's sneer as to her not knowing how to dress, set on her nobly rounded figure with an air of grace which many a fashionable beauty might have tried in vain to rival.

Phil glanced at her from time to time in a half-hesitating manner.

Should he go in and say to her what he had been meaning to say last night?

The opportunity was not a very good one; the servant might at any moment appear to lay the breakfast.

Perhaps he had better wait a little longer.

He had quite made up his mind to ask Jean to be his wife, and he was surprised to find how nervous and embarrassed he was now that the time for asking seemed to have really come.

He wondered whether Jean did care for him with anything more than a cousinly affection.

He could not be sure, he felt almost afraid to hope.

Jean was so calm and dignified, so little wont to show her own deeper feelings lightly.

He felt abashed at the thought of approaching her as a lover.

He couldn't bear the idea of making him self ridiculous in her eyes, those clear deep hazel eyes, which seemed to have such a wonderful power of looking one through and through.

'I know I'm not half good enough for her,' he thought, with true lover like humility. 'She's fit to be a duchess with her cleverness, and her beauty, and that grand sweet way of hers. But if she could care for me—and dad seems to think she might—I believe I could make her happy. I'd try my level best, anyhow, and nobody could love her better—dear darling Jean!'

Thus far he had arrived in his musing when a radiant vision passed out of the hall door, and met his dazzled gaze.

Clare Beverley, in a morning dress of white and rose color, all soft muslin, and fluttering ribbons and flimsy laces.

It was probably the first 'Paris mode' dress that had ever aired itself at Braeside Farm, and when seen in conjunction with a dainty, sylph like form, radiant blue eyes, smiling lips, exquisite complexion, and shimmering golden hair, it might well have a dazzling effect on a young man as unopprobriated as was Philip Morton.

He had seen her know what fashionable young ladies were, but it the truth must be told, his knowledge of them was largely confined to the parks and the Row; actual contact with one of the genus was an experience that had yet to come.

'Oh, Doctor Morton, you are an early riser like myself! Please don't move, I wouldn't disturb you for the world, you look so comfortable. What a lovely morning!'

Of course Phil rose from his wicker chair raising his straw hat, and replying to Miss Beverley's gushing enthusiasm with all courtesy.

'I do believe they are making hay quite close to us,' she exclaimed. 'Yes, I declare they are. Oh, I must go and see them; there's nothing on earth I love so much.'

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