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# **Bessie's Fortune A Novel**

Mary Jane Holmes

# Imprint

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**I DEDICATE THIS STORY OF BESSIE,  
WHICH WILL REMIND HIM OF A HAPPY  
YEAR IN EUROPE.**



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## BESSIE'S FORTUNE.

### PART I.

#### CHAPTER I.

##### THE JERROLDS OF BOSTON.

Mrs. Geraldine Jerrold, of Boston, had in her girlhood been Miss Geraldine Grey, of Allington, one of those quiet, pretty little towns which so thickly dot the hills and valleys Of New England. Her father, who died before her marriage, had been a sea-captain, and a man of great wealth, and was looked upon as a kind of autocrat, whose opinion was a law and whose friendship was an honor. When a young lady, Miss Geraldine had chafed at the stupid town and the stupider people, as she designated the citizens of Allington, and had only been happy when the house at Grey's Park was full of guests after the manner of English houses, where hospitality is dispensed on a larger scale than is common in America. She had been abroad, and had spent some weeks in Derbyshire at the Peacock Inn, close to the park of Chatsworth, which she admired so much that on her return to Allington she never rested until the five acres of land, in the midst of which her father's house stood, were improved and fitted up as nearly as possible like the beautiful grounds across the sea. With good taste and plenty of money, she succeeded beyond her most sanguine hopes, and Grey's Park was the pride of the town, and the wonder of the entire county. A kind of show place it became, and Miss Geraldine was never happier or prouder than when strangers were going over the grounds or through the house, which was filled with rare pictures and choice statuary gathered from all parts of the world, for Captain Grey had brought something curious and costly from every port at which his vessel touched, so that the house was like a museum, or, as Miss Geraldine fancied, like the palaces and castles in Europe, which are shown to strangers in the absence of the family.

At the age of twenty-two, Miss Geraldine had married Burton Jerrold, a young man from one of the leading banks in Boston, and whose father, Peter Jerrold, had, for years, lived on a small farm a

mile or more from the town of Allington. So far as Geraldine knew, the Jerrold blood was as good as the Grey's, even if old Peter did live a hermit life and wear a drab overcoat which must have dated back more years than she could remember. No one had ever breathed a word of censure against the peculiar man, who was never known to smile, and who seldom spoke except he was spoken to, and who, with his long white hair falling around his thin face, looked like some old picture of a saint, when on Sunday he sat in his accustomed pew by the door, and like the publican, seemed almost to smite upon his breast as he confessed himself to be a miserable sinner.

Had Burton Jerrold remained at home and been content to till the barren soil of his father's rocky farm, not his handsome face, or polished manners, or adoration of herself as the queen of queens, could have won a second thought from Geraldine, for she hated farmers, who smelled of the barn and wore cowhide boots, and would sooner have died than been a farmer's wife. But Burton had never tilled the soil, nor worn cowhide boots nor smelled of the barn, for when he was a mere boy, his mother died, and an old aunt, who lived in Boston, took him for her own, and gave him all the advantages of a city education until he was old enough to enter one of the principal banks as a clerk; then she died and left him all her fortune, except a thousand dollars which she gave to his sister Hannah, who still lived at home upon the farm, and was almost as silent and peculiar as the father himself.

"Marry one of the Grey girls if you can," the aunt had said to her nephew upon her death bed. "It is a good family, and blood is worth more than money; it goes further toward securing you a good position in Boston society. The Jerrold blood is good, for aught I know, though not equal to that of the Greys. Your father is greatly respected in Allington, where he is known, but he is a codger of the strictest type, and clings to everything old-fashioned and *outré*. He has resisted all my efforts to have him change the house into something more modern, even when, for the sake of your mother, I offered to do it at my own expense. Especially was I anxious to tear down that projection which he calls a lean-to, but when I suggested it to him, and said I would bring a carpenter at once, he flew into such a passion as fairly frightened me. 'The lean-to should not be touched for a

million of dollars; he preferred it as it was,' he said; so I let him alone. He is a strange man, and—and—Burton, I may be mistaken, but I have thought there was something he was hiding. Else, why does he never smile, or talk, or look you straight in the face? And why is he always brooding, with his head bent down and his hands clenched together? Yes, there *is* something hidden, and Hannah knows it, and this it is which turned her hair grey so early, and has made her as queer and reticent as your father. There is a secret between them, but do not try to discover it. There may be disgrace of some kind which would affect your whole life, so let it alone. Make good use of what I leave you, and marry one of the Greys. Lucy is the sweeter and the more amiable, but Geraldine is more ambitious and will help you to reach the top."

This was the last conversation Mrs. Wetherby ever held with her nephew, for in two days more she was dead, and Burton buried her in Mt. Auburn, and went back to the house which was now his, conscious of three distinct ideas which even during the funeral had recurred to him constantly. First, that he was the owner of a large house and twenty thousand dollars; second, that he must marry one of the Greys, if possible; and third, that there was some secret between his father and his sister Hannah; something which had made them what they were; something which had given his father the name of the half-crazy hermit, and to his sister that of the recluse; something which he must never try to unearth, lest it bring disquiet and disgrace.

That last word had an ugly sound to Burton Jerrold, who was more ambitious even than his aunt, more anxious that people in high positions should think well of him, and he shivered as he repeated it to himself, while all sorts of fancies flitted through his brain.

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed at last, as he arose, and, walking to the window, looked out upon the common, where groups of children were playing. "There is nothing hidden. Why should there be? My father has never stolen, or forged, or embezzled, or set any one's house on fire. They esteem him a saint in Allington, and I know he reads his Bible all the time when he is not praying, and once he was on his knees in his bedroom a whole hour, for I timed him, and

thought he *must* be crazy. Of course so good a man can have nothing concealed, and yet—"

Here Burton shivered again, and continued: "And yet, I always seem to be in a nightmare when I am at the old hut, and once I told Hannah I believed the house was haunted, for I heard strange sounds at night, soft footsteps, and moans, and whisperings, and the old dog Rover howled so dismally, that he kept me awake, and made me nervous and wretched, I don't remember what Hannah said, except that she made light of my fears, and told me that she would keep Rover in her room at night on the floor by her bed, which she did ever after when I was at home. No, there is nothing, but I may as well sound Hannah a little, and will go to her at once."

When Mrs. Wetherby died, her nephew sent a message to his father and sister, announcing her death, and the time of the funeral. He felt it his duty to do so much, but he did not say to them, "Come, I expect you." In fact, away down in his heart, there was a hope that they would not come. His father was well enough in Allington, where he was known; but, what a figure he would cut in Boston, in his old drab surtout and white hat, which he had worn since Burton could remember. Hannah was different, and must have been pretty in her early girlhood. Indeed, she was pretty now, and no one could look into her pale, sad face, and soft dark eyes, or listen to her low, sweet voice, without being attracted to her and knowing instinctively that, in spite of her plain Quakerish dress, she was a lady in the true sense of the word. So, when she came alone to pay the last token of respect to the aunt who had never been very gracious to her, Burton felt relieved, though he wished that her bonnet was a little more fashionable, and suggested her buying a new one, which he would pay for. But Hannah said "no," very quietly and firmly, and that was the end of it. The old style bonnet was worn as well as the old style cloak, and Burton felt keenly the difference between her personal appearance and his own. He, the Boston dandy, with every article of dress as faultless as the best tailor could make it, and she, the plain countrywoman, with no attempt at style or fashion, with nothing but her own sterling worth to commend her, and this was far more priceless than all the wealth of the Indies. Hannah Jerrold had been tried in the fire, and had come out purified and almost Christlike in her sweet gentleness and purity of soul. She

knew her brother was ashamed of her—whether designedly or not, he always made her feel it—but she had felt it her duty to attend her aunt's funeral, even though it stirred anew all the bitterness of her joyless life.

And now the funeral was over, and she was going home that very afternoon—to the gloomy house among the rocks, where she had grown old, and her hair gray long before her time—going back to the burden which pressed so heavily upon her, and from which she shrank as she had never done before. Not that she wished to stay in that grand house, where she was so sadly out of place, but she wanted to go somewhere, anywhere, so that she escaped from the one spot so horrible to her. She was thinking of all this and standing with her face to the window, when her brother entered the room and began, abruptly:

"I say, Hannah, I want to ask you something. Just before Aunt Wetherby died, she had a long talk with me on various matters, and among other things she said she believed there was something troubling you and father, some secret you were hiding from me and the world. Is it so? Do you know anything which I do not?"

"Yes, many things."

The voice which gave this reply was not like Hannah's voice, but was hard and sharp, and sounded as if a great ways off, and Burton could see how violently his sister was agitated, even though she stood with her back to him. Suddenly he remembered that his aunt had also said: "If there is a secret, never seek to discover it, lest it should bring disgrace." And here he was, trying to find it out almost before she was cold. A great fear took possession of Burton then, for he was the veriest moral coward in the world, and before Hannah could say another word, he continued:

"Yes, Aunt Wetherby was right. There is something; there has always been something; but don't tell me, please, I'd rather not know."

He spoke very gently for him, for somehow, there had been awakened within him a great pity for his sister, and by some sudden intuition he seemed to understand all her loneliness and pain. If there had been a wrongdoing it was not her fault; and as she still

stood with her back to him, and did not speak, he went up to her, and laying his hand upon her shoulder, said to her:

"I regret that I asked a question which has so agitated you, and, believe me, I am sorry for you, for whatever it is, you are innocent."

Then she turned toward him with a face as white as ashes and a look of terror in her large black eyes, before which he quailed. Never in his life, since he was a little child, had he seen her cry, but now, after regarding him fixedly a moment, she broke into such a wild fit of sobbing that he became alarmed, and passing his arm around her, lead her to a seat and made her lean her head upon him, while he smoothed her heavy hair, which was more than half gray, and she was only three years his senior.

At last she grew calm, and rising up, said to him:

"Excuse me, I am not often so upset—I have not cried in years—not since Rover died," here her voice trembled again, but she went on quite steadily. "He was all the companion I had, you know, and he was so faithful, so true. Oh, it almost broke my heart when he died and left me there alone!"

There was a world of pathos in her voice, as she uttered the last two words, "There alone," and it flashed upon Burton that there was more meaning in them than was at first indicated; that to live there alone was something from which his sister recoiled. Standing before her, with his hand still upon her head, he remembered, that she had not always been as she was now, so quiet and impassive, with no smile upon her face, no joy in her dark eyes. As a young girl, in the days when he, too, lived at home, and slept under the rafters in the low-roofed house, she had been full of life and frolic, and played with him all day long. She was very pretty then, and her checks, now so colorless, were red as the damask roses which grew by the kitchen door, while her wavy hair was brown, like the chestnuts they used to gather from the trees, in the rocky pasture land. It was wavy still, and soft and luxuriant, but it was iron grey, and she wore it plain, in a knot at the back of her head, and only a few short hairs, which would curl about her forehead in spite of her, softened the severity of her face. Just when the change began in his sister. Burton could not remember, for, on the rare occasions when he visited his home he had not been a close observer, and had only

been conscious of a desire to shorten his stay as much as possible, and return to his aunt's house, which was much more to his taste. He should die if he had to live in that lonely spot, he thought, and in his newly awakened pity for his sister, he said to her, impulsively:

"Don't go back there to stay. Live with me. I am all alone, and must have some one to keep my house. Von and I can get on nicely together."

He made no mention of his father, and he did not half mean what he said to his sister, and had she accepted his offer he would have regretted that it had ever been made. But she did not accept it, and she answered him at once:

"No, Burton, so long as father lives I must stay with him, and you will be happier without than with me. We are not at all alike. But I thank you for asking me all the same, and now it is time for me to go, if I take the four o'clock train. Father will be expecting me."

Burton went with her to the train, and saw her into the car, and bought her *Harper's Monthly*, and bade her good-by, and then, in passing out, met and lifted his hat to the Misses Grey, Lucy and Geraldine, who had been visiting in Boston, and were returning to Allington.

This encounter drove his sister from his mind, and made him think of his aunt's injunction to marry one of the Greys. Lucy was the prettier and gentler of the two, the one whom everybody loved, and who would make him the better wife. Probably, too, she would be more easily won than the haughty Geraldine, who had not many friends. And so, before he reached his house on Beacon street, he had planned a matrimonial campaign and carried it to a successful issue, and made sweet Lucy Grey the mistress of his home.

It is not our purpose to enter into the details of Burton's wooing. Suffice it to say, that it was unsuccessful, for Lucy said "No," very promptly, and then he tried the proud Geraldine, who listened to his suit, and, after a little, accepted him, quite as much to his surprise as to that of her acquaintances, who knew her ambitious nature.

"Anything to get away from stupid Allington," she said to her sister Lucy, who she never suspected had been Burton's first choice. "I hate the country, and I like Boston, and like Mr. Jerrold well enough. He is good-looking, and well-mannered, and has a house and twenty thousand dollars, a good position in the bank, and no bad habits. Of course, I would rather that his father and sister were not such oddities: but I am not marrying them, and shall take good care to keep them in their places, which places are not in Boston."

And so the two were married, Burton Jerrold and Geraldine Grey, and there was a grand wedding, at Grey's Park, and the supper was served on the lawn, where there was a dance, and music, and fire-works in the evening; and Sam Lawton, a half-witted fellow, went up in a balloon, and came down on a pile of rocks on the Jerrold farm, and broke his leg; and people were there from Boston, and Worcester, and Springfield, and New York, but very few from Allington, for the reason that very few were bidden. Could Lucy have had her way, the whole town would have been invited; but Geraldine overruled her, and made herself life-long enemies of the people who had known her from childhood. Peter Jerrold staid at home, just as Burton hoped he would, but Hannah was present, in a new gray silk, with some old lace, and a bit of scarlet ribbon at her throat, and her hair arranged somewhat after the fashion of the times. This was the suggestion of Lucy Grey, who had more influence over Hannah Jerrold than any one else in the world, and when she advised the new silk, and the old lace, and the scarlet ribbon, Hannah assented readily, and looked so youthful and pretty, in spite of her thirty years, that the Rev. Mr. Sanford, who was a bachelor, and had preached in Allington for several years, paid her marked attention, helping her to ices, and walking with her for half an hour on the long terrace in a corner of the park.

There was a trip to Saratoga, and Newport, and the Catskills, and then, early in September, Burton brought his bride to the house on Beacon street, which Geraldine at once remodeled and fitted up in a style worthy of her means, and of the position she meant her husband to occupy. He was a growing man, and from being clerk in a bank, soon came to be cashier, and then president, and money and friends poured in upon him, and Geraldine's drawing-rooms were filled with the elite of the city. The fashionables, the scholars, the

artists, and musicians, and whoever was in any degree famous, met with favor from Mrs. Geraldine, who liked nothing better than to fill her house with such people, and fancy herself a second Madame De Stael, in her character as hostess. All this was very pleasing to Burton, who, having recovered from any sentimental feeling he might have entertained for Lucy, blessed the good fortune which gave him Geraldine instead. He never asked himself if he loved her; he only knew that he admired, and revered, and worshiped her as a woman of genius and tact; that what she thought, he thought; what she wished, he wished; and what she did he was bound to say was right, and make others think so too. There had been a condescension on her part when she married him, and she never let him forget it; while he, too, mentally acknowledged it, and felt that, for it, he owed her perfect allegiance, from which he never swerved.

## CHAPTER II.

### GREY JERROLD.

Just a year after the grand wedding at Grey's Park, there was born to Burton and Geraldine a little boy, so small and frail and puny, that much solicitude would have been felt for him had there not been a greater anxiety for the young mother, who went so far down toward the river of death that every other thought was lost in the great fear for her. Then the two sisters, Hannah and Lucy, came, the latter giving all her time to Geraldine, and the former devoting herself to the feeble little child, whose constant wail so disturbed the mother that she begged them to take it away where she could not hear it cry, it made her so nervous.

Geraldine did not like children, and she seemed to care so little for her baby that Hannah, who had loved it with her whole soul the moment she took it in her arms and felt its soft cheek against her own, said to her brother one day:

"I must go home to-morrow, but let me take baby with me. His crying disturbs your wife, who hears him however far he may be from her room. He is a weak little thing, but I will take the best of care of him, and bring him back a healthy boy."

Burton saw no objection to the plan, and readily gave his consent, provided his wife was willing.

Although out of danger, Geraldine was still too sick to care for her baby, and so it went with Hannah to the old home among the rocks, where it grew round and plump, and pretty, and filled the house with the music of its cooing and its laughter, and learned to stretch its fat hands toward the old grandfather, who never took it in his arms, or laid his hands upon it. But Hannah once saw him kneeling by the cradle where the child was sleeping, and heard him whisper through his tears:

"God bless you, my darling boy, and may you never know what it is to sin as I have sinned, until I am not worthy to touch you with my finger. Oh, God forgive and make me clean as this little child."

Then Hannah knew why her father kept aloof from his grandson, and pitied him more than she had done before.

It was the first of October before Geraldine came up to Allington to claim her boy, of whom she really knew nothing.

Only once since her marriage had she been to the farm-house, and then she had driven to the door in her handsome carriage with the high-stepping bays, and had held up her rich silk dress as she passed through the kitchen into the "best room," around which she glanced a little contemptuously.

"Not as well furnished as my cook's room," she thought, but she tried to be gracious, and said how clean every thing was, and asked Hannah if she did not get very tired doing her own work, and praised the dahlias growing by the south door, and ate a few plums, and drank some water, which she said was so cold that it made her think of the famous well at Carisbrooke Castle on the Isle of Wight.

"Your well must be very deep. Where is it?" she asked, not because she cared, but because she must say something.

On being told it was in the woodshed she started for it, and mistaking the door, was walking into a bedroom, when she was seized roughly by her father-in-law, whose face was white as ashes, and whose voice shook, as he said:

"Not in there; this is the way."