

AN EPISODE

BY ARNOLD GOLDSWORTHY



JANE lived with the Megsons. Her parents had died when she herself was 16, and Mrs. Megson, good, simple soul, having no children of her own, had reared the child under her wing, with the understanding that as long as Jane behaved herself and did her share of the day's work she could consider herself at home.

It was not to be denied that Jane was a disappointment to her benefactors. The girl was willing enough and good-hearted enough. But she could never be brought to see the desirability of presenting a neat appearance—which was a pity, for she was old enough to know better. Her hair was old-fashioned, and she had a certain amount of freckles on her nose, which she merely attacked the trouble fitfully with a dry sponge. Her hair was old-fashioned, and she had a certain amount of freckles on her nose, which she merely attacked the trouble fitfully with a dry sponge.

Her hair, which properly cared for, might have been made attractive, was merely obscured by an unsympathetic tumble to her head with the least number of hairpins necessary for temporary security; and as she shuffled across the room in her down-at-heel shoes the position of a hairpin once or twice would express the hope that she looked tidier now. As the net result of her well-meant efforts had been merely to make confusion worse confounded, Mrs. Megson gave her up as hopeless and changed the subject.

On this particular evening Mr. Megson came in rather more hurriedly than usual, and called for "Mary" before he was inside the house. He had met Mr. Wilkins, the curate, who wanted to know if he could have his washing home a day earlier than usual.

"Well, it's all ready to be put into the basket," replied Mrs. Megson, "but I ain't goin' to say as it's properly aired."

"Jane'll tell 'em that when she leaves it," commented Mr. Megson, as he sat down to supper, but it was clear from this hint that she would be expected to take the curate's washing home first, and, as soon as everything had been certified in order, she picked up the basket and staggered out with it. The load was heavy, but Jane was strong, and, with an occasional rest along the road, it would cause her no inconvenience.

At the bottom of the lane leading to the curate's house a sturdy-looking man of about thirty years, and with a bag of tools on his shoulder, stood and watched Jane as she panted along with her loaded basket held awkwardly in front of her by the handles. He was a strong fellow, as untidy in appearance as Jane herself. As she staggered past him he caught her, and smiling grimly, sang out by way of greeting:

"Hallo!" replied Jane, tempted into stopping for a moment by the prospect of being able to entertain one who was to all appearances her social equal.

"Up to the vicarage." "Humph!" said the man as he took the nearest handle, and, having ascertained that Jane was holding her own and firmly, started off. "I know the vicarage. No class up there. Engages me last week to plant some potatoes for 'im. I'd got one row done, an' 'e comes out and see 'em. 'E says, 'You've got 'em on 'y planted 'em six inches apart. I always plants mine ten inches apart.' 'E says, 'Well, I see, 'that's where we differ, cause they didn't ought to be planted no more'n six inches apart. 'You got to alter 'em, 'e says. 'Nothink of 'y kind, 'e says."

"We only plants ours six inches apart," said Jane, displaying a sympathetic interest in the adventure.

"So does everybody what's got sense," agreed the man. "But the parson wouldn't give in. 'If you ain't goin' to do as you're told, 'e says, 'you can go. 'So I see, 'Well, if I ain't told 'em any common sense, I see, 'it ain't likely as 'e's goin' to do it. 'I don't want no back answers from 'y, 'e says. 'It's my belief, 'e says, 'you're one of these loafin' coddlers that won't work properly, not if you got the chance. 'Hoi! 'I see, steppin' up to 'im, 'say that again, 'e says. 'E just offered me a shillin' for what 'I'd done and told me to clear out. 'I told 'em 'e could keep 'e money, though, as it 'appens, 'I've wanted it, 'e says. 'I've got such a quick temper, and I'm up in a minute."

"Tain't no good," said Jane, philosophically.

"That's right, my gal, it ain't; but afterwards, 'I think of these things till after dark. An' now I'm lookin' out for another job. 'See?"

"What's your work?" asked Jane a little hesitatingly, as if she feared such a question invited an unwarrantable inquisitiveness.

"Aer' said the man. "Oh! I can turn my 'and to 'most anything. I can do a bit of gardenin' and a bit of carpenterin'—make a cabin for an ole gent that died last week—neat bit of work. You could 'ave at your dinner of it."

Jane spluttered a little, as if the merits of a coffin that was readily convertible into a dinner-table failed to appeal to her sense of the aesthetic. By this time they had arrived at the vicarage. Having delivered the washing, she returned to the lane and found herself feeling quite pleased to notice that her friend was waiting for her.

"'ere you 'ungry?' were the first words with which she greeted him, as the result of reflections that she had made on the vicarage doorstep.

"You're 'ungry," replied Jane, surprised a little at her own daring in presuming to contradict him so flatly.

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recoiled, so that the result was a substantial sandwich, she returned to the garden gate. "You've got to take this," she said in a tone of firmness which surprised even herself. The man blinked his eyes a moment and drew away hastily. Jane at once deposited the sandwich on the gate post and stepped back.

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beyond question, was naturally, a little staggering. He pushed the barrow, along vigorously for a minute or two, so that Jane, unaccustomed to such a rapid pace, was almost obliged to run in order to keep up with him. All at once he stopped short.

"Jane, my gal," he said. "Look 'ere, and I ain't 'all had when they leaves me alone. 'Supposin' me as you was to get married?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Jane. For days past she had been nursing up a vague idea that a proposal of marriage must be the necessary outcome of this strange friendship, but now that it had come with such shocking precipitancy she found herself almost disposed to resent it.

The notion that had recently come to her that she was of importance to somebody at least had given rise to dreams of the future, and the dreams had led her to frame an ideal of her own; she had not, however, been able to persist, and she dismissed as improbable the idea that he could have forsaken her for a fault that was equally apparent in himself.

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"Then you've lost your job?" gasped Jane. "Don't you bother about that, my gal," said Bob. "That'll be all right. I'll soon find another. You'll see. But I ain't goin' to 'ave people talkin' to me like that—see? Nobody couldn't stand it."

Jane sighed, and the rest of the walk home was accomplished in silence. Bob welcomed her graciously by the Megsons, took his seat at the dinner table, and while Mrs. Megson and Jane were arranging the preliminaries he conversed with Mr. Megson.

He introduced himself as one of the best workmen in the country, who had been a little unfortunate owing to a constitutional inability to tolerate injustice and oppression. He added, however, that under the softening influence of Jane's encouragement he was becoming more docile, and expected in a year's time to be a prosperous man, living in his own house, with possibly some adjacent property that would yield a useful additional income.

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short laugh. "But it don't follow that she's untidy, for all that." "Why don't you be quiet, Bob?" said Jane, appealingly.

"That's right," said Bob, throwing down his knife and fork, which he grasped in pleasurable anticipation "now you turn again. 'Go on."

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Within a Poison Drop of Death

ON A WINTER afternoon, while I was lecturing to a class of 300 students at the Hahnemann Medical college of Chicago," says a writer in the Chicago Times, "I used the experimental color reaction—failed.

"The solutions were on the table in unlabeled, tall cylindrical jars. I depended upon my memory and air arrangement upon the table to inform me of the nature of the various solutions, which were all colorless when unmixed. The experiment failed, and concluding that the potassium cyanide solution had been misplaced, in an undertone I reported my assistant to procure some sticks of the chemical from the laboratory, make a solution quickly and bring it to me.

"In his haste the assistant added some sticks of potassium cyanide instead of the proper chemical. The cyanide resembles the other in form, color and appearance. But the cyanide is the most powerful and rapidly fatal poison in the world. He made the solution with the cyanide and brought me the deadly mixture. I used it without suspicion, and again the reaction failed.

"Seeking to discover the cause of the trouble, I put a few drops of the cyanide upon my tongue. It was a mere taste, and with any other poison in the pharmacopoeia it would have been a trifling error. But it is not safe to taste the subtle and deadly cyanide.

"A black cloud seemed to gather above me, high up, beyond the ceiling, in the upper chambers of the air, yet trailing down so that it lightly touched my head. It descended rapidly, but with a heavy, jerking motion like a rusty shutter. The students flickered before my eyes for a moment and disappeared in that black cloud. It was of an intense,inky blackness, and as I stared into it I observed that its lower fringe did not quite quite reach the feet of the students in the foreground.

"There was a tremendous roar in my ears, like the fall of a cataract, and all these senses were a certain astounding of the senses. Yet I was conscious of startling internal clearness of thought as if the mind, withdrawn from all outward things, was preternaturally active within. I felt certain that if that very cloud dropped low enough to hit the students' feet I would be dead, and I struggled to retain consciousness.

"All idea of time disappeared. I could not tell how long I had been there, an only obscurely where I was. The strong, set state was a mingling of curiosity and anxiety as to whether the students' feet would disappear.

"The torpor deepened, a strange sense of isolation, of remote distance from everything came over me; death probably was near. It was a deep, more than been taken, it would in all probability have been fatal, but as it was, the angle of the system began to throw a poison off.

"The cloud suddenly began to ascend with heavy jerks, even as it had descended. The roaring in the ears drew away, and out of the blackness and not ingenuity that had surrounded me, it called, the students, the table of chemicals—all the familiar surroundings—appeared.

"There seemed to be no commotion in the class. I resumed my lecture. On inquiry I found that several students had noticed a momentary hesitation, as if I was at a loss for a word."