

JESS & CO.

By J. J. BELL.

Author of "Wee Macgregor," "Mrs. McLerie," Etc.

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"Dear" sighed Mrs. Houston hopelessly.

"Who can that be?" said her husband. "It's past Postie's time. Will I gang an' see, Jess?"

"Yes," said Jess in a choked voice.

With an anxious look at her David left the kitchen, closing the door behind him.

Jess hid her face in her apron. "I tried to— to give him a treat today," she thought bitterly, "but he thinks of nothing but his garden—the breakfast spoiled, the dinner spoiled and the—"

She lifted her head and listened. She heard David's voice and another's.

"Miss Perk!" she groaned. "Oh, I hope Davie'll have the sense not to—"

She heard the front door shut, but the voices began again.

"He's taking her into the parlor!" she sighed. "I might have known he would do it."

Presently the kitchen door opened, and David looked in. "Jess," he said in a loud whisper, "Miss Perk's in the parlour, wantin' to see ye."

"Is she?" said his wife languidly, turning the water on to a saucer.

"Ye'll no be lang, wul ye?"

"I don't know how long I'll be."

"But she—she's wantin' to see ye par-tee-clar," he said, entering the kitchen.

"What about?"

"I didna spher. But ye'll no be lang, wul ye, Jess? I'll gang an' tell her ye're jist comin', an' then I'll get on wif plantin' the sweet peas. Eh, lass?"

"Seeing you asked Miss Perk into the house, you had better go and keep her company till I'm ready," said Mrs. Houston calmly.

"But—"

"I can't be ready for half an hour. The tea was so late tonight."

"Hauf an' oor! An' what wud I say to her for hauf an' oor?"

"You might ask her if she likes sweet peas," said Jess, and she could have bitten out her tongue for saying it.

For a moment or two her husband regarded her with puzzled eyes. Then his face reddened.

"I'm vexed if I've done the wrang thing, dearie," he said gently. "The seeds can bide. I'll gang into the parlour an' dae ma best to be pleasant an' at the rest o' it. If ye like, I'll pit her out the hoose."

"No, no! You musn't do that. Just say I won't be long."

David took a step nearer his wife, then turned abruptly and left the kitchen.

"It was too bad of me," thought Jess, the tears filling her eyes.

Once more the door opened, and her husband whispered imploringly, "For peety's sake, dinna be mair nor hauf an' oor!" He vanished, and she heard him enter the parlor.

Mrs. Houston dropped into a chair and laughed quietly, with the tears still in her eyes. "Poor Davie! If he had only made me laugh sooner! But I must be quick and go after him."

Within ten minutes, her cheeks flushed and her eyes very bright, she opened the door of the parlor.

Miss Perk was sitting in the window, and Mr. Houston occupied an inch or two of the chair nearest the door, the length of the room lying between them.

"Good evening, Mrs. Houston," said Miss Perk as Jess greeted her. "Mr.

Houston and I have been having quite a delightful chat, haven't we, Mr. Houston?"

"Aye," said David as if he were telling a lie.

"He has just promised to bring you to my lecture on Thursday week." Miss Perk resumed, smiling graciously across the room, "and also to Mr. Croker's lecture the following Monday, and he has almost promised that you will both attend all our classes and lectures next season. I'm quite charmed, Mrs. Houston."

Without daring to meet his wife's eyes David rose and, saying, "Excuse me; I maun gang out to the garden," left the room with all speed.

Jess managed to hide her vexation and made a commonplace observation on the fitness of the weather for the holiday.

Miss Perk cordially agreed with the observation and continued:

"It must be so gratifying to you, Mrs. Houston, to notice the decided improvement in your husband."

"But he hasn't been ill," said Jess in surprise.

"I mean in his methods, his business methods, you know."

"Oh!" exclaimed the young woman, taken aback. "I don't understand."

She added, somewhat haughtily,

"Why, every one is talking about him," said the visitor pleasantly if rather patronizingly, "and saying how industrious he is becoming and so attentive in his work. I'm sure you must have noticed a difference during the past six months."

Mrs. Houston held her tongue.

"Perhaps you don't notice things as we do," Miss Perk went on. "But I and many of my friends can assure you that the improvement is there, and we sincerely trust it may be permanent. I'm sure you will do all in your power to make it so. You know it is a young wife's duty, to use all her influence in—"

"What are you going to lecture on Wednesday week, Miss Perk?" Jess asked, with strained politeness.

"Thursday week, Mrs. Houston, Thursday week, at 7 o'clock. Well, curiously—or perhaps I should say appropriately—enough, I intend to read a paper on the young wife's influence during the first year of married life. I have earnestly endeavored to treat the subject with the seriousness and deep consideration it deserves. But, to return to your husband, I am sure you must be delighted by what I have told you, for of course you are aware that in marrying him you entered upon quite a precarious existence, and I am sure also that you will not take offense when I tell you that I and many of my friends have frequently trembled for your future."

"It was very kind of your friends and yourself," said Jess, with a sweetness in her voice which would have sounded suspicious to any one but her visitor.

"Ah, but, being Christians, we cannot but interest ourselves in our neighbors, and since you came to settle in Kinlochlan I for one have been keenly interested in your life and have always hoped that nothing might occur to make you less satisfied with it than you appear to be. I thought that perhaps the few words I offered you some months ago might have been instrumental toward your husband's improvement, but as you say you do not notice any change in him I conclude the improvement has come from himself, which is all the more creditable to him."

"Yes," murmured Jess, with a mildness she was far from feeling.

"I heard only the other day that Sir Archibald was simply delighted with the way in which his greenhouses had been remodeled and repaired, and that he was going to recommend your husband to Lord Montgomery, who was thinking of—"

"Lord Montgomery arranged with David yesterday," said Mrs. Houston, with the faintest note of triumph in her voice.

"Indeed! That is extremely gratifying. Well, Mrs. Houston, you must now make up your mind to encourage your husband as much as possible, so that there is no chance left for a relapse. I had thought of speaking to him myself, but no doubt the matter is safe in your hands."

"I'll think about it," said Jess, holding herself in. "Have you seen my aunt, Mrs. Wallace, lately?" she inquired suddenly.

"No—no; not lately, not for some time, in fact. I trust she is quite well," Miss Perk replied, with a smile that might have been misconstrued.

"Oh, Aunt Wallace is always well," the niece returned cheerfully.

The visitor mentioned a few local topics, but in a hurried manner, suggesting that she was ill at ease. "Do you expect your aunt this evening, Mrs. Houston?" she inquired about five minutes later.

"Aunt Wallace just came along when it suits her. She might come in any time."

Miss Perk rose. "I'm afraid I cannot wait longer on the chance of the pleasure of a chat with her, but pray give her my kind regards when you see her. I'll pop in soon again and perhaps find her with you. Now I must really go."

Mrs. Houston conducted her visitor to the door, and in the porch the latter said: "I thought we should have found your husband in the garden. I should like to see him."

"He's not there," said Jess, looking about. "He likely has walked along the road."

"Well, perhaps you can take a message for him. You might kindly tell him that our drawing room window is not working nicely and ask him to come and put it right first thing in the morning. Can you remember that, Mrs. Houston?"

"I'm sorry," said Jess (she wasn't, "but he will be busy all tomorrow."

"The day after will do."

"I don't think he could attend to it for a fortnight or three weeks."

"Dear me! I didn't know he was so busy as all that," said Miss Perk in a tone of annoyance. "However, I'll call at his workshop tomorrow and see what can be done. Good evening, Mrs. Houston."

"Good evening, Miss Perk."

Jess re-entered the cottage and met David in the dusky passage.

"Is she awa?" he whispered.

"Yes," replied his wife, smiling in spite of herself. "She wanted to see you."

She delivered the message and told him what she had said to the visitor in reply.

"I wudna gang inside her hoose for five pound. She gets me to promise things I dinna mean. I'm vexed at ma stupidity, lass."

"Never mind, Davie."

"Aw, but, Jess. I didna mean to annoy ye."

"It's all right, Davie, lad. I dare say we'll be none the worse for the lectures."

"I'm vexed about the lectures, but I'm mair vexed about another thing."

"What's that?" She felt a thrill of pleasure to think that at last he understood the cause of her annoyance earlier in the evening. After all, she had not labored for his creature comforts in vain. "What's that?" she repeated softly and encouragingly.

"The—the pill," he stammered. "I didna mean to annoy ye when I mentioned it. Are ye feelin' quite wul ye noo?"

For an instant Jess felt she wanted to slap his face. Then she burst out laughing.

"I'm glad ye're no' angry wif me any mair," he said and kissed her.

"Did you get the sweet peas planted?" she inquired as she drew him into the parlor.

He shook his head. "Ye see, I didna gang out to the garden efter a'."

I jist sat in the kitchen waitin' for her to gang. I hadna the bert to plant onythin' when ye was angry wif me, Jess."

"You're just a laddie, Davie," she said, not chaffingly, but with a world of affection in her voice. "And now I'm going to have an hour at the books," she added quickly.

"Wul ye no' come for a walk, dearie?"

"I'll come afterward. It'll be too dark for the garden now, so you better take your paper and keep me company till I get through the accounts."

She laid ink and pen on the table and brought her husband's ledger from the bookcase. She seated herself, thinking how much more cheerful the figures before her were tonight than six months ago. Among the neatly kept accounts she forgot the worries of the day and now and then fell to dreaming of how in the not very distant future she would present David with a balance sheet, which she would have to explain, showing him the reward of his labor in black and white.

"Donald Binnie is to get a rise next Setturdlay," remarked Mr. Houston, settling himself in the easy chair and glancing admiringly at his wife.

"How much, Davie?"

"Twa shillin's. He's worked for it."

"All right. Anything else?" asked Mrs. Houston, making a note in a small book.

"I g'ed auld Angus five shillin's yesterday. He wantit it for his sister. She's vera badly the noo, putr budy."

"I'll go and see her tomorrow, Davie. But you would have better told me first, for Angus always buys the wrong things for his sister. She's far too old and frail for tinned salmon and cream cheeses."

"But she likes them better nor onythin' else, Angus tellt me. She likes tasty things, ye ken. But I'm app daein' the wrang thing, Jess," he muttered sadly. "I s'ndna ha'e g'ed him the five shillin's."

"Yes, you should, but you shouldn't have given it till I had a chance of telling the poor man what to buy. It's a pity he won't let any one help to nurse his sister. Aunt Wallace made some grand soup the other day and took it to Angus, and—"

"Did he no' tak' it to his sister? I'll ha'e to speak to him. He's gay dour, is Angus."

"I think he took it to his sister, Davie, but the next morning he brought it back to Aunt Wallace and said his sister was terribly obliged, but she couldn't eat it to please the king. And you never saw better soup. I wish I could make soup like Aunt Wallace. So, Davie, don't give Angus any more extra money without telling me. He and I won't quarrel, you know. We're great friends."

"I ken that, Jess. Angus wud dae onythin' for you. Well, I'll mind what ye say. Here's three pound fifteen I got frae Maister Granger yesterday. He tuk aff 5 per cent for prompt payment." David got up, laid the money on the table and resumed his seat.

"Prompt payment!" said Jess, laughing and turning up page 139 in the ledger. "The account has been owing about fifteen months. Doesn't Mr. Granger keep a footman and a butler?"

"He does that," said David, "an' a page fortybe."

"Well, he should try keepin' a penny diary. But I'm glad the account's paid. I was afraid it was going to be a bad debt. He's welcome to the 5 per cent. It'll likely be the only thing he keeps that doesn't cost him anything."

"Ye're rale smart, Jess," her husband remarked, smiling. "I daur say if ye hadna been lukin' efter the books the account wud ha'e been stamin' yet. I cud never see this gentry for money."

"It seems to be the only way of getting it from a lot of them," said Mrs.

Houston, slowly turning over the pages of the ledger. "They're not all like Sir Archibald of Arden and Mr. Coleman."

"That's true, lass. They're gentlemen though they're gentry."

"I don't think he could attend to it for a fortnight or three weeks."

"Dear me! I didn't know he was so busy as all that," said Miss Perk in a tone of annoyance. "However, I'll call at his workshop tomorrow and see what can be done. Good evening, Mrs. Houston."

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"I served yer fayther, an' I've served his son as wul as ma auld age wud let me. Aye, I've served."

"What am I to dae wif him, Jess?" whispered Houston hoarsely. "He's seen the fire, an'—"

"The fire, an' the fire!" wailed Angus. "It was maseel done that. I gaed to sleep, an' Maister Ogilvy had g'ied me a bit tobacco, an'— Oh, maister, maister, I served yer fayther, an' I've served his!"

"Davie," said Jess, "you run on, and I'll follow you. Run on and see if you can do anything."

"Wul ye be safe, wife?"

"Yes, yes! I'll be after you in no time."

Houston ran off, and his wife turned to the old man, who was effacing to her hand.

"Oh, Mistress Houston," he began, "I served his fayther faithful, an' I served—"

"Would you serve me, Angus?" she asked quietly, her free hand on her heart.

"Serve you, mistress?" It meant more than a great oath.

"Well, Angus," she said steadily, "you'll serve me—and David, too, very well, if you'll try to forget about the fire at the shop and go along and attend to the fire at Hazel Cottage. No, no; the cottage isn't on fire. I meant the kitchen fire. You'll find the door open. Look after the fire—the kitchen fire—and have the kettle ready to the boll. D'you understand, Angus?"

"Aye, mistress."

"And you won't leave the cottage till we get back?"

"Na, na!"

"What about your sister?"

"She's sleepin' lang syne. But, oh, mistress, d'ye think he'll pit me awa? I've served his fayther, an'—"

"No, Angus. David won't put you away, whatever happens. Now go to the cottage. I'm depending on you."

Old Angus did a queer thing. He kissed her hand before he let it go.

A joiner's shop, especially if it be twenty miles from a fire station, makes a merry blaze, but a short one. Fortunately the wind blew kindly, and David Houston's wood yard escaped. Otherwise it was ruin, and blackest of black ruin.

Before midnight all was over, but it was after 1 in the morning when David and Jess walked slowly home together through the calm, sweet air. For half the distance they walked in silence, the woman gripping her husband's arm, for he was dead beat with much exertion. His face and hands were filthy with soot and charred wood.

He heaved a great sigh. "Jess, lass, ye'll be sorry ye mairrit me noo. We've naethin' left."

"No, I'm not sorry, Davie, lad."

"But I deserve it," he groaned. "I clean forgot to pay ma insurance twa-three weeks syne. Oh, Jess, ye've a stupid, stupid man!"

"It's me that's stupid!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Davie! You've been suffering all this time about the insurance, and I forgot to tell you I paid it a fortnight ago."

Continued

THE ELECTRICITY HABIT.

There is One Thing in Its Favor—It Is Usually Beneficial.

"Of all the habits the one that sticks closest to a fellow is the electricity habit," said a young doctor. "The drink habit and the cocaine habit are mere summer fancies compared with it. But there is one thing to be said in its favor—it is usually beneficial. The electricity habit is contracted just like any other habit. A few currents are administered during an illness. They strengthen and stimulate, and the first thing the patient knows he finds the tonic indispensable. Even after he gets well he craves the treatment. I know one young woman who makes a fair living by calling at the homes of electricity victims and dosing them with a few shocks from a galvanic battery. Most slaves to the habit have their own batteries, but they are afraid to apply the treatment to themselves. That is practically a groundless fear, for there isn't one chance in a thousand of a person giving himself an overdose. Still they prefer an experienced hand to manage the current. Not all the electricity fiends are invalids by any means. Many of them are now as well as they ever were, yet they have become so addicted to the habit that they require the weekly, semi-weekly or possibly daily electric thrills to tone them up."

New York Post.

The Way a Man Had Revenge For an Act of Discourtesy.

"Courtesy always pays; discourtesy never does," said a famous Frenchwoman. "Let me tell you a story of an actual happening:

"Two women occupied a compartment in a railway carriage with one man, a stranger. They were extremely rude to this man. In whispers that he could overhear they criticised his costume, his figure and his manner. He, to be revenged, did a singular thing.

"The blackness of a tunnel enveloped the car, and under cover of the darkness the man kissed the back of his hand loudly and repeatedly. Then when the train entered the light again he looked from one woman to the other with a significant smile.

"They exchanged glances of suspicion.

"Was it you he kissed?"

"No; of course not. Was it you?"

"And neither lady would believe the other's denial, and each in her inmost heart believed the other had encouraged the kiss. The man looked cool and complacent. When finally he rose to go he said, lifting his hat with a jocular air:

"Have no fear, ladies. I shall never tell which of you it was."

JUST ONE WRINKLE.

The Price a Society Leader Paid to Have It Removed.

Just think of paying \$1,000 for having one wrinkle removed! That's what a well known New York society leader has paid, and without a doubt there are many others who would be willing to pay just such an exorbitant price if they had it for the same purpose.

Authorities along these lines are demanding large sums for beautifying women's faces. It is not an easy task and means much suffering for the woman. The injection of paraffin is one of the well known remedies for this shortcoming. The process is painful, the paraffin being injected underneath the skin by a hypodermic needle and allowed to remain there, harden and become a part of the membrane tissue, which it does in time.

It is a good remedy. The wrinkle is sure to disappear, and there are more women than one would surmise who are undergoing such a treatment.

Some of the society leaders who have gone west, for a rest as they say, have in reality secluded themselves for a time with doctors of beauty and upon making their reappearance in society are indeed creatures of beauty. Their complexions are beautified, white and plump, without a blemish, and they have retained their good humor and look like young matrons just entering their second year of married life instead of contemplating the celebration of their twenty-fifth.—Detroit News-Tribune.

LEATHER FURNITURE.

One Way to Clean and Polish Up the Coverings.

The following directions are said to be very good for cleaning and polishing leather: Dip a soft woolen cloth in boiling hot milk and wipe the leather with this, rubbing gently until all the dirt is removed. Then wipe dry with a soft flannel. When the leather is clean go over the surface with a piece of flannel on which is spread a tiny piece of prepared wax. The wax should be spread over the cloth as thinly as possible. After the waxing go over the leather with a clean soft flannel, rubbing briskly, but not too hard.

A recipe for this wax is as follows: Put two ounces of beeswax cut in small bits into a bowl. Place the bowl in a pan of hot water on the back of the range. When the wax is quite soft beat into it after