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JOCK'S WIFE.

CONCLUDED.

"OH, RICHARD, you have far more need of a wife when you are poor and blind: I could keep a school and you could help me; you could be no end of help. Think of it."

"I don't understand it," he said.—

"You were quite ready and willing to part with me because some person told you a foolish story; you surely could not have loved me then?"

"I thought I should have died."

"If I had known or suspected it, Lizzie, I would not have let you go, but I was poor, and I believed your love would not stand the strain of poverty; and your readiness to break the engagement made me sure of it. But now I'm what's called a rising artist, and besides, had a legacy lately; so if—"

"Do you mean to say that the blindness and the tea is all a sham?" exclaimed Lizzie, starting from her chair.

"You made the blindness: I never spoke of it—"

"You said your sight was getting dim."

"So it was at the moment, but my handkerchief could have cleared it. I own to the tea, and it has served my purpose. I wanted to judge if you cared for me at all, and how much."

"It was a foolish trick—cruel and unworthy of you."

"Not cruel, surely."

"Yes, cruel and unjustifiable. What will my friends think?—that you are a romantic fool; and they are sufficiently angry and embittered against you already."

"Let them think me a fool; I don't object."

"But I object; they must know nothing of this tea business. I mean my father and John and Nelly, and, above all, Jock."

"Who is Jock?"

"My brother, whom I dearly love and who loves me; but he is awfully wise and prudent, and could not do a foolish thing if you were to pay him for it. If he heard of the tea-trick, I don't know what he would think—not that you were fit to be his brother-in-law, I am sure."

"Well, what am I to do? where or when am I to turn up in my own colors?"

"I can't tell; it's like a dream. Have you had your bread and milk? Hebe said you ate like a famished creature."

"Hebe? that's a classic. When a man is hungry and has good food placed before him, he would be a greater fool than even I am if he didn't seize the opportunity. I had been out sketching since early morning. Is Hebe that girl's name? I made a sketch of her when I went in."

"We have got into the way of calling her that: it was impossible to call a creature like her 'Janet' always."

"Does Jock not think it silly?"

"Most likely he does; nobody can see any attraction in her but myself."

"I did. Did she not tell you I asked her to stand for her picture?"

"No; she would not know what you meant. I should like to see her in a picture."

"I think I'll call on your father to-night," said Mr. King.

"This is Monday," she said; "let it be Thursday. He'll be from home to-morrow and Wednesday. I'll give aunt the tea; what am I to charge for it? I believe you bought it coming through the village?"

"Yes, I did. Oh, make her a present of it; say I always give my customers a sample free."

"I'll ask four shillings sixpence, and say I told you not to come back."

"As tea-man, but when may I come as myself?"

"I don't know; I must have time to think. Where are you living?"

"Six miles from here, at Grasshill."

"Grasshill? Do you know Mr. Stenhouse there?"

"Very well."

"Then get him to drive you over when you go to my father's—you could not have a better introduction—and do not say anything about me at all. The thing is to make a favorable impression before they know what Mr. King you are. I could talk my father over, and even my uncle and aunt, but I am afraid of Jock; he'll stand out against you. He sees every side of anything, and he never was in love; when he is it will be with a woman made to order.—Now you are to go away; as tea-man never come back."

Jock came over to Stonylea the same evening; he had been from home for some weeks, and had only returned that day.

"Well, Lizzie," he said, "what have you been about all this time? You are looking well—a trifle pale maybe, but bright."

"I am very well indeed," she said, and then relapsed into silence not usual with her.

"And how is your pupil Hebe getting on?"

"Well," she said, "it is very uphill work teaching her; I'm thinking of giving her up."

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," said Jock; "I would persevere. You would not master a foreign language yourself in a few months, and book learning is a foreign language to her."

"But I would find out if she had any aptitude for mastering it, and go on or give it up accordingly. People can't do everything, and why waste time on what they have no taste for, and may never need? I don't mean ever to part with Hebe if I can help it, but I throw up the sponge about her education."

"That's always the way with women," said Jock. "They begin a thing with no end of enthusiasm, and if it does not succeed in a moment, down they throw it."

He spoke with displeasure in his voice.

"But, Jock, be reasonable," said his sister. "Hebe is a first-class servant, and as bright and happy as a human being can be: she'll be of far more use in a house than a score of people who can read and write to perfection—in fact, literary servants are a bore—and what's the use of forcing the little creature to what she doesn't care for?"

"Was it not your scheme to make her a companion for yourself?"

"Yes it was, but I have changed my mind; I think she'll be as happy and more useful as she is."

"There's something now in the wind; what's your next hobby to be? If I were you I would go on; I would drive pegs into her mind to hang information on, so that she wouldn't forget. See, there's some gloves I brought for you; if you were to give her a pair of them and tell her they were bought in London, that would be another peg. I think I could be a good teacher."

"I don't doubt you would. Many thanks for the gloves—a whole dozen—but they are too fine for Hebe; we must remember her station."

"To be sure," said Jock. "I didn't think of that."

Mr. King improved his introduction to the Elliots into a pretty intimate acquaintanceship, and as he was densely ignorant of Dresden, he was not for a moment suspected of being the original Mr. King, so that prejudice did not array itself against him; and thus, having a fair field, he soon won plenty of favor. Jock and Sibyl took him over to Stonylea and introduced him to Lizzie as an acquaintance they were rather proud to have made, and he and Miss Elliot went through the introduction with a gravity that left nothing to be desired.

Mr. King was of opinion that the time was ripe for revealing their plans, but Lizzie thought differently; she was still afraid of Jock, and she felt that by meeting as strangers she and Mr. King were getting deeper in the mire than ever.—Her brother would think the artist pos-

itively silly and not capable of conducting the ordinary affairs of life, for Jock was not romantic, and would have no patience with stratagems in love, whatever he might approve of in war.—Mr. King, however, not being possessed by the same love or fear or reverence for Jock as his sister was, things were likely to come to a crisis, whether she approved or not, when a light thrown suddenly up revealed her brother to Lizzie as a man who could commit an error of judgment, and who was subject to weakness like his fellow-mortals.

She had been pondering matters one afternoon, and feeling very happy and a little perplexed, when she went to the kitchen to speak to Hebe. She stopped at the door and in half-dumfounded tones said, "Jock!"

There unquestionably was the prudent, wise sub-inspector of mines standing on the hearth, his arm lying over Hebe's shoulder and his face bent down over hers.

"Jock! Hebe! Maud Muller! it is, and hadn't ought be!" hurriedly exclaimed Lizzie all in a breath.

"It had ought to be, and it is," said Jock determinedly.

Hebe in her gown and white effect and her crimson ribbons was looking down at her little hands, anxiously pulling the corner of her muslin apron: the round open face was perfectly pale, where in general it was rose pink; her under lip hung down slightly and quivered; her big blue-black eyes were dewy she said:

"It wasna me, Miss Elliot: I've often told him I was no match for him."

Lizzie thought she had never seen her look half so attractive; the grief and joy and fear blended in her face were a sight which she only wished Mr. King could have seen, having an eye to her lover's reputation.

"You are a match for any man in the county, Hebe," Jock said, drawing her close to him. "And you are mine as sure as my name is Jock Elliot; and 'wha daur meddle wi' me?'"

"I would not take him, Hebe, if I were you: he'll do nothing but drive pegs into your mind, and bother you with spelling and grammar.—You'll carry on her education, Jock?" said his sister, laughing.

At that moment the back door opened and Uncle John entered: he stood an instant and surveyed the group, then passed into the parlor without a word; but after tea he asked his nephew to go out and look at something with him, and then made use of the opportunity he had made.

"Now, Jock," he said, "what I saw in the kitchen is to go no farther: it is to stop at once. That girl is no wife for you."

"I am the best judge of that," said Jock with hauteur.

"No, you are not," his uncle said: "you are no judge at all. If you were to marry that girl, you would repent it to the end of your days. Take her youth from her, and what have you left? Be prudent and be advised."

"Time will take the youth from her and me too, and prudence may be carried too far," said Jock.

His uncle winced. "Why," he said, "she is nothing but a bright little animal: if she were a kitten she would run round after her tail. I'll never consent to it, Jock."

"So be it," said Jock. It's a point on which no man shall dictate to me."

When Nelly heard of the matter from her husband she said:

"Impossible! Jock marry a little vain, silly, flirting servant-girl! I'll set her to write a letter to him, and it will give him a fright: it will hardly be the thing he would like to see from his wife's hand. But his father and mother will prevent it: he can't be allowed to ruin himself."

Jock was the favorite nephew of John and Nelly. Hebe did not write, however: she had had sense enough not to commit herself where she knew she was awfully wanting; but if she had, the illiterateness of her production would only have seemed to Jock another claim for extra tenderness; there was actually not the shadow of a crevice in his mind through which the imprudence and folly of his intentions could gain admittance.

Except Lizzie, all Jock's kindred to a

man and woman opposed his wishes; and her consent was negative: she said nothing—she would not take the responsibility of encouraging him, although she could not see the matter in the ruinous light that the others did—but then she was fond of Hebe. Beside this the trick looked rational—a thing which, if it had come to Jock's knowledge, she had felt sure he would have thought betrayed a romantic silliness incompatible with the steady earning of a respectable livelihood.

And there is no doubt that this affair of his smoothed her own way considerably; the opposing forces were all engaged in doing battle with him; and when Mr. King, having used every means to gain the suffrages of her kindred and wipe out the past, revealed himself and his proposals, the decision upon them was left to Lizzie herself, and she having already decided he had no further trouble or anxiety.

Jock merely looked at his sister and said:

"The new hobby."

"See that you don't tire of the old one, Jock," she said.

"Never, Lizzie," he said—"never."

"But, Jock, three, five, ten years after this, how will you enjoy phonetic spelling and grammar not quite what it used to be?"

"They'll be dear to me for her sake," said Jock with strong feeling.

"Amen!" said Lizzie.

Jock did not think of lifting the lowly flower out of its bed and sending it to a hot-house, where the growth of the nearly-invisible shoots of learning might be forced to a kind of maturity; he meant that to be a gradual, natural process, accomplished by himself; but if he had, he would have found that Hebe had a mind of her own, and had decided to fulfill her engagement with Mr. Elliot; which might indicate that she had a sound conscience or groveling tastes.

Jock did not like it, but his sister persuaded him not to interfere. "Just let Hebe and me jog on together for the time: we have always been very good friends, and we'll be better ones now," she said.

The other relatives hoped that his submitting to this was a sign that the thing might possibly be broken off yet. His uncle John was so moved by the distress of the parents, and so sure that his nephew was preparing misery for himself by this mesalliance, that he privately offered Hebe five hundred pounds if she would refuse to marry him and go to America, where a brother, her only near relative, was settled, and had repeatedly asked her to come to him."

Poor little Hebe was hard pushed: her color came and went—which from much practice it was pretty good at doing—and she said,

"I'm not marrying him for money, and I'll not refuse him for money; money is nothing to me, not if it were five thousand pounds."

Could anything more be done? No pecuniary lever could be brought to bear on Jock: he was independent.

Lizzie's marriage day was fixed for the 11th of December, but as Hebe could neither stay at Stonylea when her time of service was ended, nor be received at his father's house, Jock determined that his marriage should take place on the eleventh of November, the day that his bride would leave her "place" with her little wooden chest, and her half year's wages in her hand. It was to be a marriage stripped of all externals, such as trousseau, presents, wedding-garments, bridesmaid, wedding-guests, speeches, congratulations, old shoes, etc. Jock laughed these things to scorn; it was the first time he had ever given his friends a moment of anxiety, and he was sorry for it, but he could not help it if they were unreasonable.

Hebe went about her duties as usual, doing everything well and neglecting nothing, but she did not sing as had been her wont, and her face was not so blithe as it was its nature to be.

Her master and mistress were not magnanimous towards her; if there was blame in the matter, surely it belonged to their own nephew, and not to their servant-girl, but they made her feel the weight of their displeasure; not John so much, who merely ignored her entirely, as Nelly, who snubbed her at every turn. It was not like them, but

good people can do unworthy things.

The bustle of the harvest-time had been got over, and Miss Elliot had gone to pass some days at her father's house, Mr. King being there also. It was a dark, murky Sunday night; John and Nelly had returned from church, and Hebe had taken the dinner-tea which was the Sunday fare into the parlor, and had sat down at the kitchen fire with her feet on the fender and her thoughts on Jock. She had not seen him for a fortnight, and she was sad; she was thinking if it were for his good to marry her. Would she be a drag on him? and in time would she tire of her and despise her for her low origin and want of education, as his uncle had told her? Her eyes filled with tears, and she took the cat upon her lap and stroked it, if so she might find comfort; and pussy had a very soothing effect on her and she on pussy: it climbed up and rubbed its fur on her face and purred as much as to say:

"You and me against the world, Hebe!" then in loving trust it curled itself up on her knee and composed itself to sleep. She drew Jock's last letter from her pocket and read it over the cat's head; it was written, or rather half printed, in big round text, for the writer knew if he wrote in his usual way Hebe would not be able to read it; and what will a man not do who is infatuated and shuts his eyes to causes and consequences? It was short, for when a letter is half printed in big, distinct type it checks the indulgence of imaginative flights or poetical quotations, and even assurances of undying affection, were the writer ever so inclined to these.—Jock's letter was short, but it appeared satisfactory to the person to whom it was written, for her face cleared and she kissed the paper on which it was written; which must be a genuinely natural thing to do, for Hebe had never read a novel in her life, nor ever had an opportunity of seeing a similar action performed.

She was still meditating on its contents when the back door opened without causing her to look up, as the man who attended to the horses came every night for the key of the granary, and she did not doubt that it was he as usual; but she started up and pussy fell from her lap in a hurry when a heavy hand grasped her arm and two men with crapes over their faces stood beside her.

"What do you want?" she asked, for so ignorant was she of the usages of housebreakers that the crapes on their faces had no meaning for her.

"If you are quiet and say nothing we'll not hurt you," said one of the men, "but speak a word and I'll blow your brains out," and he showed a revolver.

"Bring her with you, Jim," the other man said, striding out of the kitchen into the front lobby; and Hebe found herself hurried into the dining-room, where Mr. and Mrs. Elliot were still sitting at the table. They both rose in alarm.

"Has anything happened?" Mrs. Elliot asked.

"Not yet," said one of the men. "Now, old gentleman, tell me where your money is or I'll shoot you where you stand," and he held his pistol near Mrs. Elliot's head.

"Very well, shoot," said John, quietly.

"Oh, good men," cried Mrs. Elliot, taking out her purse, "what will you take to go away? I'll give you—" The man snatched the purse from her hand, while his mate secured her husband's watch.

"Tie him in his chair, Jim," the leader said, "and I'll hold the two women."

The man produced strong cord and bound John hand and foot, he making no resistance.

"Tie the old lady, Jim," said the man, keeping hold of Hebe.

Nelly was powerless with terror by this time.

"You'll pay for this night's work yet, you villains!" said John when he saw his wife secured with cords, and writhed at his own helplessness.

"Keep a civil tongue in your head," said the ruffian. "Now," he said to Hebe, "lead on to the old gentleman's rooms. We'll break open the desk if we can't find a key, and if you try to