

Aunt Jane's Ear Trumpet

by

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The noise of wheels was heard in the street. It was the stage coach with its load of passengers just returned from the railway station. It paused before the gate of rather a pretentious house in the main street of the village.

Mrs. Graves looked out of the window and an expression of dismay crept over her face. "I declare," she exclaimed, "if it isn't Aunt Jane Breed come to make us a visitation."

"O dear," chimed in Arabella, a young lady of eighteen, "what a pity! Just as we were going to have a party too. Couldn't we tell her it is inconvenient for us to have her, and send her to Uncle Merriam's?"

"No, Arabella, that would never do. You must consider that your Aunt Jane has twenty thousand dollars which she can dispose of as she pleases."

She had no time to say more, for the bell rang. Mrs. Graves went to the door herself.

By the time she had opened it her face was composed into an expression of joy. "Why, Aunt Jane, how do you do? What a pleasant surprise! Arabella and I were speaking of you only this morning."

"Wait a minute, Eleanor," said the old lady, fumbling in her pocket. She produced an ear trumpet which she adjusted to her ear. "There," said she, "now we can talk."

"I had no idea you were deaf," said Mrs. Graves through the trumpet.

"Age has its infirmities," said Aunt Jane. "How is Arabella."

“Very well, thank you. Here she is to speak for herself.”

Mrs. Graves turned towards her daughter, and spoke in her natural voice. “Aunt Jane’s as deaf as an adder,” she remarked. “You see she has to use an ear trumpet.”

“I’m glad of it,” said Arabella. “Now we can say what we please without her hearing us. Is she going to stay a long time?”

“I don’t know. I’ll ask her.”

“Aunt Jane,” said she, with her mouth to the ear trumpet. “I hope you are going to favor us with a long visit.”

“I can’t spare you but a month,” said Aunt Jane, “that is, if it is entirely convenient for you to have me with you so long.”

“We shall be delighted,” said Mrs. Graves, finishing the sentence for her daughter’s benefit, “to have you go. That’s the truth, isn’t it Arabella?”

“How shall we ever live through the month?” said Arabella dismally, without however, venturing to express this feeling in her countenance.

A peculiar expression flitted over the old lady’s face, but this was observed neither by Mrs. Graves nor her daughter.

Three days passed. The old lady had become domesticated at the house of her niece.

It so happened that Arabella had a beau—a young man of very much the same caliber as herself—who was employed as a clerk in one of the village stores. He called one evening when Aunt Jane had indulged herself in sitting up a little longer than usual.

“I supposed I must introduce you to my aunt,” said Arabella. “She won’t be in our way, for she is as deaf as a post. Aunt Jane,” she said through the ear-trumpet, “this is Mr. Storrs.”

“I am glad to see him,” said Aunt Jane, extending her hand.

“There, we needn’t say anything more to her,” said Arabella carelessly. “I believe you never saw her before.”

“No,” said the young man.

“Ain’t she a beauty?” laughed Arabella.

“Are you not afraid she will hear?”

“O no, she is entirely dependent on her trumpet. That’s lucky for us. If she could hear, she might not always be gratified by what she heard.”

“Ha, ha?” laughed Storrs.

“It’s a great trial to us to have her here, but you know when one has a rich aunt, she can’t very well be put off.”

“So your aunt is rich,” said the young clerk with increased interest.

“Yes, she’s worth twenty thousand dollars.”

"That's a large sum," said Storrs., thinking how large a portion of this sum would be likely to fall to Arabella whom he already looked upon as his own.

"Yes, it's worth some sacrifice. So we tolerate the old lady in spite of her frumpy dress and odd ways."

"I was just going to observe," said Storrs, banteringly, "what a strong resemblance there is between you and your aunt."

"Take that for your impertinence, sir," said the young lady, playfully tapping him with her fan. "I must be a charming creature if that were the case."

Now Aunt Jane was in reality a very good looking old lady, though of course not as good looking as when she was young.

So the conversation ran on, entirely regardless of Aunt Jane, who sat placidly in a rocking-chair at the window knitting a stocking. She appeared to take little notice of the young couple, but occasionally an amused look just flitted over her face. Probably she was thinking of something.

Aunt Jane had been a fortnight at the house of Mrs. Graves when one morning she said at the breakfast table, "I should like to go over to Merriam's to spend the day."

"Very well," said Arabella with alacrity, "we can carry you down there immediately after breakfast."

"What a relief it will be," said she turning to her mother, "to be rid of her a single day."

"Yes," said Mrs. Graves, who being older, was a little more prudent, "but you must consider that your uncle is as nearly related as I am, and we must not let her stay there too long."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Arabella with a sigh.

"You had better tell her that you hope she won't stay longer than one day."

"Well," said Arabella, "if I must I suppose I must."

"Aunt Jane, you must be sure and not stay longer than a day or two," said the young lady through the ear trumpet.

"You are very kind," said the old lady, "I didn't know but I was getting troublesome."

"O no, we are delighted to have you here," said Mrs. Graves. "We hope you will stay a long time."

"How could you say that, mother?" protested Arabella.

"Because, my dear, your aunt is too old to last very long, and we ought to feel willing to submit to some inconveniences for the sake of being remembered in her will. If we work our cards right she may leave us the whole. That would be worth having. Twenty thousand dollars don't grow on every bush."

"As likely as not she'll live to be a hundred," muttered Arabella.

After breakfast Aunt Jane was carried to the house of her nephew, Mr. James Merriam, the

only son of her sister.

Mr. Merriam was a poor man. He had met with reverses, and now lived in a much less expensive way than his cousin, Mrs. Graves, who, despite the relationship, looked upon Mr. Merriam as her social inferior. He was a very worthy man, however, and far from being as worldly as Mrs. Graves. He had three children, all at home. His wife was an excellent housekeeper, and far more amiable than Mrs. Graves, though her pretensions were much less.

"I am glad to see you, Aunt Jane," said Mr. Merriam hospitably, as he came out to help here from the carriage, "We have been hoping to see you ever since we heard of your arrival in town. Clara will be delighted to welcome you."

The old lady drew out her trumpet. Mr. Merriam looked concerned. "I am sorry that you have lost your hearing," he said.

"Old people can't expect to hear as well as young folks," said Aunt Jane.

"You must make us a good long visit," said Mrs. Merriam, who now appeared.

"I will see," said Aunt Jane.

"I always liked Aunt Jane," said Mrs. Merriam to her husband. She is always so gentle and kind. It seems very pleasant to have her in the house."

"So it does. The only thing I think of is that we have a small house, and can't make her as comfortable as at your cousins."

"Well, we will make up in the warmth of our welcome."

Aunt Jane seemed unusually happy that day. As night approached, she seemed thoughtful, and finally consented to stay longer.

"I must write a letter to my niece to explain it," she said.

An hour after, the following note was placed in the hands of Mrs. Graves.

"Niece Eleanor:

I have concluded to stay where I am during the remainder of my visit. As you remarked to Arabella when I came that you should be delighted to have me go, this information will doubtless be pleasing to you. As for Arabella, she will be easily consoled for the departure of her 'frumpy old aunt' who must have annoyed her with her 'odd ways.'

Aunt Jane.

P.S. My hearing has been wonderfully restored so that I can now dispense with my ear trumpet."

This letter filled Mrs. Graves and Arabella with dismay. They had sinned so deeply against the old lady that they felt that no apologies would be adequate. To add to Arabella's misfortunes, when the young clerk learned that there was an estrangement between her and her rich aunt, he unceremoniously deserted her for another young lady.

Aunt Jane bequeathed the bulk of her possessions to her nephew. Her will contained the

following provision:

“Item. I bequeath to my niece Eleanor my ear trumpet which I found on one occasion to be of excellent service.”