

MY HUSBAND JACK.  
A WOMAN'S STORY.

BY ROSELLA RICE.

I DON'T know what was the matter with me that summer; I had not felt well for several weeks; had a pain through my temples and down my back, and was low-spirited, and—I might as well tell the whole truth, I was cross, and scolded, and found fault, and was everything but an agreeable wife and mother.

We lived on a farm, but my husband always did the milking, and fed the pigs, and carried water, and made my work so light that I had no cause to complain about being overworked.

When I scolded he said nothing in reply, but was calm and quiet. I thought I was the most unhappy woman in the world. I envied Mrs. Baldwin, who rode in her beautiful carriage behind two prancing bays, while I had to ride in a low, old-fashioned buggy without springs, a dingy, stained thing, drawn by two broad-backed, steady farm horses, one white and the other sorrel, with a white nose and white hind feet. Our turn-out looked sorry enough along side of the Baldwins', and I was silly enough to take that matter to heart, and almost daily dwell upon it.

I envied Dr. Blakelee's wife the natural curls that beautified her pretty face and shoulders, and Mrs. Carter her long silken coil of glossy brown hair, fully as thick as my wrist, that wound round and round her head, more superbly royal than any coronet of jewels. My own hair was thin, and spread it out as I would, the fleshy color of my bare head would show through, raw, and pinky, and repulsive.

I did so much admire hazel eyes, large, and melting, and winsome—soft Italian eyes, that would make me dream of the balmy airs and the sunny skies of Italy. The Widow Webster, she who lived in the little cottage among the elms—sweet, graceful, little lady-bird of a woman she was—she had that kind of eyes; and because she had them, and I had not, I didn't like her. My eyes were gray—just common gray, like almost any man or woman chances to have—and I did think that sometimes they were more green than gray, especially if I did not feel very well, and was in an unusually complaining, fretful mood.

I couldn't dress my baby pretty like other women did, because he was so poor and scrawny that there was no beauty in his bare neck and thin, blue arms. There seemed to be muscles along the sides of his neck that reached up to the corners of his mouth, and they were always stretched, and gave him the appearance of having slipped the hangman's knot. Poor little dear, when he cried he gave demonstrations with his ears, and down both sides of his neck, while the tip end of his nose turned right up. I imagined that other women's babies looked prettier when they cried than mine did when he was laughing or looking his sweetest.

My cup was all bitterness to me, and though there was sweetness mixed in it I neither saw nor tasted it.

One day when Jack, my husband—his name was John, but I thought Jack was so much the shorter name, and more easily spoken, that I always called him Jack, or Jacky, or Jackling, just as the mood was upon me—one day he was going up to Mansfield to buy himself a suit of new clothes, and when he kissed me good-bye and smoothed my hair back off my forehead, and looked kindly into my eyes, he said: "Now if there's any little thing you want, say so, and I'll get it for you. Maybe you want a new book to read—don't you want 'Gates Ajar,' or something of the kind?"

"Oh, no; I've no time to read, you know, with this cross little red head always clinging to my skirts with his cavernous mouth wide open, and the work to 'tend to, and the house to keep in order—no, don't spend your money in books."

"Don't you want a new dress, then?" said he, and his eyes looked sadly into mine.

"No; and if I did, I couldn't trust you to select one, you'd get green, or purple, or lilac, or some color that would make me look hideous enough. I never saw a man yet who could tell what color would suit his wife's complexion, and none of you are sharp enough to select a good piece of material that would wear well. Don't get me anything—buy yourself a suit of clothes; dear knows you need 'em badly enough," and I looked down at his rusty suit of gray, threadbare, and shrunken, and shabby, the waistband button gone from his pantaloons, and not one left on his vest—both of which he had awkwardly replaced with pins, with the points sticking out where the heads should have been. "When I get to feeling well, if ever I do, then I want a broche shawl like Cousin Mary's, with a crimson centre and edge, and those large overlapping tropical leaves forming the ground-work. Oh, my! but that's a pretty shawl, and it is so large that it would quite cover me all over; and I forgot and laughed in anticipation, and sparkled my eyes, just for an instant, however, then I settled back to my old self again and bade him good-bye, and told him if he was late getting home he would have to eat a cold lunch, which he would find in the cupboard somewhere.

He started, and just reached the depot as the train whizzed into it.

The baby was cross that evening, and had an unusual crying spell; and I grew angry and whipped him, and then because he would not hush crying I cuffed his ears soundly, and commanded him to keep still. He put both of his thin little hands, spread out their widest, over his mouth, to try and keep the noise in. In his efforts he bent his head forward to stop the cry, and shifted

the hands so as to make them cover his belligerent mouth the closest, and then he wailed out a sad calling cry of "Oh, my papa!"

I never loved children; caring for them I always thought a drudgery, and when my baby was first laid into my arms my heart was not warmed towards it. I had not desired it, and had no warm welcome to give it. But to-night I was amused to see him try to stifle his cries, and after I had watched him awhile, I said: "Now if Herby will be a good boy and behave himself and go to sleep he can come to mother's arms and be rocked."

He looked up at me in a pitiful, beseeching way, with the tears still running down his cheeks, and the two little spread-out hands covered over his mouth tightly, as he ran to me and buried his face in my bosom.

"Now, if I rock, you must hush right up," said I.

"Mamma, sing 'bout a little mouse," he gasped, brokenly, knowing that if I sang, his stifled cries would be unheard.

"No, I don't feel like singing," I replied, sternly. "You cried, and made mamma's head ache worse, and she can't sing to-night."

"Please, mamma, sing 'bout a little mouse," he pleaded out in a quivering voice, all broken with sobs.

"No, not to-night; Herbert was a bad boy, and mamma don't love him—when he sleeps and gets good, then she'll love him and sing all about two, three, four little mice."

"Oh my, mamma!" he broke out, plaintively, but I shook him, and scolded him, and rocked the harder, and at last the swaying of the rocker soothed him gently, and he fell asleep with his hands up to his mouth.

I moved them softly and crossed them on his bosom. His face was wet with tears, and the pearly drops were on his long-sweeping lashes, and every few breaths a sob would come that shook his whole frame. His lips were as red as coral, and his cheeks were purple, and a flush like that of fever lighted up his white forehead, while the veins in his forehead were knotted and full, and the fine tracery that was barely visible in good health, like a delicate blue pencilling, now seemed like tensioned cords stretched to their utmost.

"I think the child's not well," I said to myself, as I slipped his little form off my arm and laid his head on the cool pillows. Late in the night, when my husband came home, he found me unhappy enough. The baby was tossing in delirium, and I was alone.

The doctor was called in and he pronounced it an attack of brain fever, brought on by some sudden revulsion, or fright, or excitement, and said he would be subject to such attacks until he became physically stronger. He staid with us until morning. Poor baby—how his cries did pierce my heart! He would shriek out, and then, as if suddenly remembering, he would spread his hot, little hands over his mouth to still the noise. Then he would reach up, as though to touch my face, and say, brokenly, "Oh, please mamma, sing 'bout a little mouse!" then again he would uplift his arms and wail out, "Oh, my papa!" in such a pitiful cry, as though it came from afar, and traveled over mountains and across valleys.

Oh, what a stern discipline was mine in those long days and nights in which my poor baby lay in the balance between life and death!

At last he was pronounced out of danger, and worn and wearied, but hopeful and patient, I gathered the little sufferer to my bosom and cried over him, repentant tears. He put both hands up to my face and feebly patted my cheeks and laughed in a dreamy, soul-sick way, just as though he did it to cheer me. No coral hue tinted his lips now, but the palest rose-leaf tinge, his eyes were sunken deeply, and the long lashes lay wearily over them.

One of the first things he asked me, was to sing about the little mouse—it appeared that those days seemed to him just one night, and that he remembered, as on the evening before, of asking for his favorite song. I sang it to him cheerily, and when I finished he kissed me and said, "My good mamma."

He slowly recovered—the thin reddish hair all came out, and instead came a beautiful crop of golden hair, that lay in clusters and rings and curls all over his head.

One evening when Herbert was first able to be lifted out of bed and to lie in his father's arms, I said: "Oh, Jack, I did forget all about your new clothes—where did you put your satchel that night—let me look at them."

"You will find it flung back under the closet stairs, if no one has moved it," said he.

I took the lamp and peeped in and brought it forth. It was as full as it could hold.

I forgot myself, and said: "That's a real man's trick! don't you know, Jackling, that these nice new clothes of yours will be as wrinkled as old Granny Dogbury's face? now see if they're not Jackey."

"Papa don't care for all the wrinkles in the world, so his darling gets well again; that's all he cares for," and Jack gathered the baby close up in his strong arms, until the thin little figure was almost lost in the heavy beard about his face. The bony, baby hands caught and buried themselves in the brown beard, and they both laughed, and played bo-peep, and were enjoying themselves, while my face was turned away. I drew out a brown paper parcel and opened it, and out fell a pair of common gray jeans pantaloons. I opened my eyes quite wide enough to display all the white that was in them, but I only felt of the pantaloons to make sure they were common jeans, and simply said: "Oh, Jackling, Jackling!" I tipped up the satchel and another parcel fell out and burst open,

and there was a coat of the same kind of material, good, common jeans, worth seventy or eighty cents a yard.

I stood and looked at him, my husband, one of those looks that measures a man and estimates him. I know it was an unkind look, but he glanced back at me, his face hidden behind the baby's head so that only his eyes peeped over, and the expression said something like, "how could you put such an estimate as that on me!"

"Why did you get a best suit of this cheap, cotton stuff, John," I said, deliberately pointing to the garments on the floor with one foot; "what did you mean?"

"I thought I couldn't afford anything better," said he, in a wounded manner, and he compressed his fine lips together.

"You said you had money enough to get a good suit—one that would do you for years. Oh, well! it corresponds with our buggy, and our match team, etc., etc., good enough for poor folks, but really I wish you'd gotten something a little better," and I drew my mouth down at the corners, and I'll warrant I looked ugly enough to turn any man's love away from me, even a good true husband's.

"Well, whenever you're ready to give the satchel another shake, do so," said he, quietly, and he commenced singing and rocking Herbert, who lay restfully in his arms.

"Oh! I didn't know there was anything else in it, but I suppose the vest comes next—likely one made of yellow canton flannel," and I laughed bitterly. I tipped the satchel over and shook out another paper, not a coarse brown one this time, it was soft and white, and the contents had not the wiry feel of jeans or any kind of goods with which I was familiar.

I untied the fine thread slowly, and unrolled the parcel, and there with tints of gold, and crimson, and creamy white, and the plushiest of rich, mossy, green-blended silk and worsted that was crisp to the touch of my astonished fingers, lay, unrolling itself in my lap, like a loving thing of life—the coveted, admired broche shawl!

I took one look at it—one greedy, hungry, but satisfied look, and my eyes filled with tears until they brimmed over, and I ran and buried my ashamed face in Jack's bosom, and cried out: "Oh, you poor 'bused good fellow! There you went and put off your dear old self with a common shabby suit of jeans, just so you could buy me that nice shawl! Why, Jacky, you're an angel of goodness! How can I bear to wear it when I know what it cost you, the best and most patient of husbands! Oh, Jackling, you old dear, I would have been served just right if, instead of getting that shawl, you'd gone and got a divorce on the grounds of incompatibility of temper. I'm not half good enough for you, old darling of a blessing, you! Why I never expected such a gift in my life! And here I've been complaining, and fretting, and scolding all summer, and haven't done one good thing for you, or tried to make you happy!" And here I bawled right out into a hearty cry of honest sorrow and shame.

I looked on the serene-faced nobleman before me; he was always the same, not up in the blue heavens one day, almost floating on ecstatic wings, and the next day wading in the mire and soiling his garments and wiping away the tears of earth.

"Oh, don't cry, dear," he said, "and make yourself out to be such a good-for-nothing wife, while you exalt me to the heavens! I know that sometimes you have been fretful and low-spirited, but I was sorry for you all the time. I knew with a cross baby and the pain in your head, that you could not be cheerful always; so don't underrate yourself; remember that you were my choice of all the women in the world; and I shall be real proud to wear my new suit of Kentucky jeans so that your long-time wish could be granted, and you could possess the beautiful shawl!" and he looked into my face so tenderly that I only cried the harder.

"Maybe the shawl won't fit you, who knows?" said he, and he sat Herby down in the rocking chair and opened it fold after fold, the fine rich colors blending and contrasting together beautifully. Then he laid it over my shoulders gracefully, and it fell even down to the floor.

The overlapping, dark, tropical looking leaves were there, and the crimson centre, and the exquisitely wrought border, and the crisp fringe, and the very hearts of the royal purple red roses—a shawl magnificent enough to have been worn by the old queens of long, long ago.

"My little princess!" said Jack, and he bowed before me, and then kissed my hand, and my forehead, and cheeks, and lips, and the dimple in my chin.

I felt ashamed of myself, and almost hung my head as I folded the shawl and laid it away reverently.

So, alone and in tears, I made good honest resolves; I built a wall of them all up around me; I should have made myself immaculate if I could, in my poor, human, blundering, blind way.

A week or two after the occurrence here related, I was invited to a quilting party at one of my neighbors. All the women of my acquaintance were there, old and young, grave and gay, giddy and sensible—just such an assemblage as one would gather together in a country neighborhood. We had very pleasant times and cheery talks, but in the afternoon Herbert grew restless, and one of the girls of the household told me to take him into the little bed-room off the porch and put him to sleep. To gratify him, I lay down on the bed beside him. Just at our feet was an open window, the sash taken out, over which a scarlet flowering bean grew luxuriantly, and covered the whole window with a tangle of quivering leaves and clusters

of dazzling red flowers. The pleasant hum of voices in the adjoining room, and on the porch just outside of the window, made a lulling sound that soothed the child into slumber.

The familiar tones of two of my old neighbors sitting on a bench under the window fell upon my ear distinctly. I did not hear what they said, neither did I listen, until the name of Jack was mentioned several times. There was no Jack in the whole township except my Jack, my good, kind Jackling, and I turned over away from Herby's breathing and laid my head upon the window-sill, and heard what the two old cronies were so glibly discussing.

"Oh, it's a sore pity that he'd not married Jenny Hargrave instead of the one he did. He'd been thousands better off to-day. Jenny was better looking and smarter every way, and then she was so good natured."

"Oh, yes," said the other, "she's so whimsical, always an ache or a pain to mess and fret over; and then, even if she's well, it's just scold, scold from morning till night; and no matter what he does for her he gets scolded in return. She growls if the weather is hot, and growls if it's cold, growls if it's wet and growls if it's dry. My man says if he was in Jack's place it wouldn't be many evenings that he'd spend at home; he'd go to the tavern, or the store or grocery, or some place where he wouldn't hear the noise of her tongue."

"Poor Jack, anybody would know by his meek, abused look, that he was henpecked," said the other; "and if there's anything in the world touches my heart, it is a mean-looking, cringing, henpecked husband. I always feel like giving him a clean shirt and a good piece of bread and butter, and wiping the tears out of his eyes, and saying: God pity and bless you, my poor fellow!"

"Yes," said her companion; "and then she feels so important. If it wasn't for poor Jack's sake, I'd never set my foot inside her door. But then she was terribly wrought upon when her baby lay so low with that spell o' fever. Tom says he wouldn't wonder if it would do her good."

"Well, it is to be hoped so, for there's plenty of room for improvement," was the reply; "but see here, would you sew his gusset right next to the band, or how?" and the muslin rustled in their hands and the conversation turned to "gusset and seam and band; band and gusset and seam."

I lay there with the cold drops of perspiration standing on my forehead, and my tongue and lips were dry and parched, while a great cry rolled up in my heart, as though it would break forth long and loud. But I sat up and clasped my hands, and thought: "Now, Dolly Norton, child, you know every word of all you have heard is true as Gospel. You have not been a good wife, you poor dear; and now you've seen yourself in a glass. You know what your honest neighbors think of you. It hurts, don't it? It's a bad tasting medicine to take; but right down with it, like a dear; good girl, and don't be angry; just go to work in earnest, and build all over anew. You will make a good, and true, and loving wife. You are not hurt at all—your selfish pride is wounded only, and that will do you good. The woman will become strong and brave, and will yet be an honor to her husband and a blessing to her baby."

And with this resolution I rose and stood beside the bed, and looked at my poor baby and thought of my dear Jack at home, and I resolved, really and positively, that, God helping me, I would be a noble woman yet, and worthy the esteem of my neighbors.

This was the first step I took in which I did not slip backward.

That was years ago. How well I have succeeded, my good neighbors can tell, and my husband and my fine blooming children.

They—husband and children and neighbors—are all that my heart could desire, and I am very happy and content with my lot.

Jacky's hair is streaked with gray, and the silvery threads lie thickly sown in the wealth of brown hair that is smoothly parted on my placid brow.

Jacky often whispers low in my ears the sweet words that have grown familiar to me now: "I thank God for the good gift of you, my darling, darling wife; not a day passes in which I do not thank Him."

LAUGHING IN MEETING.

BY MRS. H. B. STOWE.

(Christian Union.)

WE were in disgrace, we boys; and the reason was this: we had laughed out in meeting time! To be sure the occasion was a trying one, even to more disciplined nerves. Parson Lothrop had exchanged pulpits with Parson Sumner, of North Weareton. Now Parson Sumner was a man in the very outset likely to provoke the risibles of unspiritualized juveniles. He was a thin, wiry, frisky little man, in a powdered white wig, black tights, and silk stockings, with bright knee-buckles and shoe-buckles, with round dark, snapping eyes, and a curious, high, cracked, squeaking voice, the very first tones of which made all the children stare and giggle. The news that Parson Sumner was going to preach in our village spread among us as a prelude to something funny. It had a flavor like the charm of circus acting; and on the Sunday morning of our story we went to the house of God in a very hilarious state, all ready to set off in a laugh on the slightest provocation.

The occasion was not long wanting. Parson Lothrop had a favourite dog yeelp Trip, whose

behaviour in meeting was notoriously far from that edifying pattern which befits a minister's dog on Sundays. Trip was a nervous dog, and a dog that never could be taught to conceal his emotions or to respect conventionalities. If anything about the performance in the singers' seat did not please him, he was apt to express himself in a lugubrious howl. If the sermon was longer than suited him, he would gape with such a loud creak of his jaws as would arouse everybody's attention. If the flies disturbed his afternoon's nap he would give sudden snarls or snaps; or, if anything troubled his dreams, he would bark out in his sleep in a manner not only to dispel his own slumbers, but those of certain worthy deacons and old ladies, whose sanctuary repose was thereby sorely broken and troubled. For all these reasons, Madam Lothrop had been forced, as a general thing, to deny Trip the usual sanctuary privileges of good family dogs in that age, and shut him up on Sundays to private meditation. Trip, of course, was only the more set on attendance, and would hide behind doors, jump out of windows, sneak through by-ways and alleys, and lie hid till the second bell had done tolling, when suddenly he would appear in the broad aisle, innocent and happy, and take his seat as composedly as any member of the congregation.

Imagine us youngsters on the *qui vive* with excitement at seeing Parson Sumner frisk up into the pulpit with all the vivacity of a black grasshopper. We looked at each other and giggled very cautiously, with due respect to Aunt Lois' sharp observation.

At first there was only a mild, quiet simmering of giggle, compressed decorously within the bounds of propriety, and we pursed our muscles up with stringent resolution whenever we caught the apprehensive eye of our elders.

But when directly after the closing notes of the tolling second bell, Master Trip walked gravely up the front aisle, and seating himself squarely in front of the pulpit raised his nose with a critical air toward the scene of the forthcoming performance, it was too much for us—the repression was almost convulsive. Trip wore an alert, attentive air, befitting a sound, orthodox dog, who smells a possible heresy, and deems it his duty to watch the performances narrowly.

Evidently he felt called upon to see who and what were to occupy that pulpit in his master's absence.

Up rose Parson Sumner, and up went Trip's nose, vibrating with intense attention.

The Parson began in his high-cracked voice to intone the hymn:

"Sing to the Lord aloud," when Trip broke into a dismal howl.

The Parson went on to give directions to the Deacon, in the same voice in which he had been reading, so that the whole effect of the performance was somewhat as follows:

"Sing to the Lord aloud."  
"(Please to turn out that dog)—"  
"And make a joyful noise."

The dog was turned out, and the choir did their best to make a joyful noise, but we boys were upset for the rest of the day, delivered over to the temptations of Satan, and I plunged in waves and billows of hysterical giggle, from which neither winks nor frowns from Aunt Lois, nor the awful fear of the tithing-man, nor the comforting bits of fennel and orange peel, passed us by grandmother could recover us.

Everybody felt, to be sure, that here was a trial that called for some indulgence. Hard faces, even among the stoniest saints, betrayed a transient quiver of the risible muscles, old ladies put up their fans, youths and maidens, in the singers' seat laughed outright, and for the moment a general snicker among the children was pardoned. But I was one of that luckless kind whose nerves, once set in vibration, could not be composed. When the reign of gravity and decorum had returned, Harry and I sat by each other, shaking with suppressed laughter. Everything in the subsequent exercise took a funny turn, and in the long prayer, when everybody else was still and decorous, the whole scene came over me with such overpowering force that I exploded with laughter and had to be taken out of meeting and marched home by Aunt Lois, as a convicted criminal. What specially moved her indignation was that the more she rebuked and upbraided, the more I laughed, till the tears rolled down my cheeks, which Aunt Lois construed into wilful disrespect to her authority, and resented accordingly.

By Sunday evening as we gathered around the fire, the reaction from undue gaiety to sobriety had taken place, and we were in a pensive and penitential state. Grandmother was gracious and forgiving, but Aunt Lois still preserved that frosty air of reprobation which she held to be a salutary means of quickening our consciences for the future. It was, therefore, with unusual delight that we saw our old friend Sam come in and sit himself quietly down on the block in the chimney corner. With Sam we felt assured of indulgence and patronage, for though always rigidly moral and instructive in his turn of mind, he had that fellow-feeling for transgressors which is characteristic of the loose-jointed, easy-going style of his individuality.

"Lordy massy, boys—yis," said Sam virtuously in view of some of Aunt Lois' thrusts, "ye ought never to laugh nor cut up in meetin', that ar's so, but then there is times when the best on us gets took down. We gets took unawares, ye see—even ministers does. Yis, natur' will get the upper hand afore they know it."

"Why Sam, ministers don't ever laugh in meetin', do they?"

We put the question with wide eyes. Such a supposition bordered on profanity, we thought;