

ONE GOOD TURN----!

By
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"You have found it, and you must take a share--"

CHAPTER I

JACK of All Trades came to a halt.

Night was falling on the Sussex countryside. And with the night fell the rain. It came down steadily, and the dripping branches of trees on either side of the muddy lane gave no shelter. The lane seemed endless, winding through shadowy wet pasture-lands; and it seemed to the boy, wet and weary, that he was traversing a desert far from the haunts of men. It was the glimmer of a faint light through the thickening gloom that brought him to a halt.

Under the dripping trees was a little gate. Beyond, he could dimly make out the shape of a thatched cottage, the light glimmering from a tiny window. He rested his bundle on the gate, and gazed across at that glimmering light. The cottage was surrounded by a large garden, in which stood a shed. Any shelter from the rain, any lodging for the night, was welcome, even an open shed, to

the boy tired from a day's tramping. But he hesitated. Strangers after dark were likely to be regarded with suspicion, with hostility, in a lonely cottage. But the ceaseless drip-drip-drip of the rain decided him. He opened the gate at last, and tramped up a muddy, weedy path to the cottage door.

He knocked with his knuckles.

There was a sound of a movement within. But the door did not open. He knocked again, timidly. Then a voice was heard: a woman's voice in tremulous tones, in which there was a very perceptible trace of uneasiness.

"Who is there?"

In those tones Jack could read that the woman feared to open her door to a stranger's knock when night had fallen. He answered quietly:

"Please don't be alarmed! Don't open the door! Will you give me leave to shelter in your shed?"

"Who are you?"

"My name is Jack Free. I am on tramp. All I want is shelter from the rain till morning."

There was a long pause. Jack broke the silence.

"Please don't trouble—I will go on my way!"

He made a move to go. Then came the voice again.

"Stop! Is that a boy speaking—it sounds like a boy's voice."

"Yes, it is a boy speaking," answered Jack. "But you are quite right not to open your door to a stranger at night. If you wouldn't mind my sleeping in your shed, I will not disturb you in any way."

There was a rattle of a chain, and the door opened a few inches. A lamp glimmered out into the gloom, and an old wrinkled face looked out. The light fell full upon Jack's face: wet and tired, but so openly honest and frank, that few could have failed to be reassured by a single glance. The old woman looked at him steadily for a few moments, and then the wrinkles broke into a thousand creases as she smiled.

"You don't look like a Cosh boy," she said.

Jack smiled too.

"I hope not," he answered. "I am down on my luck, and on tramp, madam; that is all. If I may sleep in your shed—"

"You may come in."

The chain rattled again, as it was removed. The door was opened wide. The little old woman, half-hidden by a shawl, stepped back, holding up the lamp, for him to enter. Jack hesitated.

"I only want a shelter in the shed," he said.

"Come in, boy."

"Thank you. But—"

CHAPTER II

"A HUNDRED pounds!"
"Yes, a hundred pounds."

Jack blinked.

He had been up with the dawn. It was a bright and sunny morning after the rain, and his face was bright as the morning, when he came out of the cottage to wash at the pump. When he came back, with a cheery glowing face, old Mrs. Burr was down from her attic, and already preparing breakfast. She greeted him with a wrinkled smile.

"Sit down to breakfast, boy."

"But—!" began Jack, uneasily.

"Sit down."

He sat down.

Over a frugal breakfast he heard the simple story. She was, as he had guessed, a widow, and lived alone in the little cottage, and eked out her old-age pension by cultivating the garden,—as well as she could. There was ample space for cultivation, but to dig over that space was beyond an old woman's strength, and the greater part of it was unused, and wild with weeds. But there was one item in that simple story that was a surprise to him. Her husband had been a saving man; and, like many an old-fashioned countryman before him, he had kept his savings in his own possession. Over the years he had accumulated no less a sum than a hundred pounds, which he kept in a tin box, carefully hidden from thieves. Where it was hidden, even Mrs. Burr did not know. Women would talk, he used to say, and he was taking no risks with his life's savings. And then the end had come suddenly, and he had been unable to tell her. Somewhere about that old thatched cottage was hidden a tin box in which were packed a hundred pound notes: but as she told Jack, continual searches had failed to find it, and for years now she had given up hope of ever seeing it. A hundred pounds would have meant many comforts for her old age: but her good man's secret had been kept only too well.

"A hundred pounds!" repeated Jack, his eyes widening. To the boy on tramp, with a few shillings in his pocket, it seemed a stupendous sum.

"The savings of many, many years!" she answered. "Many, many years!"

"But it ought to be found," said Jack. "What a tremendous lot it would mean to you."

She nodded and smiled.

"It will never be found now, after all these years," she said. "If I had it,

laddie, I would give you something to help you on your way."

"No, no, no," said Jack, hastily. "I am not in need of that, Mrs. Burr. You've been kindness itself, and I wish I could repay you somehow. Is there anything I can do before I go—fetching water, or chopping wood, or anything that would help?"

"Good boy! You may chop the wood, if you like."

"Gladly," said Jack.

In the sunshine, after breakfast, he chopped the wood, and piled it neatly in the shed. As he came out of the shed, he found that the widow was already



He chopped the wood

busy, with a hoe on the potato-patch. He glanced round over the wide woody garden, and came across to her.

"You've plenty of room here for a much bigger crop," he said.

She nodded.

"My old hands could not do the work," was her answer.

"But my hands are young and strong," said Jack. "And I'm going to dig over the whole garden, and clear off every spot of weed, before I go on my way, Mrs. Burr. I know something about gardening." He laughed, "I've been called Jack of All Trades, and I can turn my hand to anything."

"But I could not pay you anything—"

"I wouldn't let you, if you could. One good turn deserves another, doesn't it? In a couple of days, ma'am you won't know this garden when you look at it. There won't be a weed left."

"But, my dear boy," faltered the widow, "I must be plain—I could not give you even your meals."

"And I wouldn't let you, either," said Jack. "I've enough to see me through, and I'm going to cut down to the village for some shopping, and then I'm going to set to work. You're going to have the whole garden planted up from fence to fence, before you see the last of me, ma'am."

There was a glimmer of a tear in the widow's eyes.

"You're a good boy, Jack," she said. "God bless you."

And for the next two or three days, "Jack of All Trades" had a new trade added to his list: digging and delving and hoeing and weeding from early morn till dewy eve.

CHAPTER III

CLINK!
"Bother!"

It was the last section,—a hard and stony patch in a remote corner of the long cottage garden. Jack had left it till last, and was in fact a little doubtful about digging it at all: it hardly seemed worth while. But he would not leave a job unfinished. The remainder of the garden had been dug over, and rich smooth crumbled earth was pleasant to the eye in all but that one spot. So at last he came to it, and under a shining sun, delved away industriously. It was hard, it was stony: and he changed the spade for a garden-fork, and laboured on. And as a prong of the fork clinked on something hard, he concluded it was a larger stone than usual, and ejaculated "Bother!"

He added "Blow!" as he withdrew the fork, and found that the prong was bent from the sudden hard contact. However, he fetched a hammer from the shed, and proceeded to hammer the prong straight again. Bang, bang, bang, echoed over the garden: and Mrs. Burr, sitting knitting at the cottage door, looked over at him, and then laid down her knitting and came across.

"It's too hard for you, boy," she said. "Leave it."

Jack shook his head.

"I'll hammer this straight in two ticks, ma'am," he answered. "Another hour or so and I'll be through."

"You've made the garden look lovely already," said the widow. "And that corner patch never did grow anything—it has never been planted up before."

"Its going to be planted up now," said Jack. "I'm going to leave every inch of your garden in apple-pie order, ma'am. Here goes."

He started in with the fork again.

Clink!

"Bother that stone," said Jack. "I'll have to dig round it, and hook it out! It sounds more like metal than a stone: but I suppose there can't be any old cans or kettles buried here. I'll have it out anyway."

"But you are getting tired—"

"Not a bit! Here it comes—Oh! What the dickens! Look!" Jack stared.



"It is the box my husband kept his savings in—"

It was not a stone, and not an old disused can or kettle, that turned up on the fork. It was a rusted tin box.

"An old tin box!" said Jack. "I thought it sounded like metal. Well, it's out now." He tossed it aside with the fork. He was about to plunge the prongs into the earth again, when a cry from the widow startled him.

"Boy! That box!"

Jack looked at her. The old wrinkled face was ablaze with an excitement that puzzled him. She pointed to the box with a shaking hand.

"What about it?" asked the boy. "Just an old tin box, looks as if it's been there for years, rusting—."

"That box—it is the box my husband kept his savings in—."

"What?"

"That box—I know it again at once—."

"Oh!" gasped Jack.

He snatched up the box. It had been locked: but the lock had rusted, and snapped at a touch. He opened the rusty lid.

"Is it—is it—?" The widow's voice faltered.

"Oh! Look!"

Jack, with dancing eyes, groped in the tin box. His hand came out with a roll of engraved slips of paper in it. He handed the roll to the widow, who took it in trembling fingers.

"Pound notes!" she whispered. "My husband's savings—his life's savings, which he meant for me—and you have found it!" The tears streamed down the old wrinkled face. "My dear boy! My dear boy!"

"Hurray!" shouted Jack.

"So that was where it was hidden—buried in that stony patch which was never dug! And you have found it! If you had not dug my garden for me, it would never have been found."

"You gave me shelter," said Jack. "And didn't I say that one good turn deserved another,—but who would have thought of this! Oh, I'm so glad, ma'am, so glad!"

"You have found it, and you must take a share—."

"No fear! Not so much as a threepenny-bit!" answered Jack, promptly. "But if you'll let me advise you, ma'am, you'll go straight down to the village and put it in the Post Office Savings Bank while it's safe. I'll finish digging over this patch while your gone."



He went with a widow's blessing

JACK of All Trades went on his way, his bundle on his shoulder, his face bright and cheery in the sunshine. He went with a widow's blessing and a light heart.

THE END