

J. COLE

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J. Cole by Emma Gellibrand

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EMMA GELLIBRAND

J. COLE

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By Emma
Gellibrand

Philadelphia
Henry Altemus Company

J. COLE.

"HONNERD MADAM,

"Wich i hav seed in the paper a page Boy wanted, and begs to say J. Cole is over thertene. and I can clene plate, wich my brutter is under a butler and lernd me, and I can wate, and no how to clene winders and boots. J. Cole opes you will let me cum. I arks 8 and all found. if you do my washin I will take seven. J. Cole will serve you well and opes to giv sattisfashun. i can cum tomorrer. J. COLE.

"P. S.—He is not verry torl but growin. My brutter is a verry good hite. i am sharp and can rede and rite and can hadd figgers if you like."

CHAPTER I.

I HAD advertised for a page-boy, and having puzzled through some dozens of answers, more or less illegible and impossible to understand, had come to the last one of the packet, of which the above is an exact copy.

The epistle was enclosed in a clumsy envelope, evidently home-made, with the aid of scissors and gum, and was written on a half-sheet of letter-paper, in a large hand, with many blots and smears, on pencilled lines.

There was something quaint and straightforward in the letter, in spite of the utter ignorance of grammar and spelling; and while I smiled at the evident pride in the "bruther" who was a "verry good hite," and the offer to take less wages if "I would do his washin," I found myself wondering what sort of a waif upon the sea of life was this not very tall person, over thirteen, who "would serve me well."

I had many letters to answer and several appointments to make, and had scarcely made up my mind whether or not to trouble to write to my accomplished correspondent, who was "sharp, and could rede and rite, and hadd figgers," when, a shadow falling on the ground by me as I sat by the open window, I looked up, and saw, standing opposite my chair, a boy—the very smallest boy, with the very largest blue eyes I ever saw. The clothes on his little limbs were evidently meant for somebody almost double his size, but they were clean and tidy.

In one hand he held a bundle, tied in a red handkerchief and in the other a bunch of wild-flowers that bore signs of having travelled far in the heat of the sun, their blossoms hanging down, dusty and fading, and their petals dropping one by one on the ground.

"Who are you, my child?" I said, "and what do you want."

At my question the boy placed his flowers on my

table, and, pulling off his cap, made a queer movement with his feet, as though he were trying to step backwards with both at once, and said, in a voice so deep that it quite startled me, so strangely did it seem to belong to the size of the clothes, and not the wearer,—

“Please, ’m, it’s J. Cole; I’ve come to live with yer. I’ve brought all my clothes, and everythink.”

For the moment I felt a little bewildered, so impossible did it seem that the small specimen of humanity before me was actually intending to enter anybody’s service; he looked so childish and wistful, and yet with a certain honesty of purpose shining out of those big, wide-open eyes, that interested me in him, and made me want to know more of him.

“You are very small to go into service,” I said, “and I am afraid you could not do the work I should require; besides, you should have waited to hear from me, and then have come to see me, if I wanted you to do so.”

“Yes, I know I’m not very big,” said the boy, nervously fidgiting with his bundle; “leastways not in hite; but my arms is that long, they’ll reach ever so ’igh above my ’ed, and as for bein’ strong, you should jest see me lift my father’s big market basket when it’s loaded with ’taters, or wotever is for market and I hope you’ll not be angry because I come to-day; but Dick—that’s my brutther Dick—

he says, 'You foller my advice, Joe,' he says, 'and go arter this 'ere place, and don't let no grass grow under your feet. I knows what it is goin' arter places; there's such lots of fitin' after 'em, that if you lets so much as a hour go afore yer looks-'em up, theres them as slips in fust gets it; and wen yer goes to the door they opens it and sez, 'It ain't no use, boy, we're sooted;'" and then where are yer, I'd like to know? So,' sez he, 'Joe, you look sharp and go, and maybe you'll get it.' So I come, mum, and please, that's all."

"But about your character, my boy," I said. "You must have somebody to speak for you, and say you are honest, and what you are able to do. I always want a good character with my servants; the last page-boy I had brought three years' good character from his former situation."

"Lor!" said Joe, with a serious look, "did he stay three years in a place afore he came to you? Wotever did he leave them people for, where he were so comfortable? If I stay with you three years, you won't catch me a leavin' yer, and goin' somewhere else. Wot a muff that chap was!"

I explained that it did not always depend on whether a servant wanted to stay or not, but whether it suited the employers to keep him.

"'Praps he did somethin', and they giv' 'm the sack," murmured Joe; "he was a flat!"

"But about this character of yours," I said; "if

I decide to give you a trial, although I am almost sure you are too small, and won't do, where am I to go for your character? Will the people where your brother lives speak for you?"

"Oh, yes!" cried the little fellow, his cheeks flushing; "I know Dick'll ask 'em to give me a caricter. Miss Edith, I often cleaned 'er boots. Once she come 'ome in the mud, and was a-goin' out agin directly; and they was lace-ups, and a orful bother to do up even; and she come into the stable-yard with 'er dog, and sez: 'Dick, will you chain Tiger up, and this little boy may clean my boots if he likes, on my feet?' So I cleaned 'em, and she giv' me sixpence; and after that, when the boots came down in the mornin', I got Dick always to let me clean them little boots, and I kep 'em clean in the insides, like the lady's maid she told me not to put my 'ands inside 'em if they was black. Miss Edith, she'll giv me a caricter, if Dick asks 'er."

Just then the visitors' bell rang, and I sent my would-be page into the kitchen to wait until I could speak to him again, and told him to ask the cook to give him something to eat.

"Here are your flowers," I said; "take them with you."

He looked at me, and then, as if ashamed of having offered them, gathered them up in his hands, and with the corner of the handkerchief wiped some leaves and dust-marks off my table, then saying in

a low voice, "I didn't know you 'ad beauties of yer own, like them in the glass pots, but I'll giv' 'em to the cook." So saying, he went away into the kitchen, and my visitors came in, and by and by some more friends arrived.

The weather was very warm, and we sat chattering and enjoying the shade of the trees by the open French window. Presently, somebody being thirsty, I suggested lemonade and ice, and I offered strawberries, and (if possible) cream; though my mind misgave me as to the latter delicacy, for we had several times been obliged to do without some of our luxuries if they entailed "*fetching*," as we had no boy to run errands quickly on an emergency and be useful. However, I rang the bell; and when the housemaid, whose temper, since she had been what is curiously termed in servant's-hall language "single-handed," was most trying, entered, I said "Make some lemonade Mary, and ask cook to gather some strawberries quickly, and bring them, with some cream."

Mary looked at me as who should say, "Well, I'm sure! and who's to do it all? You'll have to wait a bit." And I know we should have to wait, and therefore resigned myself to do so patiently, keeping up the ball of gossip, and wondering if a little music later on would perhaps while away the time.

Much to my amazement, in less than a quarter of