

Making an Impression by Dianne Berryman

The Christmas visit couldn't have been more successful. Well, except for the mouse invasion in their bedroom, but Mum and Dad had been full of praise for the tally of mice trapped that they had triumphantly announced each morning. It did mean a rather disrupted sleep as Jack had been sure to jump up to clear out and reset the traps as soon as they went off, which was pretty much every hour. But he was happy to be doing his part to clear out this unnecessary source of disease in the house, especially as the unpleasant alternative was to have dead mice in the room with him and live ones still roaming without further traps to stop them.

It was just one of the many areas in which Jack had made such a positive and lasting impression on her parents. He had worked tirelessly for two weeks to show them what an intelligent, kind and helpful partner their daughter had found, and how well he could fit in with their family.

Within the first day he had leapt in to help out around the house. The display cabinet that Mum had been talking of moving for years was now in the spare room where she'd wanted it. Mind you, they'd had to clear out quite a bit of junk to make room in the rather inaccurately named spare room. Mum had made some token protests about Jack and Nadine being on holidays and that they should be relaxing and enjoying themselves, but they'd been determined to lend a hand. Goodness knows, Mum needed the help. The house was a hoarders paradise and a fire risk, and her parents were both getting to the age when they needed to be more careful to avoid falls around the house. Surely, one of them would end up with a broken hip if they didn't have a caring daughter and her new boyfriend helping to clear out the clutter. The display cabinet had been too heavy to move without emptying the contents out first which had been a wonderful opportunity to throw out some of the rubbish that had accumulated in it. Heavens, there were even pieces of artwork Nadine had created in primary school still lurking in the shelves.

And of course they'd made sure not to add an extra burden to Mum with extra mouths to feed. Jack had really enjoyed showing them how well he could cook and that they didn't have to worry about Nadine having to take the full brunt of the kitchen workload in their relationship. It was quite an educational experience for Mum and Dad to learn about the importance of using the correct low GI bread and rice, and that not every meal had to have meat. With Mum's diabetes and Dad's family history of heart problems, it was all information that they needed to know. Nadine had been aware that her Mum had been a little concerned when told that Jack was vegetarian, but she needn't have worried. Jack had been quite happy to do most of the cooking so Mum hadn't had to worry about special meals. He'd even introduced them to the pleasures of banana smoothies with his variable speed electric whisk that just couldn't be beaten for quality smoothies.

Jack and Nadine had arrived laden with food supplies. It could be a bit risky relying on the farm food as it wasn't always easy for her parents to get to the grocery store regularly enough to buy fresh food. It had been a bit of a squeeze to fit all their foodstuffs in the fridge, especially with all the Christmas provisions Mum had stocked up on, but there had been just enough room after Nadine had emptied everything out for a bit of an overdue spring clean. Some of the use-by dates on those bottles didn't bear mentioning.

Jack had enthusiastically helped out on the farm too. He'd brought over a couple of his rifles to get those pesky rabbits and foxes under control. Dad had been suitably impressed with the clever little mouse squeaker Jack used to attract the foxes and the top of the range telescopic sight on his fox rifle. There were probably a dozen little lambs that would now make it to adulthood since Jack killed those three foxes that were prowling around. And, as Jack pointed out, Mums chickens would be safer too. Nadine's parents were very appreciative of that.

Fortunately, Nadine had stopped Jack just in time before he mistook her parents pet cat as a feral. Understandable really, the cat was rather grotty.

Jack had taken an opportunity to show Dad his handyman skills too. When one of the outside taps started gushing water and Dad was busy out in the paddocks, unable to come in to fix it, Jack came to the rescue. His fast work had saved Mum from the inconvenience of having the water turned off for several hours or the alternative of a huge water bill. The plumbing tools were a bit rusty but Jack had made do with what was in the shed. He'd even given the tools a bit of a polish and clean up afterwards and tidied up the shed into the bargain. Poor Dad just has too much to do on the farm, and he couldn't have had a more helpful person than Jack.

It had been great to see them go off fishing together, that optimal activity of male bonding. After about 8 hours, Mum and Nadine were getting a little worried, but it turned out they were just having too good a time to come in. Jack had brought over his favourite rod and reel and had caught quite a few fish with it. Dads tackle must have needed some updating as he hadn't caught as many. They'd stayed out extra long as Dad had wanted to show Jack all of his favourite fishing spots. When they finally came home, they had a lovely meal of fish that night, with some veggie patties for Jack.

Nadine rued that it was hard to get much done for Mum and Dad in only two short weeks. Her parents had insisted on the young ones going camping for a week to experience some of the beautiful beaches and parks in the local area. That had been lovely, but as they lived such a long way from her parents, they didn't want to spend too much time just exploring the countryside. There was so little time to achieve everything they wanted to achieve, and for Jack to get to know her family, so they cut their camping trip short and went back home early. Just as well that they had – the mouse traps hadn't been reset without Nadine and Jack there to supervise.

Nadine was getting very concerned about her parents. Dad really should be starting to slow down and think about retirement, and the big house was really becoming too much for Mum to handle. Why didn't they think about buying a little house in the town where they could get involved with the social activities of other people in their age group. Jack had lots of great suggestions too.

Her parents didn't seem to want to talk about it, but this was only because Christmas was such a busy time. At least now she'd planted the seed for them to think about it when things were quieter.

As they drove away, waving out the back window, Jack asked if Nadine's parents had liked him. Nadine assured him they had. How could they not? He'd been everything they could possibly have wished for in a partner for their daughter. It was just a shame that they lived so far away and couldn't visit more often.

Madge and Dave kept smiling as the top-of-the-range 4 wheel drive Prado drove off, the dust slowly settling behind it. The smiles were much easier to maintain now that the visit had ended.

"Hope he didn't forget to pack any of his new-fangled gadgets", said Dave.

"Don't worry, I made sure I'd cleared them all out of my kitchen, now that I can call it my kitchen again," Madge replied.

"Sorry I couldn't get him out of your hair a bit more, Love, but that fishing trip was about as much as I could take. The little upstart couldn't stop crowing about how many more fish he had. My bait must have been off."

"The camping holiday was a great idea. Perhaps we should have booked them in somewhere and paid for it so they didn't come back so early."

"Couldn't wait to be the hero with the fox shooting. Guess we could have burst his bubble and told him the baits were going out in a few weeks."

"Bit weird that, a vegetarian who likes to catch fish, shoot foxes, and almost had our cat lined up as well, but still gets hysterical over a few mice in the house. Surely he knew he was coming to a farm, and when a mouse plague is on, they do get in the house."

"Well at least they're well matched. Wouldn't have thought she could find someone else with the same level of do-goodiness, but she's managed it. And she seems happy. I guess that's all we can ask for."

"And we can be thankful they live too far away to visit more often."

