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## A Manual for Cleaning Women

by Janie Reynolds

If I 'ad known what I know now, I might 'ave just worked behind the tills.

Today I'm 'anging up the dusters for good. Tha's it. Just goin' to 'ave to live off me pension. I can't even do more 'elpin' out. I can't grumble. I've had a good workin' life. I'm 'ere aren' I?

But for any ladies out there who's interested in the cleanin' business, I've a few fings to say. That might 'elp along the way. Or might just make 'em think twice!

First, you need strong bones. People are paying you to work your bones for them, because they 'ate working their own bones. Fink they're better than that. To 'ave to work their own bones, cleaning up their own muck. They tell you it's because they're too busy. That they work an' all that. Which is usually true, that they're busy an' all, but not *really* too busy, an' they know it. They know it only takes a few hours to clean an 'ouse.

When I see the ads for cleaners, I always chuckle and fink 'just look on the shelves in Tesco's, you'll find plenty of cleaners there'. But people are people, an' lazy, and I wouldn't clean up me muck if I didn't 'ave to.

Me bones always ached after a day's cleanin'. Sometimes I couldn't sleep for the pain in me arms and shoulders. A painkiller before bed helped. Knocked it down wiv a glass of whiskey, I did! The bits you use most go the first. When I first started cleanin', twenty years ago, everything swelled up in me 'ole body but mainly me 'ands. I went to the doctor's finking I was ill but he just said it was the cleaning an' that I should give it up. I didn't 'fink that was very helpful of the doctor, to say that. I 'ad two kids. And meself. So I just got on wiv it. That was a dark time that was. I cried a lot wiv the pain. Under me feet hurt the worst, in the mornings and the evenings. I 'ad to hop and tiptoe for a long time. Foam glued into me shoes 'elped. I 'ad everyfing round me bed. The telly, me painkillers, me books, me whiskey and a big jug of water, so I didn't 'ave to move once I got into me bed.

I decided it was finally time to 'ang up the dishcloths when even me bones started to swell. Doctor 'as said it's arthritis. If I carried on I'd never prepare another vegetable again. Even the remote control kills me.

Anyway, I'm not one to grumble. As I say, I've 'ad a good life. Always 'eld onto me jobs. Fink that was because I kept me ears closed, me mouth shut and me head down. Took the blame for losses and breakages. Never stopped working to talk. Rubbed hard with the dusters, so it shone in the light.