SAILOR'S KNOTS

W. W. Jacobs



ALICE & BOOKS

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PUBLISHED: 1909
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DESERTED

“Sailormen ain't wot you might call dandyfied as a rule,” said the night-watchman, who had just had a passage of arms with a lighterman and been advised to let somebody else wash him and make a good job of it; “they've got too much sense. They leave dressing up and making eyesores of their-selves to men wot 'ave never smelt salt water; men wot drift up and down the river in lighters and get in everybody's way.”

He glanced fiercely at the retreating figure of the lighterman, and, turning a deaf ear to a request for a lock of his hair to patch a favorite doormat with, resumed with much vigor his task of sweeping up the litter.

The most dressy sailorman I ever knew, he continued, as he stood the broom up in a corner and seated himself on a keg, was a young feller named Rupert Brown. His mother gave 'im the name of Rupert while his father was away at sea, and when he came 'ome it was too late to alter it. All that a man could do he did do, and Mrs. Brown 'ad a black eye till 'e went to sea agin. She was a very obstinate woman, though—like most of 'em—and a little over a year arterwards got pore old Brown three months' hard by nam-ing 'er next boy Roderick Alfonso.

Young Rupert was on a barge when I knew 'im fust, but he got tired of always 'aving dirty hands arter a time, and went and enlisted as a soldier. I lost sight of 'im for a while, and then one evening he turned up on furlough and come to see me.

O' course, by this time 'e was tired of soldiering, but wot upset 'im more than anything was always 'aving to be dressed the same and not being able to wear a collar and neck-tie. He said that if it wasn't for the sake of good old England, and the chance o' getting six months, he'd desert. I tried to give 'im good advice, and, if I'd only known 'ow I was to be dragged into it, I'd ha' given 'im a lot more.

As it 'appened he deserted the very next arternoon. He was in the Three Widders at Aldgate, in the saloon bar—which is a place where you get a penn'orth of ale in a glass and pay twopence for it—and, arter being told by the barmaid that she had got one monkey at 'ome, he got into conversation with another man wot was in there.

He was a big man with a black moustache and a red face, and 'is fingers all smothered in di'mond rings. He 'ad got on a gold watch-chain as thick as a rope, and a scarf-pin the size of a large walnut, and he had 'ad a few words with the barmaid on 'is own account. He seemed to take a fancy to Rupert from the fust, and in a few minutes he 'ad given 'im a big cigar out of a seal-skin case and ordered 'im a glass of sherry wine.



He seemed to take a fancy to Rupert from the fust.

"Have you ever thought o' going on the stage?" he ses, arter Rupert 'ad told 'im of his dislike for the Army.

"No," ses Rupert, staring.

"You s'prise me," ses the big man; "you're wasting of your life by not doing so."

"But I can't act," ses Rupert.

“Stuff and nonsense!” ses the big man. “Don't tell me. You've got an actor's face. I'm a manager myself, and I know. I don't mind telling you that I refused twenty-three men and forty-eight ladies only yesterday.”

“I wonder you don't drop down dead,” ses the barmaid, lifting up 'is glass to wipe down the counter.

The manager looked at her, and, arter she 'ad gone to talk to a gentleman in the next bar wot was knocking double knocks on the counter with a pint pot, he whispered to Rupert that she 'ad been one of them.

“She can't act a bit,” he ses. “Now, look 'ere; I'm a business man and my time is valuable. I don't know nothing, and I don't want to know nothing; but, if a nice young feller, like yourself, for example, was tired of the Army and wanted to escape, I've got one part left in my company that 'ud suit 'im down to the ground.”

“Wot about being reckernized?” ses Rupert.

The manager winked at 'im. “It's the part of a Zulu chief,” he ses, in a whisper.

Rupert started. “But I should 'ave to black my face,” he ses.

“A little,” ses the manager; “but you'd soon get on to better parts—and see wot a fine disguise it is.”

He stood 'im two more glasses o' sherry wine, and, arter he' ad drunk 'em, Rupert gave way. The manager patted 'im on the back, and said that if he wasn't earning fifty pounds a week in a year's time he'd eat his 'ead; and the barmaid, wot 'ad come back agin, said it was the best thing he could do with it, and she wondered he 'adn't thought of it afore.

They went out separate, as the manager said it would be better for them not to be seen together, and Rupert, keeping about a dozen yards behind, follered 'im down the Mile End Road. By and by the manager stopped outside a shop-window wot 'ad been boarded up and stuck all over with savages dancing and killing white people and hunting elephants, and, arter turning round and giving Rupert a nod, opened the door with a key and went inside.

“That's all right,” he ses, as Rupert follered 'im in. “This is my wife, Mrs. Alfredi,” he ses, introducing 'im to a fat, red-'aired lady wot was sitting in-

side sewing. “She has performed before all the crowned 'eads of Europe. That di'mond brooch she's wearing was a present from the Emperor of Germany, but, being a married man, he asked 'er to keep it quiet.”

Rupert shook 'ands with Mrs. Alfredi, and then her 'usband led 'im to a room at the back, where a little lame man was cleaning up things, and told 'im to take his clothes off.

“If they was mine,” he ses, squinting at the fire-place, “I should know wot to do with 'em.”

Rupert laughed and slapped 'im on the back, and, arter cutting his uniform into pieces, stuffed it into the fireplace and pulled the dampers out. He burnt up 'is boots and socks and everything else, and they all three laughed as though it was the best joke in the world. Then Mr. Alfredi took his coat off and, dipping a piece of rag into a basin of stuff wot George 'ad fetched, did Rupert a lovely brown all over.

“That's the fust coat,” he ses. “Now take a stool in front of the fire and let it soak in.”

He gave 'im another coat arf an hour arterwards, while George curled his 'air, and when 'e was dressed in bracelets round 'is ankles and wrists, and a leopard-skin over his shoulder, he was as fine a Zulu as you could wish for to see. His lips was naturally thick and his nose flat, and even his eyes 'appened to be about the right color.

“He's a fair perfect treat,” ses Mr. Alfredi. “Fetch Kumbo in, George.”

The little man went out, and came back agin shoving in a fat, stumpy Zulu woman wot began to grin and chatter like a poll-parrot the moment she saw Rupert.

“It's all right,” ses Mr. Alfredi; “she's took a fancy to you.”

“Is—is she an actress?” ses Rupert.

“One o' the best,” ses the manager. “She'll teach you to dance and shy assegais. Pore thing! she buried her 'usband the day afore we come here, but you'll be surprised to see 'ow skittish she can be when she has got over it a bit.”

They sat there while Rupert practised—till he started shying the assegais, that is—and then they went out and left 'im with Kumbo. Considering that she 'ad only just buried her 'usband, Rupert found her quite skittish enough, and he couldn't 'elp wondering wot she'd be like when she'd got over her grief a bit more.

The manager and George said he 'ad got on wonderfully, and arter talking it over with Mrs. Alfredi they decided to open that evening, and pore Rupert found out that the shop was the theatre, and all the acting he'd got to do was to dance war-dances and sing in Zulu to people wot had paid a penny a 'ead. He was a bit nervous at fust, for fear anybody should find out that 'e wasn't a real Zulu, because the manager said they'd tear 'im to pieces if they did, and eat 'im arterwards, but arter a time 'is nervousness wore off and he jumped about like a monkey.

They gave performances every arf hour from ha'-past six to ten, and Rupert felt ready to drop. His feet was sore with dancing and his throat ached with singing Zulu, but wot upset 'im more than anything was an elderly old party wot would keep jabbing 'im in the ribs with her umbrella to see whether he could laugh.



An elderly old party wot would keep jabbing 'im in the ribs with her umbrella.

They 'ad supper arter they 'ad closed, and then Mr. Alfredi and 'is wife went off, and Rupert and George made up beds for themselves in the shop, while Kumbo 'ad a little place to herself at the back.

He did better than ever next night, and they all said he was improving fast; and Mr. Alfredi told 'im in a whisper that he thought he was better at it than Kumbo. “Not that I should mind 'er knowing much,” he ses, “seeing that she's took such a fancy to you.”

“Ah, I was going to speak to you about that,” ses Rupert. “Forwardness is no name for it; if she don't keep 'erself to 'erself, I shall chuck the whole thing up.”

The manager coughed behind his 'and. “And go back to the Army?” he ses. “Well, I should be sorry to lose you, but I won't stand in your way.”

Mrs. Alfredi, wot was standing by, stuffed her pocket-'ankercher in 'er mouth, and Rupert began to feel a bit uneasy in his mind.

“If I did,” he ses, “you'd get into trouble for 'elping me to desert.”

“Desert!” ses Mr. Alfredi. “I don't know anything about your deserting.”

“Ho!” ses Rupert. “And wot about my uniform?”

“Uniform?” ses Mr. Alfredi. “Wot uniform? I ain't seen no uniform. Where is it?”

Rupert didn't answer 'im, but arter they 'ad gone 'ome he told George that he 'ad 'ad enough of acting and he should go.

“Where to?” ses George.

“I'll find somewhere,” ses Rupert. “I sha'n't starve.”

“You might ketch your death o' cold, though,” ses George.

Rupert said he didn't mind, and then he shut 'is eyes and pretended to be asleep. His idea was to wait till George was asleep and then pinch 'is clothes; consequently 'is feelings when 'e opened one eye and saw George getting into bed with 'is clothes on won't bear thinking about. He laid awake for hours, and three times that night George, who was a very heavy sleeper, woke up and found Rupert busy tucking him in.

By the end of the week Rupert was getting desperate. He hated being black for one thing, and the more he washed the better color he looked. He didn't mind the black for out o' doors, in case the Army was looking for 'im, but 'aving no clothes he couldn't get out o' doors; and when he said he wouldn't perform unless he got some, Mr. Alfredi dropped 'ints about having 'im took up for a deserter.

“I've 'ad my suspicions of it for some days,” he ses, with a wink, “though you did come to me in a nice serge suit and tell me you was an actor. Now, you be a good boy for another week and I'll advance you a couple o' pounds to get some clothes with.”

Rupert asked him to let 'im have it then, but 'e wouldn't, and for another week he 'ad to pretend 'e was a Zulu of an evening, and try and persuade Kumbo that he was an English gentleman of a daytime.

He got the money at the end of the week and 'ad to sign a paper to give a month's notice any time he wanted to leave, but he didn't mind that at all, being determined the fust time he got outside the place to run away and ship as a nigger cook if 'e couldn't get the black off.

He made a list o' things out for George to get for 'im, but there seemed to be such a lot for two pounds that Mr. Alfredi shook his 'ead over it; and arter calling 'imself a soft-'arted fool, and saying he'd finish up in the work-house, he made it three pounds and told George to look sharp.

"He's a very good marketer," he ses, arter George 'ad gone; "he don't mind wot trouble he takes. He'll very likely haggle for hours to get sixpence knocked off the trousers or twopence off the shirt."

It was twelve o'clock in the morning when George went, and at ha'-past four Rupert turned nasty, and said 'e was afraid he was trying to get them for nothing. At five o'clock he said George was a fool, and at ha'-past he said 'e was something I won't repeat.

It was just eleven o'clock, and they 'ad shut up for the night, when the front door opened, and George stood there smiling at 'em and shaking his 'ead.

"Sush a lark," he ses, catching 'old of Mr. Alfredi's arm to steady 'imself. "I gave 'im shlip."

"Wot d'ye mean?" ses the manager, shaking him off. "Gave who the slip? Where's them clothes?"

"Boy's got 'em," ses George, smiling agin and catching hold of Kumbo's arm. "Sush a lark; he's been car-carrying 'em all day—all day. Now I've giv-en 'im the—the shlip, 'stead o'—'stead o' giving 'im fourpence. Take care o' the pensh, an' pouns—"

He let go o' Kumbo's arm, turned round twice, and then sat down 'eavy and fell fast asleep. The manager rushed to the door and looked out, but there was no signs of the boy, and he came back shaking his 'ead, and said that George 'ad been drinking agin.

“Well, wot about my clothes?” ses Rupert, hardly able to speak.

“P'r'aps he didn't buy 'em arter all,” ses the manager. “Let's try 'is pockets.”

He tried fust, and found some strawberries that George 'ad spoilt by sitting on. Then he told Rupert to have a try, and Rupert found some bits of string, a few buttons, two penny stamps, and twopence ha'penny in coppers.

“Never mind,” ses Mr. Alfredi; “I'll go round to the police-station in the morning; p'r'aps the boy 'as taken them there. I'm disapp'inted in George. I shall tell 'im so, too.”

He bid Rupert good-night and went off with Mrs. Alfredi; and Rupert, wishful to make the best o' things, decided that he would undress George and go off in 'is clothes. He waited till Kumbo 'ad gone off to bed, and then he started to take George's coat off. He got the two top buttons undone all right, and then George turned over in 'is sleep. It surprised Rupert, but wot surprised 'im more when he rolled George over was to find them two buttons done up agin. Arter it had 'appened three times he see 'ow it was, and he come to the belief that George was no more drunk than wot he was, and that it was all a put-up thing between 'im and Mr. Alfredi.

He went to bed then to think it over, and by the morning he 'ad made up his mind to keep quiet and bide his time, as the saying is. He spoke quite cheerful to Mr. Alfredi, and pretended to believe 'im when he said that he 'ad been to the police-station about the clothes.

Two days arterwards he thought of something; he remembered me. He 'ad found a dirty old envelope on the floor, and with a bit o' lead pencil he wrote me a letter on the back of one o' the bills, telling me all his troubles, and asking me to bring some clothes and rescue 'im. He stuck on one of the stamps he 'ad found in George's pocket, and opening the door just afore going to bed threw it out on the pavement.

The world is full of officious, interfering busy-bodies. I should no more think of posting a letter that didn't belong to me, with an unused stamp on it, than I should think o' flying; but some meddle-some son of a ——a gun posted that letter and I got it.

I was never more surprised in my life. He asked me to be outside the shop next night at ha'-past eleven with any old clothes I could pick up. If I

didn't, he said he should 'ang 'imself as the clock struck twelve, and that his ghost would sit on the wharf and keep watch with me every night for the rest o' my life. He said he expected it 'ud have a black face, same as in life.

A wharf is a lonely place of a night; especially our wharf, which is full of dark corners, and, being a silly, good-natured fool, I went. I got a pal off of one of the boats to keep watch for me, and, arter getting some old rags off of another sailorman as owed me arf a dollar, I 'ad a drink and started off for the Mile End Road.

I found the place easy enough. The door was just on the jar, and as I tapped on it with my finger-nails a wild-looking black man, arf naked, opened it and said "H'sh!" and pulled me inside. There was a bit o' candle on the floor, shaded by a box, and a man fast asleep and snoring up in one corner. Rupert dressed like lightning, and he 'ad just put on 'is cap when the door at the back opened and a 'orrid fat black woman came out and began to chatter.

Rupert told her to hush, and she 'ushed, and then he waved 'is hand to 'er to say "good-bye," and afore you could say Jack Robinson she 'ad grabbed up a bit o' dirty blanket, a bundle of assegais, and a spear, and come out arter us.

"Back!" ses Rupert in a whisper, pointing.



"Back!" ses Rupert in a whisper, pointing.

Kumbo shook her 'ead, and then he took hold of 'er and tried to shove 'er back, but she wouldn't go. I lent him a 'and, but all wimmen are the same, black or white, and afore I knew where I was she 'ad clawed my cap off and scratched me all down one side of the face.

"Walk fast," ses Rupert.

I started to run, but it was all no good; Kumbo kept up with us easy, and she was so pleased at being out in the open air that she began to dance and play about like a kitten. Instead o' minding their own business people turned and follered us, and quite a crowd collected.

"We shall 'ave the police in a minute," ses Rupert. "Come in 'ere—quick."

He pointed to a pub up a side street, and went in with Kumbo holding on to his arm. The barman was for sending us out at fust, but such a crowd

follered us in that he altered 'is mind. I ordered three pints, and, while I was 'anding Rupert his, Kumbo finished 'ers and began on mine. I tried to explain, but she held on to it like grim death, and in the confusion Rupert slipped out.

He 'adn't been gone five seconds afore she missed 'im, and I never see anybody so upset in all my life. She spilt the beer all down the place where 'er bodice ought to ha' been, and then she dropped the pot and went arter 'im like a hare. I follered in a different way, and when I got round the corner I found she 'ad caught 'im and was holding 'im by the arm.

O' course, the crowd was round us agin, and to get rid of 'em I did a thing I'd seldom done afore—I called a cab, and we all bundled in and drove off to the wharf, with the spear sticking out o' the window, and most of the assegais sticking into me.

"This is getting serious," ses Rupert.

"Yes," I ses; "and wot 'ave I done to be dragged into it? You must ha' been paying 'er some attention to make 'er carry on like this."

I thought Rupert would ha' bust, and the things he said to the man wot was spending money like water to rescue 'im was disgraceful.

We got to the wharf at last, and I was glad to see that my pal 'ad got tired of night-watching and 'ad gone off, leaving the gate open. Kumbo went in 'anging on to Rupert's arm, and I follered with the spear, which I 'ad held in my 'and while I paid the cabman.

They went into the office, and Rupert and me talked it over while Kumbo kept patting 'is cheek. He was afraid that the manager would track 'im to the wharf, and I was afraid that the guv'nor would find out that I 'ad been neglecting my dooty, for the fust time in my life.

We talked all night pretty near, and then, at ha'-past five, arf an hour afore the 'ands came on, I made up my mind to fetch a cab and drive 'em to my 'ouse. I wanted Rupert to go somewhere else, but 'e said he 'ad got nowhere else to go, and it was the only thing to get 'em off the wharf. I opened the gates at ten minutes to six, and just as the fust man come on and walked down the wharf we slipped in and drove away.

We was all tired and yawning. There's something about the motion of a cab or an omnibus that always makes me feel sleepy, and arter a time I closed my eyes and went off sound. I remember I was dreaming that I 'ad found a bag o' money, when the cab pulled up with a jerk in front of my 'ouse and woke me up. Opposite me sat Kumbo fast asleep, and Rupert 'ad disappeared!

I was dazed for a moment, and afore I could do anything Kumbo woke up and missed Rupert. Wot made matters worse than anything was that my missis was kneeling down in the passage doing 'er door-step, and 'er face, as I got down out o' that cab with Kumbo 'anging on to my arm was something too awful for words. It seemed to rise up slow-like from near the door-step, and to go on rising till I thought it 'ud never stop. And every inch it rose it got worse and worse to look at.



She stood blocking up the doorway with her 'ands on her 'ips.

She stood blocking up the doorway with her 'ands on her 'ips, while I explained, with Kumbo still 'anging on my arm and a crowd collecting behind, and the more I explained, the more I could see she didn't believe a word of it.

She never 'as believed it. I sent for Mr. Alfredi to come and take Kumbo away, and when I spoke to 'im about Rupert he said I was dreaming, and asked me whether I wasn't ashamed o' myself for carrying off a pore black gal wot 'ad got no father or mother to look arter her. He said that afore my missis, and my character 'as been under a cloud ever since, waiting for Rupert to turn up and clear it away.

HOMEWARD BOUND

Mr. Hatchard's conversation for nearly a week had been confined to fault-finding and grunts, a system of treatment designed to wean Mrs. Hatchard from her besetting sin of extravagance. On other occasions the treatment had, for short periods, proved successful, but it was quite evident that his wife's constitution was becoming inured to this physic and required a change of treatment. The evidence stared at him from the mantelpiece in the shape of a pair of huge pink vases, which had certainly not been there when he left in the morning. He looked at them and breathed heavily.

"Pretty, ain't they?" said his wife, nodding at them.

"Who gave 'em to you?" inquired Mr. Hatchard, sternly.

His wife shook her head. “You don't get vases like that given to you,” she said, slowly. “Leastways, I don't.”

“Do you mean to say you bought 'em?” demanded her husband.

Mrs. Hatchard nodded.

“After all I said to you about wasting my money?” persisted Mr. Hatchard, in amazed accents.

Mrs. Hatchard nodded, more brightly than before.

“There has got to be an end to this!” said her husband, desperately. “I won't have it! D'ye hear? I won't—have—it!”

“I bought 'em with my own money,” said his wife, tossing her head.

“Your money?” said Mr. Hatchard. “To hear you talk anybody 'ud think you'd got three hundred a year, instead o' thirty. Your money ought to be spent in useful things, same as what mine is. Why should I spend my money keeping you, while you waste yours on pink vases and having friends in to tea?”

Mrs. Hatchard's still comely face took on a deeper tinge.

“Keeping me?” she said, sharply. “You'd better stop before you say anything you might be sorry for, Alfred.”

“I should have to talk a long time before I said that,” retorted the other.

“I'm not so sure,” said his wife. “I'm beginning to be tired of it.”

“I've reasoned with you,” continued Mr. Hatchard, “I've argued with you, and I've pointed out the error of your ways to you, and it's all no good.”

“Oh, be quiet, and don't talk nonsense,” said his wife.

“Talking,” continued Mr. Hatchard, “as I said before, is no good. Deeds, not words, is what is wanted.”

He rose suddenly from his chair and, taking one of the vases from the mantelpiece, dashed it to pieces on the fender. Example is contagious, and two seconds later he was in his chair again, softly feeling a rapidly growing bump on his head, and gazing goggle-eyed at his wife.



Taking one of the vases from the mantelpiece, he dashed it to pieces on the fender.

"And I'd do it again," said that lady, breathlessly, "if there was another vase."

Mr. Hatchard opened his mouth, but speech failed him. He got up and left the room without a word, and, making his way to the scullery, turned on the tap and held his head beneath it. A sharp intake of the breath announced that a tributary stream was looking for the bump down the neck of his shirt.

He was away a long time—so long that the half-penitent Mrs. Hatchard was beginning to think of giving first aid to the wounded. Then she heard him coming slowly back along the passage. He entered the room, drying his wet hair on a hand-kerchief.

"I—I hope I didn't hurt you—much?" said his wife.

Mr. Hatchard drew himself up and regarded her with lofty indignation.

"You might have killed me," he said at last, in thrilling tones. "Then what would you have done?"

"Swept up the pieces, and said you came home injured and died in my arms," said Mrs. Hatchard, glibly. "I don't want to be unfeeling, but you'd

try the temper of a saint. I'm sure I wonder I haven't done it before. Why I married a stingy man I don't know."

"Why I married at all I don't know," said her husband, in a deep voice.

"We were both fools," said Mrs. Hatchard, in a resigned voice; "that's what it was. However, it can't be helped now."

"Some men would go and leave you," said Mr. Hatchard.

"Well, go," said his wife, bridling. "I don't want you."

"Don't talk nonsense," said the other.

"It ain't nonsense," said Mrs. Hatchard. "If you want to go, go. I don't want to keep you."

"I only wish I could," said her husband, wistfully.

"There's the door," said Mrs. Hatchard, pointing. "What's to prevent you?"

"And have you going to the magistrate?" observed Mr. Hatchard.

"Not me," was the reply.

"Or coming up, full of complaints, to the ware-house?"

"Not me," said his wife again.

"It makes my mouth water to think of it," said Mr. Hatchard. "Four years ago I hadn't a care in the world."

"Me neither," said Mrs. Hatchard; "but then I never thought I should marry you. I remember the first time I saw you I had to stuff my handkerchief in my mouth."

"What for?" inquired Mr. Hatchard.

"Keep from laughing," was the reply.

"You took care not to let me see you laugh," said Mr. Hatchard, grimly. "You were polite enough in them days. I only wish I could have my time over again; that's all."

"You can go, as I said before," said his wife.

“I'd go this minute,” said Mr. Hatchard, “but I know what it 'ud be: in three or four days you'd be coming and begging me to take you back again.”

“You try me,” said Mrs. Hatchard, with a hard laugh. “I can keep myself. You leave me the furniture—most of it is mine—and I sha'n't worry you again.”

“Mind!” said Mr. Hatchard, raising his hand with great solemnity. “If I go, I never come back again.”

“I'll take care of that,” said his wife, equably. “You are far more likely to ask to come back than I am.”

Mr. Hatchard stood for some time in deep thought, and then, spurred on by a short, contemptuous laugh from his wife, went to the small passage and, putting on his overcoat and hat, stood in the parlor doorway regarding her.

“I've a good mind to take you at your word,” he said, at last.

“Good-night,” said his wife, briskly. “If you send me your address, I'll send your things on to you. There's no need for you to call about them.”

Hardly realizing the seriousness of the step, Mr. Hatchard closed the front door behind him with a bang, and then discovered that it was raining. Too proud to return for his umbrella, he turned up his coat-collar and, thrusting his hands in his pockets, walked slowly down the desolate little street. By the time he had walked a dozen yards he began to think that he might as well have waited until the morning; before he had walked fifty he was certain of it.

He passed the night at a coffee-house, and rose so early in the morning that the proprietor took it as a personal affront, and advised him to get his breakfast elsewhere. It was the longest day in Mr. Hatchard's experience, and, securing modest lodgings that evening, he overslept himself and was late at the warehouse next morning for the first time in ten years.

His personal effects arrived next day, but no letter came from his wife, and one which he wrote concerning a pair of missing garments received no reply. He wrote again, referring to them in laudatory terms, and got a brief reply to the effect that they had been exchanged in part payment on a pair of

valuable pink vases, the pieces of which he could have by paying the carriage.

In six weeks Mr. Hatchard changed his lodgings twice. A lack of those home comforts which he had taken as a matter of course during his married life was a source of much tribulation, and it was clear that his weekly bills were compiled by a clever writer of fiction. It was his first experience of lodgings, and the difficulty of saying unpleasant things to a woman other than his wife was not the least of his troubles. He changed his lodgings for a third time, and, much surprised at his wife's continued silence, sought out a cousin of hers named Joe Pett, and poured his troubles into that gentleman's reluctant ear.

"If she was to ask me to take her back," he concluded, "I'm not sure, mind you, that I wouldn't do so."

"It does you credit," said Mr. Pett. "Well, ta-ta; I must be off."

"And I expect she'd be very much obliged to anybody that told her so," said Mr. Hatchard, clutching at the other's sleeve.

Mr. Pett, gazing into space, said that he thought it highly probable.

"It wants to be done cleverly, though," said Mr. Hatchard, "else she might get the idea that I wanted to go back."

"I s'pose you know she's moved?" said Mr. Pett, with the air of a man anxious to change the conversation.

"Eh?" said the other.

"Number thirty-seven, John Street," said Mr. Pett. "Told my wife she's going to take in lodgers. Calling herself Mrs. Harris, after her maiden name."

He went off before Mr. Hatchard could recover, and the latter at once verified the information in part by walking round to his old house. Bits of straw and paper littered the front garden, the blinds were down, and a bill was pasted on the front parlor window. Aghast at such determination, he walked back to his lodgings in gloomy thought.

On Saturday afternoon he walked round to John Street, and from the corner of his eye, as he passed, stole a glance at No. 37. He recognized the cur-

tains at once, and, seeing that there was nobody in the room, leaned over the palings and peered at a card that stood on the window-sash:

FURNISHED APARTMENTS FOR SINGLE YOUNG MAN
BOARD IF DESIRED.

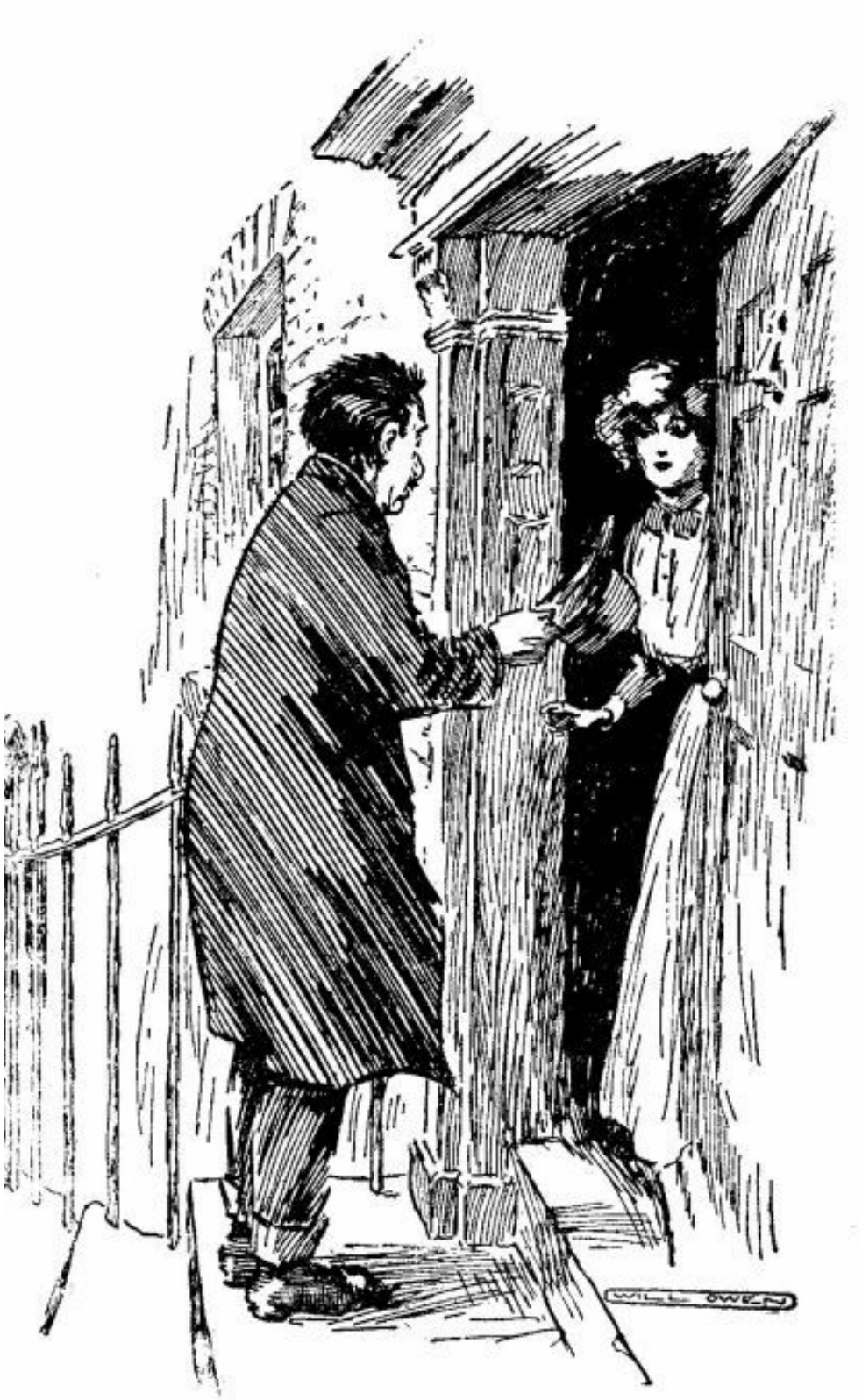
He walked away whistling, and after going a little way turned and passed it again. He passed in all four times, and then, with an odd grin lurking at the corners of his mouth, strode up to the front door and knocked loudly. He heard somebody moving about inside, and, more with the idea of keeping his courage up than anything else, gave another heavy knock at the door. It was thrown open hastily, and the astonished face of his wife appeared before him.

"What do you want?" she inquired, sharply.

Mr. Hatchard raised his hat. "Good-afternoon, ma'am," he said, politely.

"What do you want?" repeated his wife.

"I called," said Mr. Hatchard, clearing his throat—"I called about the bill in the window."



"I called about the bill in the window."

Mrs. Hatchard clutched at the door-post.

“Well?” she gasped.

“I'd like to see the rooms,” said the other.

“But you ain't a single young man,” said his wife, recovering.

“I'm as good as single,” said Mr. Hatchard. “I should say, better.”

“You ain't young,” objected Mrs. Hatchard. “I'm three years younger than what you are,” said Mr. Hatchard, dispassionately.

His wife's lips tightened and her hand closed on the door; Mr. Hatchard put his foot in.

“If you don't want lodgers, why do you put a bill up?” he inquired.

“I don't take the first that comes,” said his wife.

“I'll pay a week in advance,” said Mr. Hatchard, putting his hand in his pocket. “Of course, if you're afraid of having me here—afraid o' giving way to tenderness, I mean——”

“Afraid?” choked Mrs. Hatchard. “Tenderness! I—I——”

“Just a matter o' business,” continued her husband; “that's my way of looking at it—that's a man's way. I s'pose women are different. They can't ——”

“Come in,” said Mrs. Hatchard, breathing hard. Mr. Hatchard obeyed, and clapping a hand over his mouth ascended the stairs behind her. At the top she threw open the door of a tiny bedroom, and stood aside for him to enter. Mr. Hatchard sniffed critically.

“Smells rather stuffy,” he said, at last.

“You needn't have it,” said his wife, abruptly. “There's plenty of other fish in the sea.”

“Yes; and I expect they'd stay there if they saw this room,” said the other.

“Don't think I want you to have it; because I don't,” said Mrs. Hatchard, making a preliminary movement to showing him downstairs.

“They might suit me,” said Mr. Hatchard, musingly, as he peeped in at the sitting-room door. “I shouldn't be at home much. I'm a man that's fond of spending his evenings out.”

Mrs. Hatchard, checking a retort, eyed him grimly.

“I've seen worse,” he said, slowly; “but then I've seen a good many. How much are you asking?”

“Seven shillings a week,” replied his wife. “With breakfast, tea, and supper, a pound a week.”

Mr. Hatchard nearly whistled, but checked himself just in time.

“I'll give it a trial,” he said, with an air of unbearable patronage.

Mrs. Hatchard hesitated.

“If you come here, you quite understand it's on a business footing,” she said.

“O' course,” said the other, with affected surprise. “What do you think I want it on?”

“You come here as a stranger, and I look after you as a stranger,” continued his wife.

“Certainly,” said the other. “I shall be made more comfortable that way, I'm sure. But, of course, if you're afraid, as I said before, of giving way to tender——”

“Tender fiddlesticks!” interrupted his wife, flushing and eying him angrily.

“I'll come in and bring my things at nine o'clock to-night,” said Mr. Hatchard. “I'd like the windows open and the rooms aired a bit. And what about the sheets?”

“What about them?” inquired his wife.

“Don't put me in damp sheets, that's all,” said Mr. Hatchard. “One place I was at——”

He broke off suddenly.

“Well!” said his wife, quickly.

“Was very particular about them,” said Mr. Hatchard, recovering. “Well, good-afternoon to you, ma'am.”

“I want three weeks in advance,” said his wife.

“Three—” exclaimed the other. “Three weeks in advance? Why——”

“Those are my terms,” said Mrs. Hatchard. “Take 'em or leave 'em. P'r'aps it would be better if you left 'em.”

Mr. Hatchard looked thoughtful, and then with obvious reluctance took his purse from one pocket and some silver from another, and made up the required sum.

“And what if I'm not comfortable here?” he inquired, as his wife hastily pocketed the money. “It'll be your own fault,” was the reply.

Mr. Hatchard looked dubious, and, in a thoughtful fashion, walked downstairs and let himself out. He began to think that the joke was of a more complicated nature than he had expected, and it was not without forebodings that he came back at nine o'clock that night accompanied by a boy with his baggage.

His gloom disappeared the moment the door opened. The air inside was warm and comfortable, and pervaded by an appetizing smell of cooked meats. Upstairs a small bright fire and a neatly laid supper-table awaited his arrival.

He sank into an easy-chair and rubbed his hands. Then his gaze fell on a small bell on the table, and opening the door he rang for supper.

“Yes, sir,” said Mrs. Hatchard, entering the room. “Supper, please,” said the new lodger, with dignity.

Mrs. Hatchard looked bewildered. “Well, there it is,” she said, indicating the table. “You don't want me to feed you, do you?”

The lodger eyed the small, dry piece of cheese, the bread and butter, and his face fell. “I—I thought I smelled something cooking,” he said at last.



"I—I thought I smelled something cooking," he said.

"Oh, that was my supper," said Mrs. Hatchard, with a smile.

"I—I'm very hungry," said Mr. Hatchard, trying to keep his temper.

"It's the cold weather, I expect," said Mrs. Hatchard, thoughtfully; "it does affect some people that way, I know. Please ring if you want anything."

She left the room, humming blithely, and Mr. Hatchard, after sitting for some time in silent consternation, got up and ate his frugal meal. The fact that the water-jug held three pints and was filled to the brim gave him no satisfaction.

He was still hungry when he arose next morning, and, with curiosity tempered by uneasiness, waited for his breakfast. Mrs. Hatchard came in at last, and after polite inquiries as to how he had slept proceeded to lay breakfast. A fresh loaf and a large teapot appeared, and the smell of frizzling bacon ascended from below. Then Mrs. Hatchard came in again, and, smiling benevolently, placed an egg before him and withdrew. Two minutes later he rang the bell.

"You can clear away," he said, as Mrs. Hatchard entered the room.

“What, no breakfast?” she said, holding up her hands. “Well, I've heard of you single young men, but I never thought——”

“The tea's cold and as black as ink,” growled the indignant lodger, “and the egg isn't eatable.”

“I'm afraid you're a bit of a fault-finder,” said Mrs. Hatchard, shaking her head at him. “I'm sure I try my best to please. I don't mind what I do, but if you're not satisfied you'd better go.”

“Look here, Emily—” began her husband.

“Don't you 'Emily' me!” said Mrs. Hatchard, quickly. “The idea! A lodger, too! You know the arrangement. You'd better go, I think, if you can't behave yourself.”

“I won't go till my three weeks are up,” said Mr. Hatchard, doggedly, “so you may as well behave yourself.”

“I can't pamper you for a pound a week,” said Mrs. Hatchard, walking to the door. “If you want pampering, you had better go.”

A week passed, and the additional expense caused by getting most of his meals out began to affect Mr. Hatchard's health. His wife, on the contrary, was in excellent spirits, and, coming in one day, explained the absence of the easy-chair by stating that it was wanted for a new lodger.

“He's taken my other two rooms,” she said, smiling—“the little back parlor and the front bedroom—I'm full up now.”

“Wouldn't he like my table, too?” inquired Mr. Hatchard, with bitter sarcasm.

His wife said that she would inquire, and brought back word next day that Mr. Sadler, the new lodger, would like it. It disappeared during Mr. Hatchard's enforced absence at business, and a small bamboo table, weak in the joints, did duty in its stead.

The new lodger, a man of middle age with a ready tongue, was a success from the first, and it was only too evident that Mrs. Hatchard was trying her best to please him. Mr. Hatchard, supping on bread and cheese, more than once left that wholesome meal to lean over the balusters and smell the hot meats going into Mr. Sadler.

“You're spoiling him,” he said to Mrs. Hatchard, after the new lodger had been there a week. “Mark my words—he'll get above himself.”

“That's my look-out,” said his wife briefly.

“Don't come to me if you get into trouble, that's all,” said the other.

Mrs. Hatchard laughed derisively. “You don't like him, that's what it is,” she remarked. “He asked me yesterday whether he had offended you in any way.”

“Oh! He did, did he?” snarled Mr. Hatchard. “Let him keep himself to himself, and mind his own business.”

“He said he thinks you have got a bad temper,” continued his wife. “He thinks, perhaps, it's indigestion, caused by eating cheese for supper always.”

Mr. Hatchard affected not to hear, and, lighting his pipe, listened fer some time to the hum of conversation between his wife and Mr. Sadler below. With an expression of resignation on his face that was almost saintly he knocked out his pipe at last and went to bed.

Half an hour passed, and he was still awake. His wife's voice had ceased, but the gruff tones of Mr. Sadler were still audible. Then he sat up in bed and listened, as a faint cry of alarm and the sound of somebody rushing upstairs fell on his ears. The next moment the door of his room burst open, and a wild figure, stumbling in the darkness, rushed over to the bed and clasped him in its arms.

“Help!” gasped his wife's voice. “Oh, Alfred! Alfred!”

“Ma'am!” said Mr. Hatchard in a prim voice, as he struggled in vain to free himself.

“I'm so—so—fr-frightened!” sobbed Mrs. Hatchard.

“That's no reason for coming into a lodger's room and throwing your arms round his neck,” said her husband, severely.

“Don't be stu-stu-stupid,” gasped Mrs. Hatchard. “He—he's sitting downstairs in my room with a paper cap on his head and a fire-shovel in his hand, and he—he says he's the—the Emperor of China.”

“He? Who?” inquired her husband.

“Mr. Sad-Sadler,” replied Mrs. Hatchard, almost strangling him. “He made me kneel in front o' him and keep touching the floor with my head.”

The chair-bedstead shook in sympathy with Mr. Hatchard's husbandly emotion.

“Well, it's nothing to do with me,” he said at last.

“He's mad,” said his wife, in a tense whisper; “stark staring mad. He says I'm his favorite wife, and he made me stroke his forehead.”

The bed shook again.

“I don't see that I have any right to interfere,” said Mr. Hatchard, after he had quieted the bedstead. “He's your lodger.”

“You're my husband,” said Mrs. Hatchard. “Ho!” said Mr. Hatchard. “You've remembered that, have you?”

“Yes, Alfred,” said his wife.

“And are you sorry for all your bad behavior?” demanded Mr. Hatchard.

Mrs. Hatchard hesitated. Then a clatter of fire-irons downstairs moved her to speech.

“Ye-yes,” she sobbed.

“And you want me to take you back?” queried the generous Mr. Hatchard.

“Ye-ye-yes,” said his wife.

Mr. Hatchard got out of bed and striking a match lit the candle, and, taking his overcoat from a peg behind the door, put it on and marched downstairs. Mrs. Hatchard, still trembling, followed behind.

“What's all this?” he demanded, throwing the door open with a flourish.

Mr. Sadler, still holding the fire-shovel sceptre-fashion and still with the paper cap on his head, opened his mouth to reply. Then, as he saw the unkempt figure of Mr. Hatchard with the scared face of Mrs. Hatchard peeping over his shoulder, his face grew red, his eyes watered, and his cheeks swelled.

“K-K-K-Kch! K-Kch!” he said, explosively. “Talk English, not Chinese,” said Mr. Hatchard, sternly.



“K-K-K-Kch! K-Kch!” he said, explosively.

Mr. Sadler threw down the fire-shovel, and to Mr. Hatchard's great annoyance, clapped his open hand over his mouth and rocked with merriment.

“Sh—sh—she—she—” he spluttered.

“That'll do,” said Mr. Hatchard, hastily, with a warning frown.

“Kow-towed to me,” gurgled Mr. Sadler. “You ought to have seen it, Alf. I shall never get over it—never. It's—no—no good win-winking at me; I can't help myself.”

He put his handkerchief to his eyes and leaned back exhausted. When he removed it, he found himself alone and everything still but for a murmur of voices overhead. Anon steps sounded on the stairs, and Mr. Hatchard, grave of face, entered the room.

“Outside!” he said, briefly.

“What!” said the astounded Mr. Sadler. “Why, it's eleven o'clock.”

“I can't help it if it's twelve o'clock,” was the reply. “You shouldn't play the fool and spoil things by laughing. Now, are you going, or have I got to put you out?”

He crossed the room and, putting his hand on the shoulder of the protesting Mr. Sadler, pushed him into the passage, and taking his coat from the peg held it up for him. Mr. Sadler, abandoning himself to his fate, got into it slowly and indulged in a few remarks on the subject of ingratitude.

“I can't help it,” said his friend, in a low voice. “I've had to swear I've never seen you before.”

“Does she believe you?” said the staring Mr. Sadler, shivering at the open door.

“No,” said Mr. Hatchard, slowly, “but she pretends to.”

SELF-HELP

The night-watchman sat brooding darkly over life and its troubles. A shooting corn on the little toe of his left foot, and a touch of liver, due, he was convinced, to the unlawful cellar work of the landlord of the Queen's Head, had induced in him a vein of profound depression. A discarded boot stood by his side, and his gray-stockinged foot protruded over the edge of the jetty until a passing waterman gave it a playful rap with his oar. A subsequent

inquiry as to the price of pigs' trotters fell on ears rendered deaf by suffering.

"I might 'ave expected it," said the watchman, at last. "I done that man—if you can call him a man—a kindness once, and this is my reward for it. Do a man a kindness, and years arterwards 'e comes along and hits you over your tenderest corn with a oar."



"'E comes along and hits you over your tenderest corn with a oar."

He took up his boot, and, inserting his foot with loving care, stooped down and fastened the laces.

Do a man a kindness, he continued, assuming a safer posture, and 'e tries to borrow money off of you; do a woman a kindness and she thinks you want to marry 'er; do an animal a kindness and it tries to bite you—same as a horse bit a sailorman I knew once, when 'e sat on its head to 'elp it get up. He sat too far for'ard, pore chap.

Kindness never gets any thanks. I remember a man whose pal broke 'is leg while they was working together unloading a barge; and he went off to break the news to 'is pal's wife. A kind-'earted man 'e was as ever you see, and, knowing 'ow she would take on when she 'eard the news, he told her fust of all that 'er husband was killed. She took on like a mad thing, and at last, when she couldn't do anything more and 'ad quieted down a bit, he told 'er that it was on'y a case of a broken leg, thinking that 'er joy would be so great that she wouldn't think anything of that. He 'ad to tell her three times afore she understood 'im, and then, instead of being thankful to 'im for 'is thoughtfulness, she chased him 'arf over Wapping with a chopper, screaming with temper.

I remember Ginger Dick and Peter Russet trying to do old Sam Small a kindness one time when they was 'aving a rest ashore arter a v'y'ge. They 'ad took a room together as usual, and for the fust two or three days they was like brothers. That couldn't last, o' course, and Sam was so annoyed one evening at Ginger's suspiciousness by biting a 'arf-dollar Sam owed 'im and finding it was a bad 'un, that 'e went off to spend the evening all alone by himself.

He felt a bit dull at fust, but arter he had 'ad two or three 'arf-pints 'e began to take a brighter view of things. He found a very nice, cosey little public-'ouse he hadn't been in before, and, arter getting two and threepence and a pint for the 'arf-dollar with Ginger's tooth-marks on, he began to think that the world wasn't 'arf as bad a place as people tried to make out.

There was on'y one other man in the little bar Sam was in—a tall, dark chap, with black side-whiskers and spectacles, wot kept peeping round the partition and looking very 'ard at everybody that came in.

"I'm just keeping my eye on 'em, cap'n," he ses to Sam, in a low voice.

"Ho!" ses Sam.

"They don't know me in this disguise," ses the dark man, "but I see as 'ow you spotted me at once. Anybody 'ud have a 'ard time of it to deceive you; and then they wouldn't gain nothing by it."

"Nobody ever 'as yet," ses Sam, smiling at 'im.

"And nobody ever will," ses the dark man, shaking his 'ead; "if they was all as fly as you, I might as well put the shutters up. How did you twig I was

a detective officer, cap'n?"

Sam, wot was taking a drink, got some beer up 'is nose with surprise.

"That's my secret," he ses, arter the tec 'ad patted 'im on the back and brought 'im round.

"You're a marvel, that's wot you are," ses the tec, shaking his 'ead. "Have one with me."

Sam said he didn't mind if 'e did, and arter drinking each other's healths very perlite 'e ordered a couple o' twopenny smokes, and by way of showing off paid for 'em with 'arf a quid.

"That's right, ain't it?" ses the barmaid, as he stood staring very 'ard at the change. "I ain't sure about that 'arf-crown, now I come to look at it; but it's the one you gave me."

Pore Sam, with a tec standing alongside of 'im, said it was quite right, and put it into 'is pocket in a hurry and began to talk to the tec as fast as he could about a murder he 'ad been reading about in the paper that morning. They went and sat down by a comfortable little fire that was burning in the bar, and the tec told 'im about a lot o' murder cases he 'ad been on himself.

"I'm down 'ere now on special work," he ses, "looking arter sailormen."

"Wot ha' they been doing?" ses Sam.

"When I say looking arter, I mean protecting 'em," ses the tec. "Over and over agin some pore feller, arter working 'ard for months at sea, comes 'ome with a few pounds in 'is pocket and gets robbed of the lot. There's a couple o' chaps down 'ere I'm told off to look arter special, but it's no good unless I can catch 'em red-'anded."

"Red-'anded?" ses Sam.

"With their hands in the chap's pockets, I mean," ses the tec.

Sam gave a shiver. "Somebody had their 'ands in my pockets once," he ses. "Four pun ten and some coppers they got."

"Wot was they like?" ses the tee, starting.

Sam shook his 'ead. "They seemed to me to be all hands, that's all I know about 'em," he ses. "Arter they 'ad finished they leaned me up agin the dock

wall an' went off."

"It sounds like 'em," ses the tec, thoughtfully. "It was Long Pete and Fair Alf, for a quid; that's the two I'm arter."

He put his finger in 'is weskit-pocket. "That's who I am," he ses, 'anding Sam a card; "Detective-Sergeant Cubbins. If you ever get into any trouble at any time, you come to me."

Sam said 'e would, and arter they had 'ad another drink together the tec shifted 'is seat alongside of 'im and talked in his ear.

"If I can nab them two chaps I shall get promotion," he ses; "and it's a fi'-pun note to anybody that helps me. I wish I could persuade you to."

"'Ow's it to be done?" ses Sam, looking at 'im.

"I want a respectable-looking seafaring man," ses the tec, speaking very slow; "that's you. He goes up Tower Hill to-morrow night at nine o'clock, walking very slow and very unsteady on 'is pins, and giving my two beauties the idea that 'e is three sheets in the wind. They come up and rob 'im, and I catch them red-'anded. I get promotion, and you get a fiver."

"But 'ow do you know they'll be there?" ses Sam, staring at 'im.

Mr. Cubbins winked at 'im and tapped 'is nose.



Mr. Cubbins winked at 'im and tapped 'is nose.

"We 'ave to know a good deal in our line o' business," he ses.

"Still," ses Sam, "I don't see——"

"Narks," says the tec; "coppers' narks. You've 'eard of them, cap'n? Now, look 'ere. Have you got any money?"

"I got a matter o' twelve quid or so," ses Sam, in a off-hand way.

“The very thing,” says the tec. “Well, to-morrow night you put that in your pocket, and be walking up Tower Hill just as the clock strikes nine. I promise you you'll be robbed afore two minutes past, and by two and a 'arf past I shall 'ave my hands on both of 'em. Have all the money in one pocket, so as they can get it neat and quick, in case they get interrupted. Better still, 'ave it in a purse; that makes it easier to bring it 'ome to 'em.”

“Wouldn't it be enough if they stole the purse?” ses Sam. “I should feel safer that way, too.”

Mr. Cubbins shook his 'ead, very slow and solemn. “That wouldn't do at all,” he ses. “The more money they steal, the longer they'll get; you know that, cap'n, without me telling you. If you could put fifty quid in it would be so much the better. And, what-ever you do, don't make a noise. I don't want a lot o' clumsy policemen interfering in my business.”

“Still, s'pose you didn't catch 'em,” ses Sam, “where should I be?”

“You needn't be afraid o' that,” ses the tec, with a laugh. “Here, I'll tell you wot I'll do, and that'll show you the trust I put in you.”

He drew a big di'mond ring off of 'is finger and handed it to Sam.

“Put that on your finger,” he ses, “and keep it there till I give you your money back and the fi'-pun note reward. It's worth seventy quid if it's worth a farthing, and was given to me by a lady of title for getting back 'er jewellery for 'er. Put it on, and wotever you do, don't lose it!”

He sat and watched while Sam forced it on 'is finger.

“You don't need to flash it about too much,” he ses, looking at 'im rather anxious. “There's men I know as 'ud cut your finger off to get that.”

Sam shoved his 'and in his pocket, but he kept taking it out every now and then and 'olding his finger up to the light to look at the di'mond. Mr. Cubbins got up to go at last, saying that he 'ad got a call to make at the police-station, and they went out together.

“Nine o'clock sharp,” he ses, as they shook hands, “on Tower Hill.”

“I'll be there,” ses Sam.

“And, wotever you do, no noise, no calling out,” ses the tec, “and don't mention a word of this to a living soul.”

Sam shook 'ands with 'im agin, and then, hiding his 'and in his pocket, went off 'ome, and, finding Ginger and Peter Russet wasn't back, went off to bed.

He 'eard 'em coming upstairs in the dark in about an hour's time, and, putting the 'and with the ring on it on the counterpane, shut 'is eyes and pretended to be fast asleep. Ginger lit the candle, and they was both beginning to undress when Peter made a noise and pointed to Sam's 'and.

"Wot's up?" ses Ginger, taking the candle and going over to Sam's bed. "Who've you been robbing, you fat pirate?"

Sam kept 'is eyes shut and 'eard 'em whispering; then he felt 'em take 'is hand up and look at it. "Where did you get it, Sam?" ses Peter.

"He's asleep," ses Ginger, "sound asleep. I b'lieve if I was to put 'is finger in the candle he wouldn't wake up."

"You try it," ses Sam, sitting up in bed very sharp and snatching his 'and away. "Wot d'ye mean coming 'ome at all hours and waking me up?" "Where did you get that ring?" ses Ginger. "Friend o' mine," ses Sam, very short.

"Who was it?" ses Peter.

"It's a secret," ses Sam.

"You wouldn't 'ave a secret from your old pal Ginger, Sam, would you?" ses Ginger.

"Old wot?" ses Sam. "Wot did you call me this arternoon?"

"I called you a lot o' things I'm sorry for," ses Ginger, who was bursting with curiosity, "and I beg your pardin, Sam."

"Shake 'ands on it," ses Peter, who was nearly as curious as Ginger.

They shook hands, but Sam said he couldn't tell 'em about the ring; and several times Ginger was on the point of calling 'im the names he 'ad called 'im in the arternoon, on'y Peter trod on 'is foot and stopped him. They wouldn't let 'im go to sleep for talking, and at last, when 'e was pretty near tired out, he told 'em all about it.

“Going—to 'ave your—pocket picked?” ses Ginger, staring at 'im, when 'e had finished.

“I shall be watched over,” ses Sam.

“He's gorn stark, staring mad,” ses Ginger. “Wot a good job it is he's got me and you to look arter 'im, Peter.”

“Wot d'ye mean?” ses Sam.

“*Mean?*” ses Ginger. “Why, it's a put-up job to rob you, o' course. I should ha' thought even your fat 'ead could ha' seen that':”

“When I want your advice I'll ask you for it,” ses Sam, losing 'is temper. “Wot about the di'mond ring—eh?”

“You stick to it,” ses Ginger, “and keep out o' Mr. Cubbins's way. That's my advice to you. 'Sides, p'r'aps it ain't a real one.”

Sam told 'im agin he didn't want none of 'is advice, and, as Ginger wouldn't leave off talking, he pretended to go to sleep. Ginger woke 'im up three times to tell 'im wot a fool 'e was, but 'e got so fierce that he gave it up at last and told 'im to go 'is own way.

Sam wouldn't speak to either of 'em next morning, and arter breakfast he went off on 'is own. He came back while Peter and Ginger was out, and they wasted best part o' the day trying to find 'im.

“We'll be on Tower Hill just afore nine and keep 'im out o' mischief, any way,” ses Peter.

Ginger nodded. “And be called names for our pains,” he ses. “I've a good mind to let 'im be robbed.”

“It 'ud serve 'im right,” ses Peter, “on'y then he'd want to borrer off of us. Look here! Why not—why not rob 'im ourselves?”

“Wot?” ses Ginger, starting.

“Walk up behind 'im and rob 'im,” ses Peter. “He'll think it's them two chaps he spoke about, and when 'e comes 'ome complaining to us we'll tell 'im it serves 'im right. Arter we've 'ad a game with 'im for a day or two we'll give 'im 'is money back.”

“But he'd reckernize us,” ses Ginger.

“We must disguise ourselves,” ses Peter, in a whisper. “There's a barber's shop in Cable Street, where I've seen beards in the winder. You hook 'em on over your ears. Get one o' them each, pull our caps over our eyes and turn our collars up, and there you are.”

Ginger made a lot of objections, not because he didn't think it was a good idea, but because he didn't like Peter thinking of it instead of 'im; but he gave way at last, and, arter he 'ad got the beard, he stood for a long time in front o' the glass thinking wot a difference it would ha' made to his looks if he had 'ad black 'air instead o' red.

Waiting for the evening made the day seem very long to 'em; but it came at last, and, with the beards in their pockets, they slipped out and went for a walk round. They 'ad 'arf a pint each at a public-'ouse at the top of the Minories, just to steady themselves, and then they came out and hooked on their beards; and wot with them, and pulling their caps down and turning their coat-collars up, there wasn't much of their faces to be seen by anybody.

It was just five minutes to nine when they got to Tower Hill, and they walked down the middle of the road, keeping a bright lookout for old Sam. A little way down they saw a couple o' chaps leaning up agin a closed gate in the dock wall lighting their pipes, and Peter and Ginger both nudged each other with their elbows at the same time. They 'ad just got to the bottom of the Hill when Sam turned the corner.

Peter wouldn't believe at fust that the old man wasn't really the worse for liquor, 'e was so lifelike. Many a drunken man would ha' been proud to ha' done it 'arf so well, and it made 'im pleased to think that Sam was a pal of 'is. Him and Ginger turned and crept up behind the old man on tiptoe, and then all of a sudden he tilted Sam's cap over 'is eyes and flung his arms round 'im, while Ginger felt in 'is coat-pockets and took out a leather purse chock full o' money.

It was all done and over in a moment, and then, to Ginger's great surprise, Sam suddenly lifted 'is foot and gave 'im a fearful kick on the shin of 'is leg, and at the same time let drive with all his might in 'is face. Ginger went down as if he 'ad been shot, and as Peter went to 'elp him up he got a bang over the 'ead that put 'im alongside o' Ginger, arter which Sam turned and trotted off down the Hill like a dancing-bear.



Let drive with all 'is might in his face.

For 'arf a minute Ginger didn't know where 'e was, and afore he found out the two men they'd seen in the gateway came up, and one of 'em put his knee in Ginger's back and 'eld him, while the other caught hold of his 'and and dragged the purse out of it. Arter which they both made off up the Hill as 'ard as they could go, while Peter Russet in a faint voice called "Police!" arter them.

He got up presently and helped Ginger up, and they both stood there pitying themselves, and 'elping each other to think of names to call Sam.

"Well, the money's gorn, and it's 'is own silly fault," ses Ginger. "But wotever 'appens, he mustn't know that we had a 'and in it, mind that."

"He can starve for all I care," ses Peter, feeling his 'ead. "I won't lend 'im a ha'penny—not a single, blessed ha'penny."

"Who'd ha' thought 'e could ha' hit like that?" says Ginger. "That's wot gets over me. I never 'ad such a bang in my life—never. I'm going to 'ave a little drop o' brandy—my 'ead is fair swimming."

Peter 'ad one, too; but though they went into the private bar, it wasn't private enough for them; and when the landlady asked Ginger who'd been kissing 'im, he put 'is glass down with a bang and walked straight off 'ome.

Sam 'adn't turned up by the time they got there, and pore Ginger took advantage of it to put a little warm candle-grease on 'is bad leg. Then he bathed 'is face very careful and 'elped Peter bathe his 'ead. They 'ad just finished when they heard Sam coming upstairs, and Ginger sat down on 'is bed and began to whistle, while Peter took up a bit o' newspaper and stood by the candle reading it.

"Lor' lumme, Ginger!" ses Sam, staring at 'im. "What ha' you been a-doing to your face?"

"Me?" ses Ginger, careless-like. "Oh, we 'ad a bit of a scrap down Limehouse way with some Scotchies. Peter got a crack over the 'ead at the same time."

"Ah, I've 'ad a bit of a scrap, too," ses Sam, smiling all over, "but I didn't get marked."

"Oh!" ses Peter, without looking up from 'is paper. "Was it a little boy, then?" ses Ginger.

"No, it wasn't a little boy neither, Ginger," ses Sam; "it was a couple o' men twice the size of you and Peter here, and I licked 'em both. It was the two men I spoke to you about last night."

"Oh!" ses Peter agin, yawning.

"I did a bit o' thinking this morning," ses Sam, nodding at 'em, "and I don't mind owning up that it was owing to wot you said. You was right, Ginger, arter all."

"Fust thing I did arter breakfast," ses Sam, "I took that di'mond ring to a pawnshop and found out it wasn't a di'mond ring. Then I did a bit more thinking, and I went round to a shop I know and bought a couple o' knuckle-dusters."

"Couple o' wot?" ses Ginger, in a choking voice.

"Knuckle-dusters," ses Sam, "and I turned up to-night at Tower Hill with one on each 'and just as the clock was striking nine. I see 'em the moment I

turned the corner—two enormous big chaps, a yard acrost the shoulders, coming down the middle of the road—You've got a cold, Ginger!"

"No, I ain't," ses Ginger.

"I pretended to be drunk, same as the tec told me," ses Sam, "and then I felt 'em turn round and creep up behind me. One of 'em come up behind and put 'is knee in my back and caught me by the throat, and the other gave me a punch in the chest, and while I was gasping for breath took my purse away. Then I started on 'em."

"Lor'!" ses Ginger, very nasty.

"I fought like a lion," ses Sam. "Twice they 'ad me down, and twice I got up agin and hammered 'em. They both of 'em 'ad knives, but my blood was up, and I didn't take no more notice of 'em than if they was made of paper. I knocked 'em both out o' their hands, and if I hit 'em in the face once I did a dozen times. I surprised myself."

"You surprise me," ses Ginger.

"All of a sudden," ses Sam, "they see they 'ad got to do with a man wot didn't know wot fear was, and they turned round and ran off as hard as they could run. You ought to ha' been there, Ginger. You'd 'ave enjoyed it."

Ginger Dick didn't answer 'im. Having to sit still and listen to all them lies without being able to say anything nearly choked 'im. He sat there gasping for breath.

"O' course, you got your purse back in the fight, Sam?" ses Peter.

"No, mate," ses Sam. "I ain't going to tell you no lies—I did not."

"And 'ow are you going to live, then, till you get a ship, Sam?" ses Ginger, in a nasty voice. "You won't get nothing out o' me, so you needn't think it."

"Wot on earth's the matter, Ginger?"

"Nor me," ses Peter. "Not a brass farthing."

"There's no call to be nasty about it, mates," ses Sam. "I 'ad the best fight I ever 'ad in my life, and I must put up with the loss. A man can't 'ave it all his own way."

"'Ow much was it?" ses Peter.

"Ten brace-buttons, three French ha'pennies, and a bit o' tin," ses Sam. "Wot on earth's the matter, Ginger?"



"Wot on earth's the matter, Ginger?"

Ginger didn't answer him.

SENTENCE DEFERRED



An elderly man with a wooden leg, who joined the indignant officer in the pursuit.

Fortunately for Captain Bligh, there were but few people about, and the only person who saw him trip Police-Sergeant Pilbeam was an elderly man with a wooden leg, who joined the indignant officer in the pursuit. The captain had youth on his side, and, diving into the narrow alley-ways that constitute the older portion of Woodhatch, he moderated his pace and listened acutely. The sounds of pursuit died away in the distance, and he had already dropped into a walk when the hurried tap of the wooden leg sounded from one corner and a chorus of hurried voices from the other. It was clear that the number of hunters had increased.

He paused a second, irresolute. The next, he pushed open a door that stood ajar in an old flint wall and peeped in. He saw a small, brick-paved yard, in which trim myrtles and flowering plants stood about in freshly

ochred pots, and, opening the door a little wider, he slipped in and closed it behind him.

“Well?” said a voice, sharply. “What do you want?”

Captain Bligh turned, and saw a girl standing in a hostile attitude in the doorway of the house. “H'sh!” he said, holding up his finger.

The girl's cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkled.

“What are you doing in our yard?” she demanded.

The captain's face relaxed as the sound of voices died away. He gave his moustache a twist, and eyed her with frank admiration.

“Escaping,” he said, briefly. “They nearly had me, though.”

“You had no business to escape into our yard,” said the girl. “What have you been escaping from?”

“Fat policeman,” said the skipper, jauntily, twisting his moustache.

Miss Pilbeam, only daughter of Sergeant Pilbeam, caught her breath sharply.

“What have you been doing?” she inquired, as soon as she could control her voice.

“Nothing,” said the skipper, airily, “nothing. I was kicking a stone along the path and he told me to stop it.”

“Well?” said Miss Pilbeam, impatiently.

“We had words,” said the skipper. “I don't like policemen—fat policemen—and while we were talking he happened to lose his balance and go over into some mud that was swept up at the side of the road.”

“Lost his balance?” gasped the horrified Miss Pilbeam.

The skipper was flattered at her concern. “You would have laughed if you had seen him,” he said, smiling. “Don't look so frightened; he hasn't got me yet.”

“No,” said the girl, slowly. “Not yet.”

She gazed at him with such a world of longing in her eyes that the skipper, despite a somewhat large share of self-esteem, was almost startled.

“And he shan't have me,” he said, returning her gaze with interest.

Miss Pilbeam stood in silent thought. She was a strong, well-grown girl, but she realized fully that she was no match for the villain who stood before her, twisting his moustache and adjusting his neck-tie. And her father would not be off duty until nine.

“I suppose you would like to wait here until it is dark?” she said at last.

“I would sooner wait here than anywhere,” said the skipper, with respectful ardor.

“Perhaps you would like to come in and sit down?” said the girl.

Captain Bligh thanked her, and removing his cap followed her into a small parlor in the front of the house.

“Father is out,” she said, as she motioned him to an easy-chair, “but I'm sure he'll be pleased to see you when he comes in.”

“And I shall be pleased to see him,” said the innocent skipper.

Miss Pilbeam kept her doubts to herself and sat in a brown study, wondering how the capture was to be effected. She had a strong presentiment that the appearance of her father at the front door would be the signal for her visitor's departure at the back. For a time there was an awkward silence.

“Lucky thing for me I upset that policeman,” said the skipper, at last.

“Why?” inquired the girl.

“Else I shouldn't have come into your yard,” was the reply. “It's the first time we have ever put into Woodhatch, and I might have sailed away and never seen you. Where should we have been but for that fat policeman?”

Miss Pilbeam—as soon as she could get her breath—said, “Ah, where indeed!” and for the first time in her life began to feel the need of a chaperon.

“Funny to think of him hunting for me high and low while I am sitting here,” said the skipper.

Miss Pilbeam agreed with him, and began to laugh—to laugh so heartily that he was fain at last to draw his chair close to hers and pat her somewhat

anxiously on the back. The treatment sobered her at once, and she drew apart and eyed him coldly.

"I was afraid you would lose your breath," explained the skipper, awkwardly. "You are not angry, are you?"

He was so genuinely relieved when she said, "No," that Miss Pilbeam, despite her father's wrongs, began to soften a little. The upsetter of policemen was certainly good-looking; and his manner towards her so nicely balanced between boldness and timidity that a slight feeling of sadness at his lack of moral character began to assail her.

"Suppose you are caught after all?" she said, presently. "You will go to prison."

The skipper shrugged his shoulders. "I don't suppose I shall be," he replied.

"Aren't you sorry?" persisted Miss Pilbeam, in a vibrant voice.

"Certainly not," said the skipper. "Why, I shouldn't have seen you if I hadn't done it."

Miss Pilbeam looked at the clock and pondered. It wanted but five minutes to nine. Five minutes in which to make up a mind that was in a state of strong unrest.

"I suppose it is time for me to go," said the skipper, watching her. Miss Pilbeam rose. "No, don't go," she said, hastily. "Do be quiet. I want to think."

Captain Bligh waited in respectful silence, heedless of the fateful seconds ticking from the mantelpiece. At the sound of a slow, measured footfall on the cobblestone path outside Miss Pilbeam caught his arm and drew him towards the door.

"Go!" she breathed. "No, stop!"

She stood trying in vain to make up her mind. "Upstairs," she said. "Quick!" and, leading the way, entered her father's bedroom, and, after a moment's thought, opened the door of a cupboard in the corner.

"Get in there," she whispered.

“But—” objected the astonished Bligh.

The front door was heard to open.

“Police!” said Miss Pilbeam, in a thrilling whisper. The skipper stepped into the cupboard without further parley, and the girl, turning the key, slipped it into her pocket and sped downstairs.

Sergeant Pilbeam was in the easy-chair, with his belt unfastened, when she entered the parlor, and, with a hungry reference to supper, sat watching her as she lit the lamp and drew down the blind. With a lifelong knowledge of the requirements of the Force, she drew a jug of beer and placed it by his side while she set the table.

“Ah! I wanted that,” said the sergeant. “I've been running.”

Miss Pilbeam raised her eyebrows.

“After some sailor-looking chap that capsized me when I wasn't prepared for it,” said her father, putting down his glass. “It was a neat bit o' work, and I shall tell him so when I catch him. Look here!”

He stood up and exhibited the damage.

“I've rubbed off what I could,” he said, resuming his seat, “and I s'pose the rest'll brush off when it's dry. To-morrow morning I shall go down to the harbor and try and spot my lord.”

He drew his chair to the table and helped himself, and, filling his mouth with cold meat and pickles, enlarged on his plans for the capture of his assailant; plans to which the undecided Miss Pilbeam turned a somewhat abstracted ear.

By the time her father had finished his supper she was trying, but in vain, to devise means for the prisoner's escape. The sergeant had opened the door of the room for the sake of fresh air, and it was impossible for anybody to come downstairs without being seen. The story of a sickly geranium in the back-yard left him unmoved.

“I wouldn't get up for all the geraniums in the world,” he declared. “I'm just going to have one more pipe and then I'm off to bed. Running don't agree with me.”

He went, despite his daughter's utmost efforts to prevent him, and she sat in silent consternation, listening to his heavy tread overhead. She heard the bed creak in noisy protest as he climbed in, and ten minutes later the lusty snoring of a healthy man of full habit resounded through the house.

She went to bed herself at last, and, after lying awake for nearly a couple of hours, closed her eyes in order to think better. She awoke with the sun pouring in at the window and the sounds of vigorous brushing in the yard beneath.

"I've nearly got it off," said the sergeant, looking up. "It's destroying evidence in a sense, I suppose; but I can't go about with my uniform plastered with mud. I've had enough chaff about it as it is."

Miss Pilbeam stole to the door of the next room and peeped stealthily in. Not a sound came from the cupboard, and a horrible idea that the prisoner might have been suffocated set her trembling with apprehension.

"H'sh!" she whispered.

An eager but stifled "H'st!" came from the cup-board, and Miss Pilbeam, her fears allayed, stepped softly into the room.

"He's downstairs brushing the mud off," she said, in a low voice.

"Who is?" said the skipper.

"The fat policeman," said the girl, in a hard voice, as she remembered her father's wrongs.

"What's he doing it here for?" demanded the astonished skipper.

"Because he lives here."

"Lodger?" queried the skipper, more astonished than before.

"Father," said Miss Pilbeam.

A horrified groan from the cupboard fell like music on her ears. Then the smile forsook her lips, and she stood quivering with indignation as the groan gave way to suppressed but unmistakable laughter.

"H'sh!" she said sharply, and with head erect sailed out of the room and went downstairs to give Mr. Pilbeam his breakfast.

To the skipper in the confined space and darkness of the cupboard the breakfast seemed unending. The sergeant evidently believed in sitting over his meals, and his deep, rumbling voice, punctuated by good-natured laughter, was plainly audible. To pass the time the skipper fell to counting, and, tired of that, recited some verses that he had acquired at school. After that, and with far more heartiness, he declaimed a few things that he had learned since; and still the clatter and rumble sounded from below.

It was a relief to him when he heard the sergeant push his chair back and move heavily about the room. A minute later he heard him ascending the stairs, and then he held his breath with horror as the foot-steps entered the room and a heavy hand was laid on the cupboard door.

"Elsie!" bawled the sergeant. "Where's the key of my cupboard? I want my other boots."

"They're down here," cried the voice of Miss Pilbeam, and the skipper, hardly able to believe in his good fortune, heard the sergeant go downstairs again.

At the expiration of another week—by his own reckoning—he heard the light, hurried footsteps of Miss Pilbeam come up the stairs and pause at the door.

"H'st!" he said, recklessly.

"I'm coming," said the girl. "Don't be impatient."

A key turned in the lock, the door was flung open, and the skipper, dazed and blinking with the sudden light, stumbled into the room.

"Father's gone," said Miss Pilbeam.

The skipper made no answer. He was administering first aid to a right leg which had temporarily forgotten how to perform its duties, varied with slaps and pinches at a left which had gone to sleep. At intervals he turned a red-rimmed and reproachful eye on Miss Pilbeam.



He was administering first aid to a right leg.

"You want a wash and some breakfast," she said, softly, "especially a wash. There's water and a towel, and while you're making yourself tidy I'll be getting breakfast."

The skipper hobbled to the wash-stand, and, dipping his head in a basin of cool water, began to feel himself again. By the time he had done his hair in the sergeant's glass and twisted his moustache into shape he felt better still, and he went downstairs almost blithely.

"I'm very sorry it was your father," he said, as he took a seat at the table. "Very."

"That's why you laughed, I suppose?" said the girl, tossing her head.

"Well, I've had the worst of it," said the other. "I'd sooner be upset a hundred times than spend a night in that cupboard. However, all's well that ends well."

"Ah!" said Miss Pilbeam, dolefully, "but is it the end?"

Captain Bligh put down his knife and fork and eyed her uneasily.

"What do you mean?" he said.

"Never mind; don't spoil your breakfast," said the girl. "I'll tell you afterwards. It's horrid to think, after all my trouble, of your doing two months as well as a night in the cupboard."

"Beastly," said the unfortunate, eying her in great concern. "But what's the matter?"

"One can't think of everything," said Miss Pilbeam, "but, of course, we ought to have thought of the mate getting uneasy when you didn't turn up last night, and going to the police-station with a description of you."

The skipper started and smote the table with his fist.

"Father's gone down to watch the ship now," said Miss Pilbeam. "Of course, it's the exact description of the man that assaulted him. Providential he called it."

"That's the worst of having a fool for a mate," said the skipper, bitterly. "What business was it of his, I should like to know? What's it got to do with him whether I turn up or not? What does he want to interfere for?"

"It's no good blaming him," said Miss Pilbeam, thinking deeply, with her chin on her finger. "The thing is, what is to be done? Once father gets his hand on you——"

She shuddered; so did the skipper.

"I might get off with a fine; I didn't hurt him," he remarked.

Miss Pilbeam shook her head. "They're very strict in Woodhatch," she said.

"I was a fool to touch him at all," said the repentant skipper. "High spirits, that's what it was. High spirits, and being spoken to as if I was a child."

"The thing is, how are you to escape?" said the girl. "It's no good going out of doors with the police and half the people in Woodhatch all on the look-out for you."

“If I could only get aboard I should be all right,” muttered the skipper. “I could keep down the fo'-c's'le while the mate took the ship out.”

Miss Pilbeam sat in deep thought. “It's the getting aboard that's the trouble,” she said, slowly. “You'd have to disguise yourself. It would have to be a good disguise, too, to pass my father, I can tell you.”

Captain Bligh gave a gloomy assent.

“The only thing for you to do, so far as I can see,” said the girl, slowly, “is to make yourself up like a coalie. There are one or two colliers in the harbor, and if you took off your coat—I could send it on afterwards—rubbed yourself all over with coal-dust, and shaved off your moustache, I believe you would escape.”

“Shave!” ejaculated the skipper, in choking accents. “Rub—! Coal-dust!”

“It's your only chance,” said Miss Pilbeam.

Captain Bligh leaned back frowning, and from sheer force of habit passed the ends of his moustache slowly through his fingers. “I think the coal-dust would be enough,” he said at last.

The girl shook her head. “Father particularly noticed your moustache,” she said.

“Everybody does,” said the skipper, with mournful pride. “I won't part with it.”

“Not for my sake?” inquired Miss Pilbeam, eying him mournfully. “Not after all I've done for you?”

“No,” said the other, stoutly.

Miss Pilbeam put her handkerchief to her eyes and, with a suspicious little sniff, hurried from the room. Captain Bligh, much affected, waited for a few seconds and then went in pursuit of her. Fifteen minutes later, shorn of his moustache, he stood in the coal-hole, sulkily smearing himself with coal.

“That's better,” said the girl; “you look horrible.”

She took up a handful of coal-dust and, ordering him to stoop, shampooed him with hearty good-will.



She took up a handful of coal-dust and shampooed him with hearty good-will.

"No good half doing it," she declared. "Now go and look at yourself in the glass in the kitchen."

The skipper went, and came back in a state of wild-eyed misery. Even Miss Pilbeam's statement that his own mother would not know him failed to lift the cloud from his brow. He stood disconsolate as the girl opened the front door.

"Good-by," she said, gently. "Write and tell me when you are safe."

Captain Bligh promised, and walked slowly up the road. So far from people attempting to arrest him, they vied with each other in giving him elbow-room. He reached the harbor unmolested, and, lurking at a convenient corner, made a careful survey. A couple of craft were working out their coal, a small steamer was just casting loose, and a fishing-boat gliding slowly over

the still water to its berth. His own schooner, which lay near the colliers, had apparently knocked off work pending his arrival. For Sergeant Pilbeam he looked in vain.

He waited a minute or two, and then, with a furtive glance right and left, strolled in a careless fashion until he was abreast of one of the colliers. Nobody took any notice of him, and, with his hands in his pockets, he gazed meditatively into the water and edged along towards his own craft. His foot trembled as he placed it on the plank that formed the gangway, but, resisting the temptation to look behind, he gained the deck and walked forward.

"Halloa! What do you want?" inquired a sea-man, coming out of the galley.

"All right, Bill," said the skipper, in a low voice. "Don't take any notice of me."

"Eh?" said the seaman, starting. "Good lor'! What ha' you——"

"Shut up!" said the skipper, fiercely; and, walking to the forecastle, placed his hand on the scuttle and descended with studied slowness. As he reached the floor the perturbed face of Bill blocked the opening.

"Had an accident, cap'n?" he inquired, respectfully.

"No," snapped the skipper. "Come down here—quick! Don't stand up there attracting attention. Do you want the whole town round you? Come down!"

"I'm all right where I am," said Bill, backing hastily as the skipper, putting a foot on the ladder, thrust a black and furious face close to his.

"Clear out, then," hissed the skipper. "Go and send the mate to me. Don't hurry. And if anybody noticed me come aboard and should ask you who I am, say I'm a pal of yours."

The seaman, marvelling greatly, withdrew, and the skipper, throwing himself on a locker, wiped a bit of grit out of his eye and sat down to wait for the mate. He was so long in coming that he waxed impatient, and ascending a step of the ladder again peeped on to the deck. The first object that met his gaze was the figure of the mate leaning against the side of the ship with a wary eye on the scuttle.

“Come here,” said the skipper.

“Anything wrong?” inquired the mate, retreating a couple of paces in disorder.

“Come—here!” repeated the skipper.

The mate advanced slowly, and in response to an imperative command from the skipper slowly descended and stood regarding him nervously.

“Yes; you may look,” said the skipper, with sudden ferocity. “This is all your doing. Where are you going?”

He caught the mate by the coat as he was making for the ladder, and hauled him back again.

“You'll go when I've finished with you,” he said, grimly. “Now, what do you mean by it? Eh? What do you mean by it?”

“That's all right,” said the mate, in a soothing voice. “Don't get excited.”

“Look at me!” said the skipper. “All through your interfering. How dare you go making inquiries about me?”

“Me?” said the mate, backing as far as possible. “Inquiries?”

“What's it got to do with you if I stay out all night?” pursued the skipper.

“Nothing,” said the other, feebly.

“What did you go to the police about me for, then?” demanded the skipper.

“Me?” said the mate, in the shrill accents of astonishment. “Me? I didn't go to no police about you. Why should I?”

“Do you mean to say you didn't report my absence last night to the police?” said the skipper, sternly.

“Cert'nly not,” said the mate, plucking up courage. “Why should I? If you like to take a night off it's nothing to do with me. I 'ope I know my duty better. I don't know what you're talking about.”

“And the police haven't been watching the ship and inquiring for me?” asked the skipper.

The mate shook his bewildered head. “Why should they?” he inquired.

The skipper made no reply. He sat goggle-eyed, staring straight before him, trying in vain to realize the hardness of the heart that had been responsible for such a scurvy trick.

"Besides, it ain't the fust time you've been out all night," remarked the mate, aggressively.

The skipper favored him with a glance the dignity of which was somewhat impaired by his complexion, and in a slow and stately fashion ascended to the deck. Then he caught his breath sharply and paled beneath the coaldust as he saw Sergeant Pilbeam standing on the quay, opposite the ship. By his side stood Miss Pilbeam, and both, with a far-away look in their eyes, were smiling vaguely but contentedly at the horizon. The sergeant appeared to be the first to see the skipper.

"Ahoy, Darkie!" he cried.

Captain Bligh, who was creeping slowly aft, halted, and, clenching his fists, regarded him ferociously.

"Give this to the skipper, will you, my lad?" said the sergeant, holding up the jacket Bligh had left behind. "Good-looking young man with a very fine moustache he is."



"Give this to the skipper, will you, my lad?" said the sergeant.

"Was," said his daughter, in a mournful voice.

"And a rather dark complexion," continued the sergeant, grinning madly. "I was going to take him—for stealing my coal—but I thought better of it. Thought of a better way. At least, my daughter did. So long, Darkie."

He kissed the top of a fat middle finger, and, turning away, walked off with Miss Pilbeam. The skipper stood watching them with his head swimming until, arrived at the corner, they stopped and the sergeant came slowly back.

"I was nearly forgetting," he said, slowly. "Tell your skipper that if so be as he wants to apologize—for stealing my coal—I shall be at home at tea at five o'clock."

He jerked his thumb in the direction of Miss Pilbeam and winked with slow deliberation. “She'll be there, too,” he added. “Savvy?”

“MATRIMONIAL OPENINGS”

Mr. Dowson sat by the kitchen fire smoking and turning a docile and well-trained ear to the heated words which fell from his wife's lips.

“She'll go and do the same as her sister Jenny done,” said Mrs. Dowson, with a side glance at her daughter Flora; “marry a man and then 'ave to work and slave herself to skin and bone to keep him.”

“I see Jenny yesterday,” said her husband, nodding. “Getting quite fat, she is.”

“That's right,” said Mrs. Dowson, violently, “that's right! The moment I say something you go and try and upset it.”

“Un'ealthy fat, p'r'aps,” said Mr. Dowson, hurriedly; “don't get enough exercise, I s'pose.”

“Anybody who didn't know you, Joe Dowson,” said his wife, fiercely, “would think you was doing it a purpose.”

“Doing wot?” inquired Mr. Dowson, removing his pipe and regarding her open-mouthed. “I only said——”

“I know what you said,” retorted his wife. “Here I do my best from morning to night to make everybody 'appy and comfortable; and what happens?”

“Nothing,” said the sympathetic Mr. Dowson, shaking his head. “Nothing.”

“Anyway, Jenny ain't married a fool,” said Mrs. Dowson, hotly; “she's got that consolation.”

“That's right, mother,” said the innocent Mr. Dowson, “look on the bright side o' things a bit. If Jenny 'ad married a better chap I don't suppose we should see half as much of her as wot we do.”

“I'm talking of Flora,” said his wife, restraining herself by an effort. “One unfortunate marriage in the family is enough; and here, instead o' walking out with young Ben Lippet, who'll be 'is own master when his father dies, she's gadding about with that good-for-nothing Charlie Foss.”

Mr. Dowson shook his head. “He's so good-looking, is Charlie,” he said, slowly; “that's the worst of it. Wot with 'is dark eyes and his curly 'air——”

“Go on!” said his wife, passionately, “go on!”

Mr. Dowson, dimly conscious that something was wrong, stopped and puffed hard at his pipe. Through the cover of the smoke he bestowed a sympathetic wink upon his daughter.

“You needn't go on too fast,” said the latter, turning to her mother. “I haven't made up my mind yet. Charlie's looks are all right, but he ain't over and above steady, and Ben is steady, but he ain't much to look at.”

“What does your 'art say?” inquired the sentimental Mr. Dowson.

Neither lady took the slightest notice.

“Charlie Foss is too larky,” said Mrs. Dowson, solemnly; “it's easy come and easy go with 'im. He's just such another as your father's cousin Bill—and look what 'appened to him!”

Miss Dowson shrugged her shoulders and subsiding in her chair, went on with her book, until a loud knock at the door and a cheerful, but peculiarly shrill, whistle sounded outside.



Miss Dowson, subsiding in her chair, went on with her book.

"There is my lord," exclaimed Mrs. Dowson, waspishly; "anybody might think the 'ouse belonged to him. And now he's dancing on my clean doorstep."

"Might be only knocking the mud off afore coming in," said Mr. Dowson, as he rose to open the door. "I've noticed he's very careful."

"I just came in to tell you a joke," said Mr. Foss, as he followed his host into the kitchen and gazed tenderly at Miss Dowson—"best joke I ever had in my life; I've 'ad my fortune told—guess what it was! I've been laughing to myself ever since."

"Who told it?" inquired Mrs. Dowson, after a somewhat awkward silence.

"Old gypsy woman in Peter Street," replied Mr. Foss. "I gave 'er a wrong name and address, just in case she might ha' heard about me, and she did make a mess of it; upon my word she did."

“Wot did she say?” inquired Mr. Dowson.

Mr. Foss laughed. “Said I was a wrong 'un,” he said, cheerfully, “and would bring my mother's gray hairs to the grave with sorrow. I'm to 'ave bad companions and take to drink; I'm to steal money to gamble with, and after all that I'm to 'ave five years for bigamy. I told her I was disappointed I wasn't to be hung, and she said it would be a disappointment to a lot of other people too. Laugh! I thought I should 'ave killed myself.”

“I don't see nothing to laugh at,” said Mrs. Dowson, coldly.

“I shouldn't tell anybody else, Charlie,” said her husband. “Keep it a secret, my boy.”

“But you—you don't believe it?” stammered the crestfallen Mr. Foss.

Mrs. Dowson cast a stealthy glance at her daughter. “Its wonderful 'ow some o' those fortune-tellers can see into the future,” she said, shaking her head.

“Ah!” said her husband, with a confirmatory nod. “Wonderful is no name for it. I 'ad my fortune told once when I was a boy, and she told me I should marry the prettiest, and the nicest, and the sweetest-tempered gal in Poplar.”

Mr. Foss, with a triumphant smile, barely waited for him to finish. “There you—” he began, and stopped suddenly.



"I just came in to tell you a joke.'

"What was you about to remark?" inquired Mrs. Dowson, icily.

"I was going to say," replied Mr. Foss—"I was going to say—I 'ad just got it on the tip o' my tongue to say, 'There you—you—you 'ad all the luck, Mr. Dowson.'"

He edged his chair a little nearer to Flora; but there was a chilliness in the atmosphere against which his high spirits strove in vain. Mr. Dowson remembered other predictions which had come true, notably the case of one man who, learning that he was to come in for a legacy, gave up a two-pound-a-week job, and did actually come in for twenty pounds and a bird-cage seven years afterwards.



He edged his chair a little nearer to Flora.

"It's all nonsense," protested Mr. Foss; "she only said all that because I made fun of her. You don't believe it, do you, Flora?"

"I don't see anything to laugh at," returned Miss Dowson. "Fancy five years for bigamy! Fancy the disgrace of it!"

"But you're talking as if I was going to do it," objected Mr. Foss. "I wish you'd go and 'ave your fortune told. Go and see what she says about you. P'r'aps you won't believe so much in fortune-telling afterwards."

Mrs. Dowson looked up quickly, and then, lowering her eyes, took her hand out of the stocking she had been darning and, placing it beside its companion, rolled the pair into a ball.

“You go round to-morrow night, Flora,” she said, deliberately. “It sha'n't be said a daughter of mine was afraid to hear the truth about herself; father'll find the money.”

“And she can say what she likes about you, but I sha'n't believe it,” said Mr. Foss, reproachfully.

“I don't suppose it'll be anything to be ashamed of,” said Miss Dowson, sharply.

Mr. Foss bade them good-night suddenly, and, finding himself accompanied to the door by Mr. Dowson, gave way to gloom. He stood for so long with one foot on the step and the other on the mat that Mr. Dowson, who disliked draughts, got impatient.



Mr. Foss bade them good-night suddenly.

"You'll catch cold, Charlie," he said at last.

"That's what I'm trying to do," said Mr. Foss; "my death o' cold. Then I sha'n't get five years for bigamy," he added bitterly.

"Cheer up," said Mr. Dowson; "five years ain't much out of a lifetime; and you can't expect to 'ave your fun without—"

He watched the retreating figure of Mr. Foss as it stamped its way down the street, and closing the door returned to the kitchen to discuss palmistry and other sciences until bedtime.

Mrs. Dowson saw husband and daughter off to work in the morning, and after washing up the breakfast things drew her chair up to the kitchen fire and became absorbed in memories of the past. All the leading incidents in Flora's career passed in review before her. Measles, whooping-cough, school-prizes, and other things peculiar to the age of innocence were all there. In her enthusiasm she nearly gave her a sprained ankle which had belonged to her sister. Still shaking her head over her mistake, she drew Flora's latest portrait carefully from its place in the album, and putting on her hat and jacket went round to make a call in Peter Street.

By the time Flora returned home Mrs. Dowson appeared to have forgotten the arrangement made the night before, and, being reminded by her daughter, questioned whether any good could come of attempts to peer into the future. Mr. Dowson was still more emphatic, but his objections, being recognized by both ladies as trouser-pocket ones, carried no weight. It ended in Flora going off with half a crown in her glove and an urgent request from her father to make it as difficult as possible for the sibyl by giving a false name and address.

No name was asked for, however, as Miss Dowson was shown into the untidy little back room on the first floor, in which the sorceress ate, slept, and received visitors. She rose from an old rocking-chair as the visitor entered, and, regarding her with a pair of beady black eyes, bade her sit down.

“Are you the fortune-teller?” inquired the girl.

“Men call me so,” was the reply.

“Yes, but are you?” persisted Miss Dowson, who inherited her father's fondness for half crowns.

“Yes,” said the other, in a more natural voice.

She took the girl's left hand, and pouring a little dark liquid into the palm gazed at it intently. “Left for the past; right for the future,” she said, in a deep voice.

She muttered some strange words and bent her head lower over the girl's hand.



She muttered some strange words and bent her head lower over the girl's hand.

"I see a fair-haired infant," she said, slowly; "I see a little girl of four racked with the whooping-cough; I see her later, eight she appears to be. She is in bed with measles."

Miss Dowson stared at her open-mouthed.

"She goes away to the seaside to get strong," continued the sorceress; "she is paddling; she falls into the water and spoils her frock; her mother ——"

"Never mind about that," interrupted the staring Miss Dowson, hastily. "I was only eight at the time and mother always was ready with her hands."

"People on the beach smile," resumed the other. "They—"

“It don't take much to make some people laugh,” said Miss Dowson, with bitterness.

“At fourteen she and a boy next door but seven both have the mumps.”

“And why not?” demanded Miss Dowson with great warmth. “Why not?”

“I'm only reading what I see in your hand,” said the other. “At fifteen I see her knocked down by a boat-swing; a boy from opposite brings her home.”

“Passing at the time,” murmured Miss Dowson.

“His head is done up with sticking-plaster. I see her apprenticed to a dressmaker. I see her— —”

The voice went on monotonously, and Flora, gasping with astonishment, listened to a long recital of the remaining interesting points in her career.

“That brings us to the present,” said the soothsayer, dropping her hand. “Now for the future.”

She took the girl's other hand and poured some of the liquid into it. Miss Dowson shrank back.

“If it's anything dreadful,” she said, quickly, “I don't want to hear it. It— it ain't natural.”

“I can warn you of dangers to keep clear of,” said the other, detaining her hand. “I can let you peep into the future and see what to do and what to avoid. Ah!”

She bent over the girl's hand again and uttered little ejaculations of surprise and perplexity.

“I see you moving in gay scenes surrounded by happy faces,” she said, slowly. “You are much sought after. Handsome presents and fine clothes are showered upon you. You will cross the sea. I see a dark young man and a fair young man. They will both influence your life. The fair young man works in his father's shop. He will have great riches.”

“What about the other?” inquired Miss Dowson, after a somewhat lengthy pause.

The fortune-teller shook her head. “He is his own worst enemy,” she said, “and he will drag down those he loves with him. You are going to marry one of them, but I can't see clear—I can't see which.”

“Look again,” said the trembling Flora.

“I can't see,” was the reply, “therefore it isn't meant for me to see. It's for you to choose. I can see them now as plain as I can see you. You are all three standing where two roads meet. The fair young man is beckoning to you and pointing to a big house and a motor-car and a yacht.”

“And the other?” said the surprised Miss Dowson.

“He's in knickerbockers,” said the other, doubtfully. “What does that mean? Ah, I see! They've got the broad arrow on them, and he is pointing to a jail. It's all gone—I can see no more.”

She dropped the girl's hand and, drawing her hand across her eyes, sank back into her chair. Miss Dowson, with trembling fingers, dropped the half crown into her lap, and, with her head in a whirl, made her way downstairs.

After such marvels the streets seemed oddly commonplace as she walked swiftly home. She decided as she went to keep her knowledge to herself, but inclination on the one hand and Mrs. Dowson on the other got the better of her resolution. With the exception of a few things in her past, already known and therefore not worth dwelling upon, the whole of the interview was disclosed.

“It fair takes your breath away,” declared the astounded Mr. Dowson.

“The fair young man is meant for Ben Lippet,” said his wife, “and the dark one is Charlie Foss. It must be. It's no use shutting your eyes to things.”

“It's as plain as a pikestaff,” agreed her husband. “And she told Charlie five years for bigamy, and when she's telling Flora's Fortune she sees 'im in convict's clothes. How she does it I can't think.”

“It's a gift,” said Mrs. Dowson, briefly, “and I do hope that Flora is going to act sensible. Anyhow, she can let Ben Lippet come and see her, without going upstairs with the tooth-ache.”

“He can come if he likes,” said Flora; “though why Charlie couldn't have 'ad the motor-car and 'im the five years, I don't know.”

Mr. Lippet came in the next evening, and the evening after. In fact, so easy is it to fall into habits of an agreeable nature that nearly every evening saw him the happy guest of Mr. Dowson. A spirit of resignation, fostered by a present or two and a visit to the theatre, descended upon Miss Dowson. Fate and her mother combined were in a fair way to overcome her inclinations, when Mr. Foss, who had been out of town on a job, came in to hear the result of her visit to the fortune-teller, and found Mr. Lippet installed in the seat that used to be his.

At first Mrs. Dowson turned a deaf ear to his request for information, and it was only when his jocularity on the subject passed the bounds of endurance that she consented to gratify his curiosity.

“I didn't want to tell you,” she said, when she had finished, “but you asked for it, and now you've got it.”

“It's very amusing,” said Mr. Foss. “I wonder who the dark young man in the fancy knickers is?”

“Ah, I daresay you'll know some day,” said Mrs. Dowson.

“Was the fair young man a good-looking chap?” inquired the inquisitive Mr. Foss.

Mrs. Dowson hesitated. “Yes,” she said, defiantly.

“Wonder who it can be?” muttered Mr. Foss, in perplexity.

“You'll know that too some day, no doubt,” was the reply.

“I'm glad it's to be a good-looking chap,” he said; “not that I think Flora believes in such rubbish as fortune-telling. She's too sensible.”

“I do,” said Flora. “How should she know all the things I did when I was a little girl? Tell me that.”

“I believe in it, too,” said Mrs. Dowson. “P'r'aps you'll tell me I'm not sensible!”

Mr. Foss quailed at the challenge and relapsed into moody silence. The talk turned on an aunt of Mr. Lippet's, rumored to possess money, and an

uncle who was “rolling” in it. He began to feel in the way, and only his native obstinacy prevented him from going.

It was a relief to him when the front door opened and the heavy step of Mr. Dowson was heard in the tiny passage. If anything it seemed heavier than usual, and Mr. Dowson's manner when he entered the room and greeted his guests was singularly lacking in its usual cheerfulness. He drew a chair to the fire, and putting his feet on the fender gazed moodily between the bars.

“I've been wondering as I came along,” he said at last, with an obvious attempt to speak carelessly, “whether this 'ere fortune-telling as we've been hearing so much about lately always comes out true.”

“It depends on the fortune-teller,” said his wife.

“I mean,” said Mr. Dowson, slowly, “I mean that gypsy woman that Charlie and Flora went to.”

“Of course it does,” snapped his wife. “I'd trust what she says afore anything.”

“I know five or six that she has told,” said Mr. Lippet, plucking up courage; “and they all believe 'er. They couldn't help themselves; they said so.”

“Still, she might make a mistake sometimes,” said Mr. Dowson, faintly. “Might get mixed up, so to speak.”

“Never!” said Mrs. Dowson, firmly.

“Never!” echoed Flora and Mr. Lippet.

Mr. Dowson heaved a big sigh, and his eye wandered round the room. It lighted on Mr. Foss.

“She's an old humbug,” said that gentleman. “I've a good mind to put the police on to her.”

Mr. Dowson reached over and gripped his hand. Then he sighed again.

“Of course, it suits Charlie Foss to say so,” said Mrs. Dowson; “naturally he'd say so; he's got reasons. I believe every word she says. If she told me I

was coming in for a fortune I should believe her; and if she told me I was going to have misfortunes I should believe her."

"Don't say that," shouted Mr. Dowson, with startling energy. "Don't say that. That's what she did say!"

"What?" cried his wife, sharply. "What are you talking about?"

"I won eighteenpence off of Bob Stevens," said her husband, staring at the table. "Eighteenpence is 'er price for telling the future only, and, being curious and feeling I'd like to know what's going to 'appen to me, I went in and had eighteenpennorth."

"Well, you're upset," said Mrs. Dowson, with a quick glance at him. "You get upstairs to bed."

"I'd sooner stay 'ere," said her husband, resuming his seat; "it seems more cheerful and lifelike. I wish I 'adn't gorn, that's what I wish."

"What did she tell you?" inquired Mr. Foss.

Mr. Dowson thrust his hands into his trouser pockets and spoke desperately. "She says I'm to live to ninety, and I'm to travel to foreign parts——"

"You get to bed," said his wife. "Come along."

Mr. Dowson shook his head doggedly. "I'm to be rich," he continued, slowly—"rich and loved. After my pore dear wife's death I'm to marry again; a young woman with money and stormy brown eyes."

Mrs. Dowson sprang from her chair and stood over him quivering with passion. "How dare you?" she gasped. "You—you've been drinking."

"I've 'ad two arf-pints," said her husband, solemnly. "I shouldn't 'ave 'ad the second only I felt so miserable. I know I sha'n't be 'appy with a young woman."

Mrs. Dowson, past speech, sank back in her chair and stared at him.

"I shouldn't worry about it if I was you, Mrs. Dowson," said Mr. Foss, kindly. "Look what she said about me. That ought to show you she ain't to be relied on."

"Eyes like lamps," said Mr. Dowson, musingly, "and I'm forty-nine next month. Well, they do say every eye 'as its own idea of beauty."

A strange sound, half laugh and half cry, broke from the lips of the overwrought Mrs. Dowson. She controlled herself by an effort.

"If she said it," she said, doggedly, with a fierce glance at Mr. Foss, "it'll come true. If, after my death, my 'usband is going to marry a young woman with—with——"

"Stormy brown eyes," interjected Mr. Foss, softly.

"It's his fate and it can't be avoided," concluded Mrs. Dowson.

"But it's so soon," said the unfortunate husband. "You're to die in three weeks and I'm to be married three months after."

Mrs. Dowson moistened her lips and tried, but in vain, to avoid the glittering eye of Mr. Foss. "Three!" she said, mechanically, "three! three weeks!"

"Don't be frightened," said Mr. Foss, in a winning voice. "I don't believe it; and, besides, we shall soon see! And if you don't die in three weeks, perhaps I sha'n't get five years for bigamy, and perhaps Flora won't marry a fair man with millions of money and motor-cars."

"No; perhaps she is wrong after all, mother," said Mr. Dowson, hopefully.

Mrs. Dowson gave him a singularly unkind look for one about to leave him so soon, and, afraid to trust herself to speech, left the room and went up-stairs. As the door closed behind her, Mr. Foss took the chair which Mr. Lippet had thoughtlessly vacated, and offered such consolations to Flora as he considered suitable to the occasion.

ODD MAN OUT

The night watchman pursed up his lips and shook his head. Friendship, he said, decidedly, is a deloosion and a snare. I've 'ad more friendships in my life than most people—owing to being took a fancy to for some reason or other—and they nearly all came to a sudden ending.



Friendship, he said, decidedly, is a deloosion and a snare.

I remember one man who used to think I couldn't do wrong; everything I did was right to 'im; and now if I pass 'im in the street he makes a face as if he'd got a hair in 'is mouth. All because I told 'im the truth one day when he was thinking of getting married. Being a bit uneasy-like in his mind, he asked me 'ow, supposing I was a gal, his looks would strike me.

It was an orkard question, and I told him that he 'ad got a good 'art and that no man could 'ave a better pal. I said he 'ad got a good temper and was free with 'is money. O' course, that didn't satisfy 'im, and at last he told me to take a good look at 'im and tell him wot I thought of 'is looks. There was no getting out of it, and at last I 'ad to tell him plain that everybody 'ad diff'rent ideas about looks; that looks wasn't everything; and that 'andsome is as 'andsome does. Even then 'e wasn't satisfied, and at last I told 'im, speaking as a pal to a pal, that if I was a gal and he came along trying to court me, I should go to the police about it.

I remember two young fellers that was shipmates with me some years ago, and they was such out-and-out pals that everybody called 'em the Siamese twins. They always shipped together and shared lodgings together when they was ashore, and Ted Denver would no more 'ave thought of going out without Charlie Brice than Charlie Brice would 'ave thought of going out without 'im. They shared their baccy and their money and everything else, and it's my opinion that if they 'ad only 'ad one pair o' boots between 'em they'd 'ave hopped along in one each.

They 'ad been like it for years, and they kept it up when they left the sea and got berths ashore. Anybody knowing them would ha' thought that nothing but death could part 'em; but it happened otherwise.

There was a gal in it, of course. A gal that Ted Denver got into conversation with on top of a bus, owing to her steadying 'erself by putting her hand on 'is shoulder as she passed 'im. Bright, lively sort o' gal she seemed, and, afore Ted knew where he was, they was talking away as though they 'ad known each other for years.

Charlie didn't seem to care much for it at fust, but he didn't raise no objection; and when the gal got up to go he stopped the bus for 'er by poking the driver in the back, and they all got off together. Ted went fust to break her fall, in case the bus started off too sudden, and Charlie 'elped her down behind by catching hold of a lace collar she was wearing. When she turned to speak to 'im about it, she knocked the conductor's hat off with 'er umbrella, and there was so much unpleasantness that by the time they 'ad got to the pavement she told Charlie that she never wanted to see his silly fat face agin.

“It ain't fat,” ses Ted, speaking up for 'im; “it's the shape of it.”

“And it ain't silly,” ses Charlie, speaking very quick; “mind that!”

“It's a bit o' real lace,” ses the gal, twisting her 'ead round to look at the collar; “it cost me one and two-three only last night.”

“One an' *wot?*” ses Charlie, who, not being a married man, didn't understand 'er.

“One shilling,” ses the gal, “two pennies, and three farthings. D'ye understand that?”

“Yes,” ses Charlie.

“He's cleverer than he looks,” ses the gal, turning to Ted. “I s'pose you're right, and it is the shape after all.”

Ted walked along one side of 'er and Charlie the other, till they came to the corner of the road where she lived, and then Ted and 'er stood there talking till Charlie got sick and tired of it, and kept tugging at Ted's coat for 'im to come away.

“I'm coming,” ses Ted, at last. “I s'pose you won't be this way to-morrow night?” he ses, turning to the gal.

“I might if I thought there was no chance of seeing you,” she ses, tossing her 'ead.

“You needn't be alarmed,” ses Charlie, shoving in his oar; “we're going to a music-'all to-morrow night.”

“Oh, go to your blessed music-'all,” ses the gal to Ted; “I don't want you.”

She turned round and a'most ran up the road, with Ted follering 'er and begging of 'er not to be so hasty, and afore they parted she told 'im that 'er name was Emma White, and promised to meet 'im there the next night at seven.

O' course Mr. Charlie Brice turned up alongside o' Ted the next night, and at fust Emma said she was going straight off 'ome agin. She did go part o' the way, and then, when she found that Ted wouldn't send his mate off, she came back and, woman-like, said as 'ow she wasn't going to go 'ome just to please Charlie Brice. She wouldn't speak a word to 'im, and when they all went to the music-'all together she sat with her face turned away from 'im

and her elbow sticking in 'is chest. Doing that and watching the performance at the same time gave 'er a stiff neck, and she got in such a temper over it she wouldn't hardly speak to Ted, and when Charlie—meaning well—told 'er to rub it with a bit o' mutton-fat she nearly went off her 'ead.

"Who asked you to come with us?" she ses, as soon as she could speak. "'Ow dare you force yourself where you ain't wanted?"

"Ted wants me," ses Charlie.

"We've been together for years," ses Ted. "You'll like Charlie when you get used to 'im—everybody does."

"Not me!" ses Emma, with a shiver. "It gives me the fair creeps to look at him. You'll 'ave to choose between us. If he comes, I sha'n't. Which is it to be?"

Neither of 'em answered 'er, but the next night they both turned up as usual, and Emma White stood there looking at 'em and nearly crying with temper.

"'Ow would you like it if I brought another young lady with me?" she ses to Ted.

"It wouldn't make no difference to me," ses Ted. "Any friend o' yours is welcome."

Emma stood looking at 'em, and then she patted 'er eyes with a pocket-'ankercher and began to look more cheerful.

"You ain't the only one that has got a dear friend," she says, looking at 'im and wiping 'er lips with the 'ankercher. "I've got one, and if Charlie Brice don't promise to stay at 'ome to-morrow night I'll bring her with me."

"Bring 'er, and welcome," ses Ted.

"I sha'n't stay at 'ome for fifty dear friends," ses Charlie.

"Have it your own way," ses Emma. "If you come, Sophy Jennings comes, that's all."

She was as good as 'er word, too, and next night when they turned up they found Emma and 'er friend waiting for them. Charlie thought it was the friend's mother at fust, but he found out arterwards that she was a widder-

woman. She had 'ad two husbands, and both of 'em 'ad passed away with a smile on their face. She seemed to take a fancy to Charlie the moment she set eyes on 'im, and two or three times, they'd 'ave lost Ted and Emma if it hadn't been for 'im.



When they turned up they found Emma and 'er friend waiting for them.

They did lose 'em the next night, and Charlie Brice 'ad Mrs. Jennings all alone to himself for over a couple of hours walking up and down the Commercial Road talking about the weather; Charles saying 'ow wet and cold it was, and thinking p'r'aps they 'ad better go off 'ome afore she got a chill.

He complained to Ted about it when 'e got 'ome, and Ted promised as it shouldn't 'appen agin. He said that 'im and Emma 'ad been so busy talking about getting married that he 'ad forgotten to keep an eye on him.

"Married!" ses Charlie, very upset. "Married! And wot's to become o' me?"

"Come and lodge with us," ses Ted.

They shook hands on it, but Ted said they 'ad both better keep it to themselves a bit and wait until Emma 'ad got more used to Charlie afore they told her. Ted let 'er get used to 'im for three days more afore he broke the

news to 'er, and the way she went on was alarming. She went on for over ten minutes without taking breath, and she was just going to start again when Mrs. Jennings stopped her.

"He's all right," she ses. "You leave 'im alone."

"I'm not touching 'im," ses Emma, very scornful.

"You leave 'im alone," ses Mrs. Jennings, taking hold of Charlie's arm. "I don't say things about your young man."

Charlie Brice started as if he 'ad been shot, and twice he opened 'is mouth to speak and show Mrs. Jennings 'er mistake; but, wot with trying to find 'is voice in the fust place, and then finding words to use it with in the second, he didn't say anything. He just walked along gasping, with 'is mouth open like a fish.

"Don't take no notice of 'er, Charlie," ses Mrs. Jennings.

"I—I don't mind wot she ses," ses pore Charlie; "but you're making a great— —"

"She's quick-tempered, is Emma," ses Mrs. Jennings. "But, there, so am I. Wot you might call a generous temper, but quick."

Charlie went cold all over.

"Treat me well and I treat other people well," ses Mrs. Jennings. "I can't say fairer than that, can I?"

Charlie said "Nobody could," and then 'e walked along with her hanging on to 'is arm, arf wondering whether it would be wrong to shove 'er under a bus that was passing, and arf wondering whether 'e could do it if it wasn't.

"As for Emma saying she won't 'ave you for a lodger," ses Mrs. Jennings, "let 'er wait till she's asked. She'll wait a long time if I 'ave my say."

Charlie didn't answer her. He walked along with 'is mouth shut, his idea being that the least said the soonest mended. Even Emma asked 'im at last whether he 'ad lost 'is tongue, and said it was curious 'ow different love took different people.

He talked fast enough going 'ome with Ted though, and pretty near lost 'is temper with 'im when Ted asked 'im why he didn't tell Mrs. Jennings

straight that she 'ad made a mistake.

"She knows well enough," he says, grinding 'is teeth; "she was just trying it on. That's 'ow it is widders get married agin. You'll 'ave to choose between going out with me or Emma, Ted. I can't face Mrs. Jennings again. I didn't think anybody could 'ave parted us like that."

Ted said it was all nonsense, but it was no good, and the next night he went off alone and came back very cross, saying that Mrs. Jennings 'ad been with 'em all the time, and when 'e spoke to Emma about it she said it was just tit for tat, and reminded 'im 'ow she had 'ad to put up with Charlie. For four nights running 'e went out for walks, with Emma holding one of 'is arms and Mrs. Jennings the other.

"It's miserable for you all alone 'ere by yourself; Charlie," he ses. "Why not come? She can't marry you against your will. Besides, I miss you."

Charlie shook 'ands with 'im, but 'e said 'e wouldn't walk out with Mrs. Jennings for a fortune. And all that Ted could say made no difference. He stayed indoors of an evening reading the paper, or going for little walks by 'imself, until at last Ted came 'ome one evening, smiling all over his face, and told 'im they had both been making fools of themselves for nothing.

"Mrs. Jennings is going to be married," he ses, clapping Charlie on the back.

"*Wot?*" ses Charlie.

Ted nodded. "Her and Emma 'ad words to-night," he ses, laughing, "and it all come out. She's been keeping company for some time. He's away at present, and they're going to be married as soon as 'e comes back."

"Well," ses Charlie, "why did she——"

"To oblige Emma," ses Ted, "to frighten you into staying at 'ome. I'd 'ad my suspicions for some time, from one or two things I picked up."

"Ho!" ses Charlie. "Well, it'll be my turn to laugh to-morrow night. We'll see whether she can shake me off agin."

Ted looked at 'im a bit worried. "It's a bit orkard," he ses, speaking very slow. "You see, they made it up arterwards, and then they both made me promise not to tell you, and if you come, they'll know I 'ave."

Charlie did a bit o' thinking. “Not if I pretend to make love to Mrs. Jennings?” he ses, at last, winking at 'im. “And it'll serve her right for being deceitful. We'll see 'ow she likes it. Wot sort o' chap is the young man—big?”

“Can't be,” ses Ted; “cos Emma called 'im a little shrimp.”

“I'll come,” ses Charlie; “and it'll be your own fault if they find out you told me about it.”

They fell asleep talking of it, and the next evening Charlie put on a new neck-tie he 'ad bought, and arter letting Ted have arf an hour's start went out and met 'em accidental. The fust Mrs. Jennings knew of 'is being there was by finding an arm put round 'er waist.

“Good-evening, Sophy,” he ses.

“'Ow—'ow dare you?” ses Mrs. Jennings, giving a scream and pushing him away.

Charlie looked surprised.

“Why, ain't you pleased to see me?” he ses. “I've 'ad the raging toothache for over a week; I've got it now a bit, but I couldn't stay away from you any longer.”

“You behave yourself,” ses Mrs. Jennings.

“Ted didn't say anything about your toothache,” ses Emma.

“I wouldn't let 'im, for fear of alarming Sophy,” ses Charlie.

Mrs. Jennings gave a sort of laugh and a sniff mixed.

“Ain't you pleased to see me agin?” ses Charlie.

“I don't want to see you,” ses Mrs. Jennings. “Wot d'ye think I want to see you for?”

“Change your mind pretty quick, don't you?” ses Charlie. “It's blow 'ot and blow cold with you seemingly. Why, I've been counting the minutes till I should see you agin.”

Mrs. Jennings told 'im not to make a fool of 'imself, and Charlie saw 'er look at Emma in a puzzled sort of way, as if she didn't know wot to make of it. She kept drawing away from 'im and he kept drawing close to 'er; other

people on the pavement dodging and trying to get out of their way, and asking them which side they was going and to stick to it.

"Why don't you behave yourself?" ses Emma, at last.

"We're all right," ses Charlie; "you look arter your own young man. We can look arter ourselves."

"Speak for yourself," ses Mrs. Jennings, very sharp.

Charlie laughed, and the more Mrs. Jennings showed 'er dislike for 'is nonsense the more he gave way to it. Even Ted thought it was going too far, and tried to interfere when he put his arm round Mrs. Jennings's waist and made 'er dance to a piano-organ; but there was no stopping 'im, and at last Mrs. Jennings said she had 'ad enough of it, and told Emma she was going off 'ome.



He put his arm round Mrs. Jennings's waist and made 'er dance to a piano-organ.

"Don't take no notice of 'im," ses Emma.

"I must," ses Mrs. Jennings, who was arf crying with rage.

"Well, if you go 'ome, I shall go," ses Emma. "I don't want 'is company. I believe he's doing it on purpose.

“Behave yourself, Charlie,” ses Ted.

“All right, old man,” ses Charlie. “You look arter your young woman and I'll look arter mine.”

“Your wot?” ses Mrs. Jennings, very loud.

“My young woman,” ses Charlie.

“Look 'ere,” ses Emma. “You may as well know first as last—Sophy 'as got a young man.”

“O' course she 'as,” ses Charlie. “Twenty-seven on the second of next January, he is; same as me.”

“She's going to be married,” ses Emma, very solemn.

“Yes, to me,” ses Charlie, pretending to be surprised. “Didn't you know that?”

He looked so pleased with 'imself at his cleverness that Emma arf put up her 'and, and then she thought better of it and turned away.

“He's just doing it to get rid of you,” she ses to Mrs. Jennings, “and if you give way you're a bigger silly than I took you for. Let 'im go on and 'ave his own way, and tell your intended about 'im when you see 'im. Arter all, you started it.”

“I was only 'aving a bit o' fun,” ses Mrs. Jennings.

“Well, so is he,” ses Emma.

“Not me!” ses Charlie, turning his eyes up. “I'm in dead earnest; and so is she. It's only shyness on 'er part; it'll soon wear off.”

He took 'old of Mrs. Jennings's arm agin and began to tell 'er 'ow lonely 'is life was afore she came acrost his path like an angel that had lost its way. And he went on like that till she told Emma that she'd either 'ave to go off 'ome or scream. Ted interfered agin then, and, arter listening to wot he 'ad got to say, Charlie said as 'ow he'd try and keep his love under control a bit more.

“She won't stand much more of it,” he ses to Ted, arter they 'ad got 'ome that night. “I shouldn't be surprised if she don't turn up to-morrow.”

Ted shook his 'ead. “She'll turn up to oblige Emma,” he ses; “but there's no need for you to overdo it, Charlie. If her young man 'appened to get to 'ear of it it might cause trouble.”

“I ain't afraid of 'im,” ses Charlie, “not if your description of 'im is right.”

“Emma knows 'im,” ses Ted, “and I know she don't think much of 'im. She says he ain't as big as I am.”

Charlie smiled to himself and laid awake for a little while thinking of pet names to surprise Mrs. Jennings with. He called 'er a fresh one every night for a week, and every night he took 'er a little bunch o' flowers with 'is love. When she flung 'em on the pavement he pretended to think she 'ad dropped 'em; but, do wot he would, 'e couldn't frighten 'er into staying away, and 'is share of music-'alls and bus rides and things like that was more than 'e cared to think of. All the time Ted was as happy as a sand-boy, and one evening when Emma asked 'im to go 'ome to supper 'e was so pleased 'e could 'ardly speak.

“Father thought he'd like to see you,” ses Emma. “I shall be proud to shake 'im by the 'and,” ses Ted, going red with joy.

“And you're to come, too, Sophy,” ses Emma, turning to Mrs. Jennings.

Charlie coughed, feeling a bit orkard-like, and Emma stood there as if waiting for 'im to go.

“Well, so long,” ses Charlie at last. “Take care o' my little prize packet.”

“You can come, too, if you like,” ses Emma. “Father said I was to bring you. Don't 'ave none of your nonsense there, that's all.”

Charlie thanked 'er, and they was all walking along, him and Mrs. Jennings behind, when Emma looked over 'er shoulder.

“Sophy's young man is coming,” she ses.

“Ho!” ses Charlie. He walked along doing a bit o' thinking, and by and by 'e gives a little laugh, and he ses, “I—I don't think p'r'aps I'll come arter all.”

“Afraid?” ses Emma, with a nasty laugh.

“No,” ses Charlie.

“Well, it looks like it,” ses Emma.

“He's brave enough where wimmen are concerned,” ses Mrs. Jennings.

“I was thinking of you,” ses Charlie.

“You needn't trouble about me,” ses Mrs. Jennings. “I can look after myself, thank you.”

Charlie looked round, but there was no help for it. He got as far away from Mrs. Jennings as possible, and when they got to Emma's house he went in last.

Emma's father and mother was there and two or three of 'er brothers and sisters, but the fust thing that Charlie noticed was a great lump of a man standing by the mantelpiece staring at 'im.

“Come in, and make yourselves at 'ome,” ses Mr. White. “I'm glad to see you both. Emma 'as told me all about you.”

Charlie's 'art went down into 'is boots, but every-body was so busy drawing their chairs up to the table that they didn't notice 'ow pale he 'ad gone. He sat between Mr. White and Mrs. Jennings, and by and by, when every-body was talking, he turned to 'im in a whisper, and asked 'im who the big chap was.

“Mrs. Jennings's brother,” ses Mr. White; “brewer's drayman he is.”

Charlie said, “Oh!” and went on eating, a bit relieved in 'is mind.

“Your friend and my gal 'll make a nice couple,” ses Mr. White, looking at Ted and Emma, sitting 'and in 'and.

“She couldn't 'ave a better husband,” ses Charlie, whispering again; “but where is Mrs. Jennings's young man? I 'eard he was to be here.”

Mr. White put down 'is knife and fork. “Eh?” he ses, staring at 'im.

“Mrs. Jennings's intended?” ses Charlie.

“Who are you getting at?” ses Mr. White, winking at 'im.

“But she 'as got one, ain't she?” ses Charlie. “That'll do,” ses Mr. White, with another wink. “Try it on somebody else.”

“Wot are you two talking about?” ses Emma, who 'ad been watching 'em.

“He's trying to pull my leg,” ses 'er father, smiling all over his face. “Been asking me where Mrs. Jennings's young man is. P'r'aps you oughtn't to 'ave told us yet, Emma.”

“It's all right,” ses Emma. “He's got a very jealous disposition, poor fellow; and me and Sophy have been telling 'im about a young man just to tease 'im. We've been describing him to 'imself all along, and he thought it was somebody else.”

She caught Charlie's eye, and all in a flash he saw 'ow he 'ad been done. Some of 'em began to laugh, and Mrs. Jennings put her 'and on his and gave it a squeeze. He sat there struck all of a heap, wondering wot he was going to do, and just at that moment there was a knock at the street door.

“I'll open it,” he ses.

He jumped up before anybody could stop 'im and went to the door. Two seconds arter Ted Denver followed 'im, and that is last he ever saw of Charlie Brice, he was running down the road without 'is hat as hard as he could run.



He was running down the road without 'is hat as hard as he could run.

“THE TOLL-HOUSE”

“It's all nonsense,” said Jack Barnes. “Of course people have died in the house; people die in every house. As for the noises—wind in the chimney and rats in the wainscot are very convincing to a nervous man. Give me another cup of tea, Meagle.”

“Lester and White are first,” said Meagle, who was presiding at the tea-table of the Three Feathers Inn. “You've had two.”

Lester and White finished their cups with irritating slowness, pausing between sips to sniff the aroma, and to discover the sex and dates of arrival of the “strangers” which floated in some numbers in the beverage. Mr. Meagle served them to the brim, and then, turning to the grimly expectant Mr. Barnes, blandly requested him to ring for hot water.

“We'll try and keep your nerves in their present healthy condition,” he remarked. “For my part I have a sort of half-and-half belief in the supernatural.”

“All sensible people have,” said Lester. “An aunt of mine saw a ghost once.”

White nodded.

“I had an uncle that saw one,” he said.

“It always is somebody else that sees them,” said Barnes.

“Well, there is a house,” said Meagle, “a large house at an absurdly low rent, and nobody will take it. It has taken toll of at least one life of every family that has lived there—however short the time—and since it has stood empty caretaker after caretaker has died there. The last caretaker died fifteen years ago.”

“Exactly,” said Barnes. “Long enough ago for legends to accumulate.”

“I'll bet you a sovereign you won't spend the night there alone, for all your talk,” said White, suddenly.

“And I,” said Lester.

“No,” said Barnes slowly. “I don't believe in ghosts nor in any supernatural things whatever; all the same I admit that I should not care to pass a night there alone.”

“But why not?” inquired White.

“Wind in the chimney,” said Meagle with a grin.

“Rats in the wainscot,” chimed in Lester.

“As you like,” said Barnes coloring.

“Suppose we all go,” said Meagle. “Start after supper, and get there about eleven. We have been walking for ten days now without an adventure—except Barnes's discovery that ditchwater smells longest. It will be a novelty, at any rate, and, if we break the spell by all surviving, the grateful owner ought to come down handsome.”

“Let's see what the landlord has to say about it first,” said Lester. “There is no fun in passing a night in an ordinary empty house. Let us make sure that it is haunted.”

He rang the bell, and, sending for the landlord, appealed to him in the name of our common humanity not to let them waste a night watching in a house in which spectres and hobgoblins had no part. The reply was more than reassuring, and the landlord, after describing with considerable art the exact appearance of a head which had been seen hanging out of a window in the moonlight, wound up with a polite but urgent request that they would settle his bill before they went.

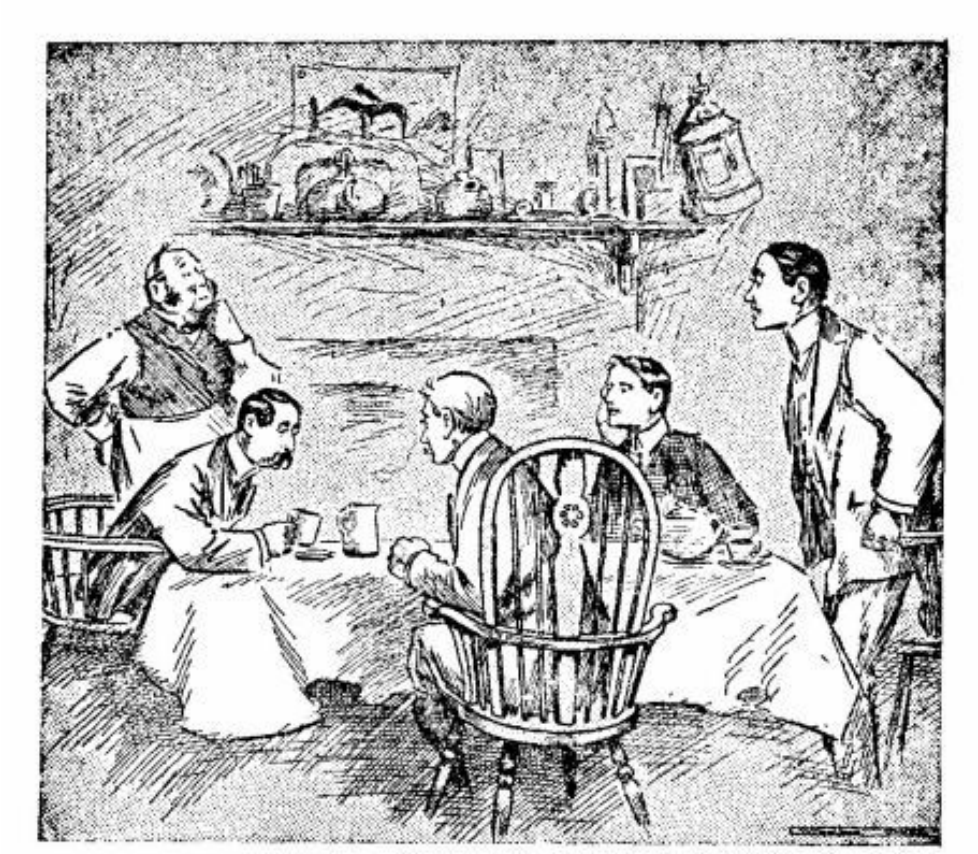
“It's all very well for you young gentlemen to have your fun,” he said indulgently; “but supposing as how you are all found dead in the morning, what about me? It ain't called the Toll-House for nothing, you know.”

“Who died there last?” inquired Barnes, with an air of polite derision.

“A tramp,” was the reply. “He went there for the sake of half a crown, and they found him next morning hanging from the balusters, dead.”

“Suicide,” said Barnes. “Unsound mind.”

The landlord nodded. “That's what the jury brought it in,” he said slowly; “but his mind was sound enough when he went in there. I'd known him, off and on, for years. I'm a poor man, but I wouldn't spend the night in that house for a hundred pounds.”



“I'm a poor man, but I wouldn't spend the night in that house for a hundred pounds.”

He repeated this remark as they started on their expedition a few hours later. They left as the inn was closing for the night; bolts shot noisily behind

them, and, as the regular customers trudged slowly homewards, they set off at a brisk pace in the direction of the house. Most of the cottages were already in darkness, and lights in others went out as they passed.

"It seems rather hard that we have got to lose a night's rest in order to convince Barnes of the existence of ghosts," said White.

"It's in a good cause," said Meagle. "A most worthy object; and something seems to tell me that we shall succeed. You didn't forget the candles, Lester?"

"I have brought two," was the reply; "all the old man could spare."

There was but little moon, and the night was cloudy. The road between high hedges was dark, and in one place, where it ran through a wood, so black that they twice stumbled in the uneven ground at the side of it.

"Fancy leaving our comfortable beds for this!" said White again. "Let me see; this desirable residential sepulchre lies to the right, doesn't it?"

"Farther on," said Meagle.

They walked on for some time in silence, broken only by White's tribute to the softness, the cleanliness, and the comfort of the bed which was receding farther and farther into the distance. Under Meagle's guidance they turned off at last to the right, and, after a walk of a quarter of a mile, saw the gates of the house before them.



They saw the gates of the house before them

The lodge was almost hidden by overgrown shrubs and the drive was choked with rank growths. Meagle leading, they pushed through it until the dark pile of the house loomed above them.

“There is a window at the back where we can get in, so the landlord says,” said Lester, as they stood before the hall door.

“Window?” said Meagle. “Nonsense. Let's do the thing properly. Where's the knocker?”

He felt for it in the darkness and gave a thundering rat-tat-tat at the door.

“Don't play the fool,” said Barnes crossly.

“Ghostly servants are all asleep,” said Meagle gravely, “but I'll wake them up before I've done with them. It's scandalous keeping us out here in the dark.”

He plied the knocker again, and the noise volleyed in the emptiness beyond. Then with a sudden exclamation he put out his hands and stumbled forward.

“Why, it was open all the time,” he said, with an odd catch in his voice. “Come on.”

“I don't believe it was open,” said Lester, hanging back. “Somebody is playing us a trick.”

“Nonsense,” said Meagle sharply. “Give me a candle. Thanks. Who's got a match?”

Barnes produced a box and struck one, and Meagle, shielding the candle with his hand, led the way forward to the foot of the stairs. “Shut the door, somebody,” he said, “there's too much draught.”

“It is shut,” said White, glancing behind him.

Meagle fingered his chin. “Who shut it?” he inquired, looking from one to the other. “Who came in last?”

“I did,” said Lester, “but I don't remember shutting it—perhaps I did, though.”

Meagle, about to speak, thought better of it, and, still carefully guarding the flame, began to explore the house, with the others close behind. Shadows danced on the walls and lurked in the corners as they proceeded. At the end of the passage they found a second staircase, and ascending it slowly gained the first floor.

“Careful!” said Meagle, as they gained the landing.

He held the candle forward and showed where the balusters had broken away. Then he peered curiously into the void beneath.

“This is where the tramp hanged himself, I suppose,” he said thoughtfully.

“You've got an unwholesome mind,” said White, as they walked on. “This place is quite creepy enough without your remembering that. Now let's find a comfortable room and have a little nip of whiskey apiece and a pipe. How will this do?”

He opened a door at the end of the passage and revealed a small square room. Meagle led the way with the candle, and, first melting a drop or two of tallow, stuck it on the mantelpiece. The others seated themselves on the floor and watched pleasantly as White drew from his pocket a small bottle of whiskey and a tin cup.

“H'm! I've forgotten the water,” he exclaimed.

“I'll soon get some,” said Meagle.

He tugged violently at the bell-handle, and the rusty jangling of a bell sounded from a distant kitchen. He rang again.

“Don't play the fool,” said Barnes roughly.

Meagle laughed. “I only wanted to convince you,” he said kindly. “There ought to be, at any rate, one ghost in the servants' hall.”

Barnes held up his hand for silence.

“Yes?” said Meagle with a grin at the other two. “Is anybody coming?”

“Suppose we drop this game and go back,” said Barnes suddenly. “I don't believe in spirits, but nerves are outside anybody's command. You may laugh as you like, but it really seemed to me that I heard a door open below and steps on the stairs.”

His voice was drowned in a roar of laughter.

“He is coming round,” said Meagle with a smirk. “By the time I have done with him he will be a confirmed believer. Well, who will go and get some water? Will you, Barnes?”

“No,” was the reply.

“If there is any it might not be safe to drink after all these years,” said Lester. “We must do without it.”

Meagle nodded, and taking a seat on the floor held out his hand for the cup. Pipes were lit and the clean, wholesome smell of tobacco filled the room. White produced a pack of cards; talk and laughter rang through the room and died away reluctantly in distant corridors.

“Empty rooms always delude me into the belief that I possess a deep voice,” said Meagle. “To-morrow——”

He started up with a smothered exclamation as the light went out suddenly and something struck him on the head. The others sprang to their feet. Then Meagle laughed.

“It's the candle,” he exclaimed. “I didn't stick it enough.”

Barnes struck a match and relighting the candle stuck it on the mantelpiece, and sitting down took up his cards again.

“What was I going to say?” said Meagle. “Oh, I know; to-morrow I— —”

“Listen!” said White, laying his hand on the other's sleeve. “Upon my word I really thought I heard a laugh.”

“Look here!” said Barnes. “What do you say to going back? I've had enough of this. I keep fancying that I hear things too; sounds of something moving about in the passage outside. I know it's only fancy, but it's uncomfortable.”

“You go if you want to,” said Meagle, “and we will play dummy. Or you might ask the tramp to take your hand for you, as you go downstairs.”

Barnes shivered and exclaimed angrily. He got up and, walking to the half-closed door, listened.

“Go outside,” said Meagle, winking at the other two. “I'll dare you to go down to the hall door and back by yourself.”

Barnes came back and, bending forward, lit his pipe at the candle.

“I am nervous but rational,” he said, blowing out a thin cloud of smoke. “My nerves tell me that there is something prowling up and down the long passage outside; my reason tells me that it is all nonsense. Where are my cards?”

He sat down again, and taking up his hand, looked through it carefully and led.

“Your play, White,” he said after a pause. White made no sign.

“Why, he is asleep,” said Meagle. “Wake up, old man. Wake up and play.”

Lester, who was sitting next to him, took the sleeping man by the arm and shook him, gently at first and then with some roughness; but White, with his back against the wall and his head bowed, made no sign. Meagle bawled in his ear and then turned a puzzled face to the others.

“He sleeps like the dead,” he said, grimacing. “Well, there are still three of us to keep each other company.”

“Yes,” said Lester, nodding. “Unless—Good Lord! suppose— —”

He broke off and eyed them trembling.

“Suppose what?” inquired Meagle.

“Nothing,” stammered Lester. “Let's wake him. Try him again. *White! White!*”

“It's no good,” said Meagle seriously; “there's something wrong about that sleep.”

“That's what I meant,” said Lester; “and if he goes to sleep like that, why shouldn't——”

Meagle sprang to his feet. “Nonsense,” he said roughly. “He's tired out; that's all. Still, let's take him up and clear out. You take his legs and Barnes will lead the way with the candle. Yes? Who's that?”

He looked up quickly towards the door. “Thought I heard somebody tap,” he said with a shamefaced laugh. “Now, Lester, up with him. One, two—Lester! Lester!”

He sprang forward too late; Lester, with his face buried in his arms, had rolled over on the floor fast asleep, and his utmost efforts failed to awaken him.

“He—is—asleep,” he stammered. “Asleep!”

Barnes, who had taken the candle from the mantel-piece, stood peering at the sleepers in silence and dropping tallow over the floor.



Barnes stood peering at the sleepers in silence and dropping tallow over the floor.

"We must get out of this," said Meagle. "Quick!" Barnes hesitated. "We can't leave them here—" he began.

"We must," said Meagle in strident tones. "If you go to sleep I shall go—Quick! Come."

He seized the other by the arm and strove to drag him to the door. Barnes shook him off, and putting the candle back on the mantelpiece, tried again to arouse the sleepers.

"It's no good," he said at last, and, turning from them, watched Meagle. "Don't you go to sleep," he said anxiously.

Meagle shook his head, and they stood for some time in uneasy silence. "May as well shut the door," said Barnes at last.

He crossed over and closed it gently. Then at a scuffling noise behind him he turned and saw Meagle in a heap on the hearthstone.

With a sharp catch in his breath he stood motionless. Inside the room the candle, fluttering in the draught, showed dimly the grotesque attitudes of the sleepers. Beyond the door there seemed to his over-wrought imagination a strange and stealthy unrest. He tried to whistle, but his lips were parched, and in a mechanical fashion he stooped, and began to pick up the cards which littered the floor.

He stopped once or twice and stood with bent head listening. The unrest outside seemed to increase; a loud creaking sounded from the stairs.

"Who is there?" he cried loudly.

The creaking ceased. He crossed to the door and flinging it open, strode out into the corridor. As he walked his fears left him suddenly.

"Come on!" he cried with a low laugh. "All of you! All of you! Show your faces—your infernal ugly faces! Don't skulk!"

He laughed again and walked on; and the heap in the fireplace put out his head tortoise fashion and listened in horror to the retreating footsteps. Not until they had become inaudible in the distance did the listeners' features relax.

"Good Lord, Lester, we've driven him mad," he said in a frightened whisper. "We must go after him."

There was no reply. Meagle sprung to his feet. "Do you hear?" he cried. "Stop your fooling now; this is serious. White! Lester! Do you hear?"

He bent and surveyed them in angry bewilderment. "All right," he said in a trembling voice. "You won't frighten me, you know."

He turned away and walked with exaggerated carelessness in the direction of the door. He even went outside and peeped through the crack, but the sleepers did not stir. He glanced into the blackness behind, and then came hastily into the room again.

He stood for a few seconds regarding them. The stillness in the house was horrible; he could not even hear them breathe. With a sudden resolution he snatched the candle from the mantelpiece and held the flame to White's finger. Then as he reeled back stupefied the footsteps again became audible.

He stood with the candle in his shaking hand listening. He heard them ascending the farther staircase, but they stopped suddenly as he went to the door. He walked a little way along the passage, and they went scurrying down the stairs and then at a jog-trot along the corridor below. He went back to the main staircase, and they ceased again.

For a time he hung over the balusters, listening and trying to pierce the blackness below; then slowly, step by step, he made his way downstairs, and, holding the candle above his head, peered about him.

"Barnes!" he called. "Where are you?" Shaking with fright, he made his way along the passage, and summoning up all his courage pushed open doors and gazed fearfully into empty rooms. Then, quite suddenly, he heard the footsteps in front of him.

He followed slowly for fear of extinguishing the candle, until they led him at last into a vast bare kitchen with damp walls and a broken floor. In front of him a door leading into an inside room had just closed. He ran towards it and flung it open, and a cold air blew out the candle. He stood aghast.



Into a vast bare kitchen with damp walls and a broken floor.

"Barnes!" he cried again. "Don't be afraid! It is I—Meagle!"

There was no answer. He stood gazing into the darkness, and all the time the idea of something close at hand watching was upon him. Then suddenly the steps broke out overhead again.

He drew back hastily, and passing through the kitchen groped his way along the narrow passages. He could now see better in the darkness, and finding himself at last at the foot of the staircase began to ascend it noiselessly. He reached the landing just in time to see a figure disappear round the angle of a wall. Still careful to make no noise, he followed the sound of the steps until they led him to the top floor, and he cornered the chase at the end of a short passage.

"Barnes!" he whispered. "Barnes!"

Something stirred in the darkness. A small circular window at the end of the passage just softened the blackness and revealed the dim outlines of a motionless figure. Meagle, in place of advancing, stood almost as still as a sudden horrible doubt took possession of him. With his eyes fixed on the shape in front he fell back slowly and, as it advanced upon him, burst into a terrible cry.

"Barnes! For God's sake! Is it you?"

The echoes of his voice left the air quivering, but the figure before him paid no heed. For a moment he tried to brace his courage up to endure its approach, then with a smothered cry he turned and fled.

The passages wound like a maze, and he threaded them blindly in a vain search for the stairs. If he could get down and open the hall door——

He caught his breath in a sob; the steps had begun again. At a lumbering trot they clattered up and down the bare passages, in and out, up and down, as though in search of him. He stood appalled, and then as they drew near entered a small room and stood behind the door as they rushed by. He came out and ran swiftly and noiselessly in the other direction, and in a moment the steps were after him. He found the long corridor and raced along it at top speed. The stairs he knew were at the end, and with the steps close behind he descended them in blind haste. The steps gained on him, and he shrank to the side to let them pass, still continuing his headlong flight. Then suddenly he seemed to slip off the earth into space.

Lester awoke in the morning to find the sunshine streaming into the room, and White sitting up and regarding with some perplexity a badly blistered finger.

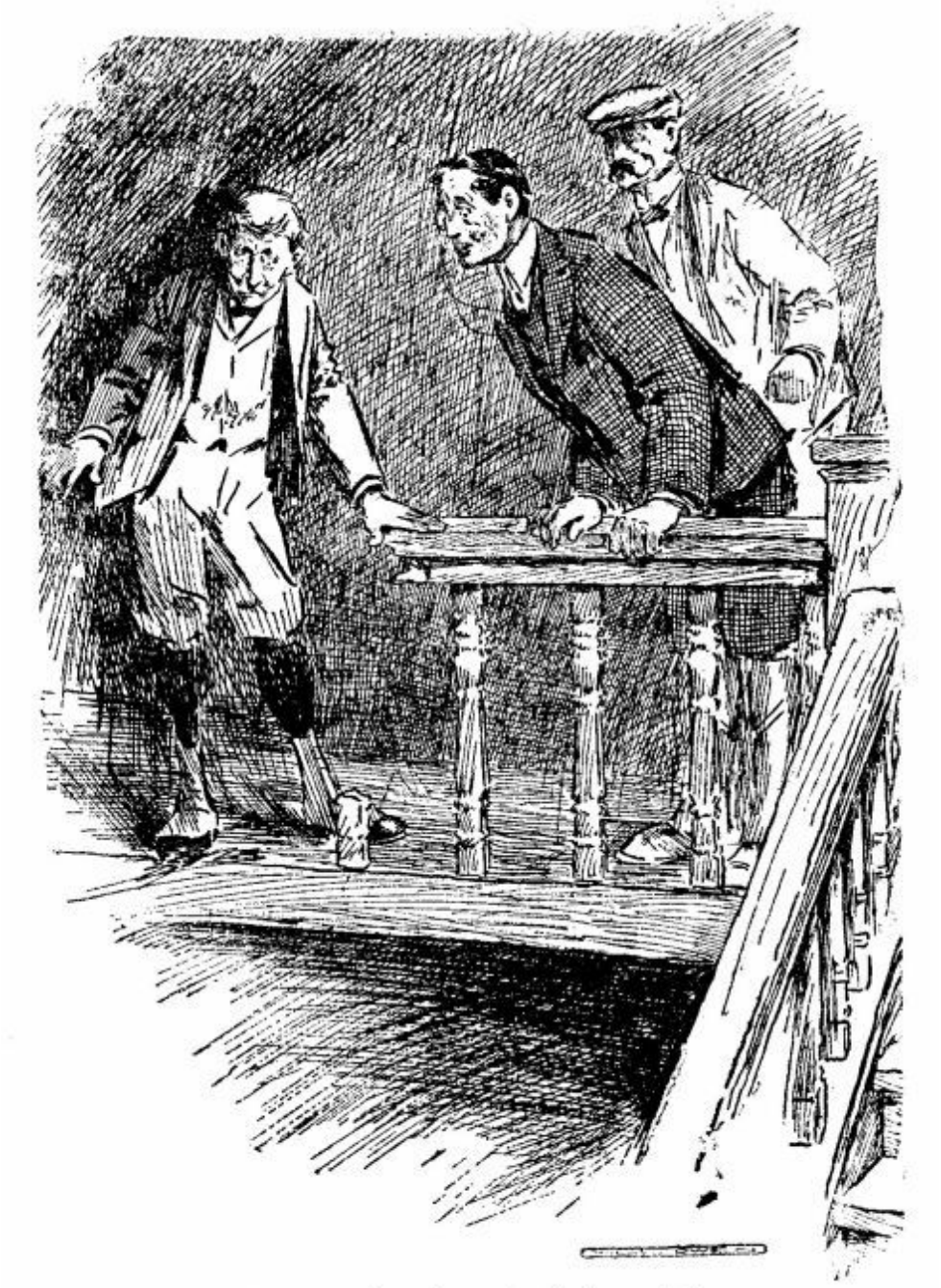
"Where are the others?" inquired Lester. "Gone, I suppose," said White. "We must have been asleep."

Lester arose, and stretching his stiffened limbs, dusted his clothes with his hands, and went out into the corridor. White followed. At the noise of their approach a figure which had been lying asleep at the other end sat up and revealed the face of Barnes. "Why, I've been asleep," he said in surprise. "I don't remember coming here. How did I get here?"

"Nice place to come for a nap," said Lester, severely, as he pointed to the gap in the balusters. "Look there! Another yard and where would you have

been?”

He walked carelessly to the edge and looked over. In response to his startled cry the others drew near, and all three stood gazing at the dead man below.



All three stood gazing at the dead man below.

PETER'S PENCE

Sailormen don't bother much about their relations, as a rule, said the night-watchman; sometimes because a railway-ticket costs as much as a barrel o' beer, and they ain't got the money for both, and sometimes because most relations run away with the idea that a sailorman has been knocking about 'arf over the world just to bring them 'ome presents.

Then, agin, some relations are partikler about appearances, and they don't like it if a chap don't wear a collar and tidy 'imself up. Dress is everything nowadays; put me in a top 'at and a tail-coat, with a twopenny smoke stuck in my mouth, and who would know the difference between me and a lord? Put a bishop in my clothes, and you'd ask 'im to 'ave a 'arf-pint as soon as you would me—sooner, p'r'aps.



Put a bishop in my clothes, and you'd ask 'im to 'ave a 'arf-pint as soon as you would me.

Talking of relations reminds me of Peter Russet's uncle. It's some years ago now, and Peter and old Sam Small and Ginger Dick 'ad just come back arter being away for nearly ten months. They 'ad all got money in their pockets, and they was just talking about the spree they was going to have, when a letter was brought to Peter, wot had been waiting for 'im at the office.

He didn't like opening it at fust. The last letter he had 'ad kept 'im hiding indoors for a week, and then made him ship a fortnight afore 'e had meant to. He stood turning it over and over, and at last, arter Sam, wot was always a curious man, 'ad told 'im that if he didn't open it he'd do it for 'im, he tore it open and read it.

"It's from my old uncle, George Goodman," he ses, staring. "Why, I ain't seen 'im for over twenty years."

"Do you owe 'im any money?" ses Sam.

Peter shook his 'ead. "He's up in London," he ses, looking at the letter agin, "up in London for the fust time in thirty-three years, and he wants to

come and stay with me so that I can show 'im about."

"Wot is he?" ses Sam.

"He's retired," ses Peter, trying not to speak proud.

"Got money?" ses Sam, with a start.

"I b'leeve so," ses Peter, in a off-hand way. "I don't s'pose 'e lives on air."

"Any wives or children?" ses Sam.

"No," ses Peter. "He 'ad a wife, but she died."

"Then you have 'im, Peter," ses Sam, wot was always looking out for money. "Don't throw away a oppertunity like that. Why, if you treat 'im well he might leave it all to you."

"No such luck," ses Peter.

"You do as Sam ses," ses Ginger. "I wish I'd got an uncle."

"We'll try and give 'im a good time," ses Sam, "and if he's anything like Peter we shall enjoy ourselves."

"Yes; but he ain't," ses Peter. "He's a very solemn, serious-minded man, and a strong teetotaller. Wot you'd call a glass o' beer he'd call pison. That's 'ow he got on. He's thought a great deal of in 'is place, I can tell you, but he ain't my sort."

"That's a bit orkard," ses Sam, scratching his 'ead. "Same time, it don't do to throw away a chance. If 'e was my uncle I should pretend to be a teeto-taller while 'e was here, just to please 'im."

"And when you felt like a drink, Peter," ses Ginger, "me and Sam would look arter 'im while you slipped off to get it."

"He could 'ave the room below us," ses Sam. "It is empty."

Peter gave a sniff. "Wot about you and Ginger?" he ses.

"Wot about us?" ses Sam and Ginger, both together.

"Why, you'd 'ave to be teetotallers, too," ses Peter. "Wot's the good o' me pretending to be steady if 'e sees I've got pals like you?"

Sam scratched his 'ead agin, ever so long, and at last he ses, “Well, mate,” he ses, “drink don't trouble me nor Ginger. We can do without it, as far as that goes; and we must all take it in turns to keep the old gentleman busy while the others go and get wot they want. You'd better go and take the room downstairs for 'im, afore it goes.”

Peter looked at 'im in surprise, but that was Sam all over. The idea o' knowing a man with money was too much for 'im, and he sat there giving good advice to Peter about 'is behavior until Peter didn't know whether it was 'is uncle or Sam's. 'Owever, he took the room and wrote the letter, and next arternoon at three o'clock Mr. Goodman came in a four-wheel cab with a big bag and a fat umbrella. A short, stiffish-built man of about sixty he was, with 'is top lip shaved and a bit o' short gray beard. He 'ad on a top 'at and a tail-coat, black kid gloves and a little black bow, and he didn't answer the cabman back a single word.



Mr. Goodman came in a four-wheel cab with a big bag and a fat umbrella

He seemed quite pleased to see Peter, and by and by Sam, who was bursting with curiosity, came down-stairs to ask Peter to lend 'im a boot-lace, and was interduced. Then Ginger came down to look for Sam, and in a few minutes they was all talking as comfortable as possible.

"I ain't seen Peter for twenty years," ses Mr. Goodman—"twenty long years!"

Sam shook his 'ead and looked at the floor.

"I happened to go and see Peter's sister—my niece Polly," ses Mr. Goodman, "and she told me the name of 'is ship. It was quite by chance, because she told me it was the fust letter she had 'ad from him in seven years."

"I didn't think it was so long as that," ses Peter. "Time passes so quick."

His uncle nodded. “Ah, so it does,” 'e ses. “It's all the same whether we spend it on the foaming ocean or pass our little lives ashore. Afore we can turn round, in a manner o' speaking, it 'as gorn.”

“The main thing,” ses Peter, in a good voice, “is to pass it properly.”

“Then it don't matter,” ses Ginger.

“So it don't,” ses Sam, very serious.

“I held 'im in my arms when 'e was a baby,” ses Mr. Goodman, looking at Peter.

“Fond o' children?” ses Sam.

Mr. Goodman nodded. “Fond of everybody,” he ses.

“That's 'ow Peter is,” ses Ginger; “specially young——”

Peter Russet and Sam both turned and looked at 'im very sharp.

“Children,” ses Ginger, remembering 'imself, “*and* teetotallers. I s'pose it is being a teetotaller 'imself.”

“Is Peter a teetotaller?” ses Mr. Goodman. “I'd no idea of it. Wot a joyful thing!”

“It was your example wot put it into his 'ead fust, I b'leeve,” ses Sam, looking at Peter for 'im to notice 'ow clever he was.

“And then, Sam and Ginger Dick being teetotallers too,” ses Peter, “we all, natural-like, keep together.”

Mr. Goodman said they was wise men, and, arter a little more talk, he said 'ow would it be if they went out and saw a little bit of the great wicked city? They all said they would, and Ginger got quite excited about it until he found that it meant London.

They got on a bus at Aldgate, and fust of all they went to the British Museum, and when Mr. Goodman was tired o' that—and long arter the others was—they went into a place and 'ad a nice strong cup of tea and a piece o' cake each. When they come out o' there they all walked about looking at the shops until they was tired out, and arter wot Mr. Goodman said was a very improving evening they all went 'ome.

Sam and Ginger went 'ome just for the look 'o the thing, and arter waiting a few minutes in their room they crept downstairs agin to spend wot was left of the evening. They went down as quiet as mice, but, for all that, just as they was passing Mr. Goodman's room the door opened, and Peter, in a polite voice, asked 'em to step inside.

"We was just thinking you'd be dull up there all alone," he ses.

Sam lost 'is presence o' mind, and afore he knew wot 'e was doing 'im and Ginger 'ad walked in and sat down. They sat there for over an hour and a 'arf talking, and then Sam, with a look at Ginger, said they must be going, because he 'ad got to call for a pair o' boots he 'ad left to be mended.

"Why, Sam, wot are you thinking of?" ses Peter, who didn't want anybody to 'ave wot he couldn't. "Why, the shop's shut."

"I don't think so," ses Sam, glaring at 'im. "Anyway, we can go and see."

Peter said he'd go with 'im, and just as they got to the door Mr. Goodman said he'd go too. O' course, the shops was shut, and arter Mr. Goodman 'ad stood on Tower Hill admiring the Tower by moonlight till Sam felt ready to drop, they all walked back. Three times Sam's boot-lace come undone, but as the ethers all stopped too to see 'im do it up it didn't do 'im much good. Wot with temper and dryness 'e could 'ardly bid Peter "Good-night."

Sam and Ginger 'ad something the next morning, but morning ain't the time for it; and arter they had 'ad dinner Mr. Goodman asked 'em to go to the Zoological Gardens with 'im. He paid for them all, and he 'ad a lot to say about kindness to animals and 'ow you could do anything with 'em a'most by kindness. He walked about the place talking like a book, and when a fat monkey, wot was pretending to be asleep, got a bit o' Sam's whisker, he said it was on'y instink, and the animal had no wish to do 'im 'arm.

"Very likely thought it was doing you a kindness, Sam," ses Ginger.

Mr. Goodman said it was very likely, afore Sam could speak, and arter walking about and looking at the other things they come out and 'ad a nice, strong, 'ot cup o' tea, same as they 'ad the day before, and then walked about, not knowing what to do with themselves.

Sam got tired of it fust, and catching Ginger's eye said he thought it was time to get 'ome in case too much enjoyment wasn't good for 'em. His idea

was to get off with Ginger and make a night of it, and when 'e found Peter and his uncle was coming too, he began to think that things was looking serious.

"I don't want to spile your evening," he says, very perlite. "I must get 'ome to mend a pair o' trowsis o' mine, but there's no need for you to come."

"I'll come and watch you," ses Peter's uncle.

"And then I'm going off to bed early," ses Sam. "Me, too," ses Ginger, and Peter said he could hardly keep 'is eyes open.

They got on a bus, and as Sam was about to foller Ginger and Peter on top, Mr. Goodman took hold of 'im by the arm and said they'd go inside. He paid two penny fares, and while Sam was wondering 'ow to tell 'im that it would be threepence each, the bus stopped to take up a passenger and he got up and moved to the door.

"They've gone up there," he ses, pointing.

Afore Sam could stop 'im he got off, and Sam, full o' surprise, got off too, and follered 'im' on to the pavement.

"Who's gone up there?" he ses, as the bus went on agin.

"Peter and Mr. Ginger Dick," ses Mr. Goodman. "But don't you trouble. You go 'ome and mend your trowsis."

"But they're on the bus," ses Sam, staring. "Dick and Peter, I mean."

Mr. Goodman shook his 'ead.

"They got off. Didn't you see 'em?" he ses.

"No," ses Sam, "I'll swear they didn't."

"Well, it's my mistake, I s'pose," ses Peter's uncle. "But you get off home; I'm not tired yet, and I'll walk."

Sam said 'e wasn't very tired, and he walked along wondering whether Mr. Goodman was quite right in his 'ead. For one thing, 'e seemed upset about something or other, and kept taking little peeps at 'im in a way he couldn't understand at all.

"It was nice tea we 'ad this arternoon," ses Mr. Goodman at last.

“De-licious,” ses Sam.

“Trust a teetotaller for knowing good tea,” ses Mr. Goodman. “I expect Peter enjoyed it. I s'pose 'e is a very strict teetotaller?”

“Strict ain't the word for it,” ses Sam, trying to do 'is duty by Peter. “We all are.”

“That's right,” ses Mr. Goodman, and he pushed his 'at back and looked at Sam very serious. They walked on a bit further, and then Peter's uncle stopped sudden just as they was passing a large public-'ouse and looked at Sam.

“I don't want Peter to know, 'cos it might alarm 'im,” he ses, “but I've come over a bit faint. I'll go in 'ere for 'arf a minnit and sit down. You'd better wait outside.”

“I'll come in with you, in case you want help,” ses Sam. “I don't mind wot people think.”

Mr. Goodman tried to persuade 'im not to, but it was all no good, and at last 'e walked in and sat down on a tall stool that stood agin the bar, and put his hand to his 'ead.

“I s'pose we shall 'ave to 'ave something,” he ses in a whisper to Sam; “we can't expect to come in and sit down for nothing. What'll you take?”

Sam looked at 'im, but he might just as well ha' looked at a brass door-knob.

“I—I—I'll 'ave a small ginger-beer,” he ses at last, “a very small one.”

“One small ginger,” ses Mr. Goodman to the bar-maid, “and one special Scotch.”

Sam could 'ardly believe his ears, and he stood there 'oldin' his glass o' ginger-beer and watching Peter's teetotal uncle drink whiskey, and thought 'e must be dreaming.

“I dessay it seems very shocking to you,” ses Mr. Goodman, putting down 'is glass and dryin' 'is lips on each other, “but I find it useful for these attacks.”

“I—I s'pose the flavor's very nasty?” ses Sam, taking a sip at 'is ginger-beer.

“Not exactly wot you could call nasty,” ses Mr. Goodman, “though I dessay it would seem so to you. I don't suppose you could swallow it.”

“I don't s'pose I could,” ses Sam, “but I've a good mind to 'ave a try. If it's good for one teetotaller I don't see why it should hurt another.”

Mr. Goodman looked at 'im very hard, and then he ordered a whiskey and stood watching while Sam, arter pretending for a minnit to look at it as though 'e didn't know wot to do with it, took a sip and let it roll round 'is mouth.

“Well?” ses Mr. Goodman, looking at 'im anxious-like.

“It ain't so 'orrid as I 'ad fancied,” ses Sam, lapping up the rest very gentle.



"It aint so 'orrid as I 'ad fancied," ses Sam.

"'Ave you 'ad enough to do you all the good it ought to?"

Mr. Goodman said that it was no good 'arf doing a thing, and p'r'aps he 'ad better 'ave one more; and arter Sam 'ad paid for the next two they went out arm-in-arm.

"'Ow cheerful everybody looks!" ses Mr. Goodman, smiling.

"They're going to amuse theirselves, I expect," ses Sam—"music-'alls and such-like."

Mr. Goodman shook his 'ead at 'em.

"Music-'alls ain't so bad as some people try to make out," ses Sam.

“Look 'ere; I took some drink to see what the flavor was like; suppose you go to a music-'all to see wot that's like?”

“It seems on'y fair,” ses Peter's uncle, considering.

“It is fair,” ses Sam, and twenty minutes arterwards they was sitting in a music-'all drinking each other's 'ealths and listening to the songs— Mr. Goodman with a big cigar in 'is mouth and his 'at cocked over one eye, and Sam beating time to the music with 'is pipe.

“'Ow do you like it?” he ses.

Mr. Goodman didn't answer 'im because 'e was joining in the chorus with one side of 'is mouth and keeping 'is cigar alight with the other. He just nodded at 'im; but 'e looked so 'appy that Sam felt it was a pleasure to sit there and look at 'im.

“I wonder wot Peter and Ginger is doin'?” he ses, when the song was finished.

“I don't know,” ses Mr. Goodman, “and, wot's more, I don't care. If I'd 'ad any idea that Peter was like wot he is I should never 'ave wrote to 'im. I can't think 'ow you can stand 'im.”

“He ain't so bad,” ses Sam, wondering whether he ought to tell 'im 'arf of wot Peter really was like.

“Bad!” ses Mr. Goodman. “I come up to London for a 'oliday—a change, mind you—and I thought Peter and me was going to 'ave a good time. Instead o' that, he goes about with a face as long as a fiddle. He don't drink, 'e don't go to places of amusement—innercent places of amusement —and 'is idea of enjoying life is to go walking about the streets and drinking cups o' tea.”

“We must try and alter 'im,” ses Sam, arter doing a bit o' thinking.

“Certainly not,” ses Mr. Goodman, laying his 'and on Sam's knee. “Far be it from me to interfere with a feller-creature's ideas o' wot's right. Besides, he might get writing to 'is sister agin, and she might tell my wife.”

“But Peter said she was dead,” ses Sam, very puzzled.

“I married agin,” ses Peter's uncle, in a whisper, 'cos people was telling 'im to keep quiet, “a tartar—a perfect tartar. She's in a 'orsepittle at present,

else I shouldn't be 'ere. And I shouldn't ha' been able to come if I 'adn't found five pounds wot she'd hid in a match-box up the chimbley."

"But wot'll you do when she finds it out?" ses Sam, opening 'is eyes.

"I'm going to 'ave the house cleaned and the chimbleys swept to welcome her 'ome," ses Mr. Goodman, taking a sip o' whiskey. "It'll be a little surprise for her."

They stayed till it was over, and on the bus he gave Sam some strong peppermint lozenges wot 'e always carried about with 'im, and took some 'imself. He said 'e found 'em helpful.

"What are we going to tell Peter and Ginger?" ses Sam, as they got near the 'ouse.

"Tell 'em?" ses Mr. Goodman. "Tell 'em the truth. How we follered 'em when they got off the bus, and 'ave been looking for 'em ever since. I'm not going to 'ave my 'oliday spoilt by a teetotal nevvy, I can tell you."

He started on Peter, wot was sitting on his bed with Ginger waiting for them, the moment he got inside, and all Ginger and Peter could say didn't make any difference.

"Mr. Small see you as plain as what I did," he ses.

"Plainer," ses Sam.

"But I tell you we come straight 'ome," ses Ginger, "and we've been waiting for you 'ere ever since."

Mr. Goodman shook his 'ead at 'im. "Say no more about it," he ses, in a kind voice. "I dessay it's rather tiresome for young men to go about with two old ones, and in future, if you and Peter keep together, me and my friend Mr. Small will do the same."

Sam shook 'ands with 'im, and though Peter tried his 'ardest to make 'im alter his mind it was no good. His uncle patted 'im on the shoulder, and said they'd try it for a few days, at any rate, and Ginger, wot thought it was a very good idea, backed 'im up. Everybody seemed pleased with the idea except Peter Russet, but arter Sam 'ad told 'im in private wot a high opinion 'is uncle 'ad got of 'im, and 'ow well off he was, 'e gave way.

They all enjoyed the next evening, and Sam and Mr. Goodman got on together like twin brothers. They went to a place of amusement every night, and the on'y unpleasantness that happened was when Peter's uncle knocked a chemist's shop up at a quarter-past twelve one night to buy a penn'orth o' peppermint lozenges.

They 'ad four of the 'appiest evenings together that Sam 'ad ever known; and Mr. Goodman would 'ave been just as 'appy too if it hadn't ha' been for the thoughts o' that five pounds. The more 'e thought of it the more unlikely it seemed that 'is wife would blame it on to the sweep, and one night he took the match-box out of 'is pocket and shook his 'ead over it till Sam felt quite sorry for 'im.

"Don't take up your troubles afore they come," he ses. "Orsepittles are dangerous places."

Mr. Goodman cheered up a bit at that, but he got miserable agin the next night because 'is money was getting low and he wanted another week in London.

"I've got seven shillings and fourpence and two stamps left," he ses. "Where it's all gone to I can't think."

"Don't you worry about that," ses Sam. "I've got a pound or two left yet."

"No, I ain't going to be a burden on you," ses Mr. Goodman, "but another week I must 'ave, so I must get the money somehow. Peter can't spend much, the way he goes on."

Sam gave a little cough.

"I'll get a pound or two out of 'im," ses Mr. Goodman.

Sam coughed agin. "Won't he think it rather funny?" he ses, arter a bit.

"Not if it's managed properly," ses Mr. Goodman, thinking 'ard. "I'll tell you 'ow we'll do it. To-morrow morning, while we are eating of our breakfast, you ask me to lend you a pound or two."

Sam, what 'ad just taken up 'is glass for a drink, put it down agin and stared at 'im.

"But I don't want no money," he ses; "and, besides, you 'aven't got any."

“You do as I tell you,” ses Mr. Goodman, “and when you've got it, you hand it over to me, see? Ask me to lend you five pounds.”

Sam thought as 'ow the whiskey 'ad got to Mr. Goodman's 'ead at last. 'Owever, to pacify 'im he promised to do wot 'e was told, and next morning, when they was all at breakfast, he looks over and catches Mr. Goodman's eye.

“I wonder if I might be so bold as to ask a favor of you?” he ses.

“Certainly,” ses Peter's uncle, “and glad I shall be to oblige you. There is no man I've got a greater respect for.”

“Thankee,” ses Sam. “The fact is, I've run a bit short owing to paying a man some money I owed 'im. If you could lend me five pounds, I couldn't thank you enough.”

Mr. Goodman put down 'is knife and fork and wrinkled up 'is forehead.

“I'm very sorry,” he ses, feeling in 'is pockets; “do you want it to-day?”

“Yes; I should like it,” ses Sam.

“It's most annoying,” ses Mr. Goodman, “but I was so afraid o' pickpockets that I didn't bring much away with me. If you could wait till the day arter to-morrow, when my money is sent to me, you can 'ave ten if you like.”

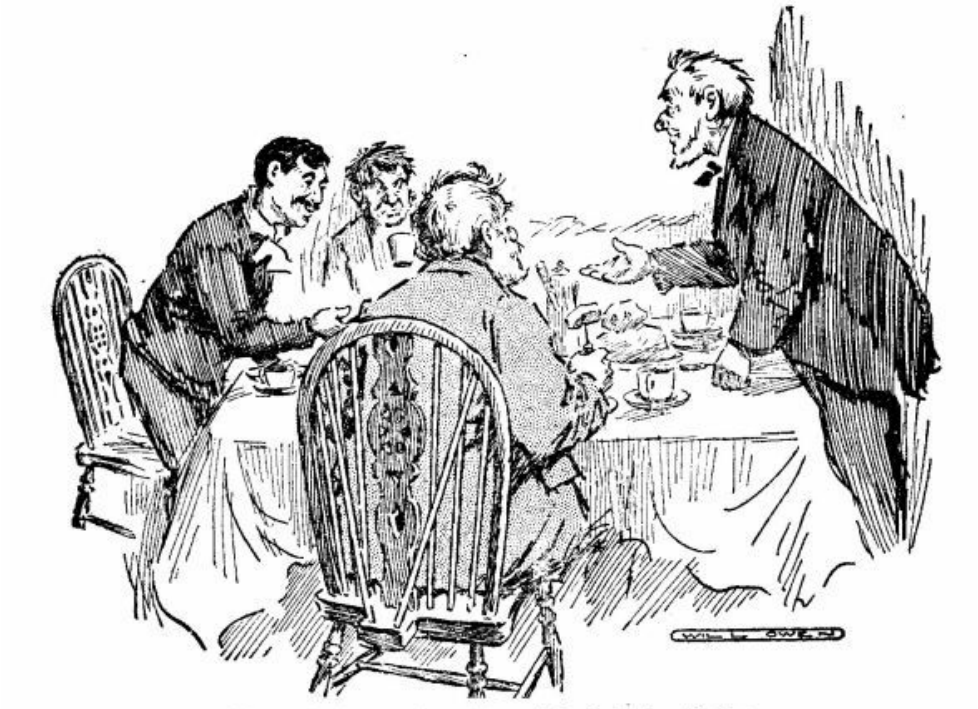
“You're very kind,” ses Sam, “but that 'ud be too late for me. I must try and get it somewhere else.” Peter and Ginger went on eating their breakfast, but every time Peter looked up he caught 'is uncle looking at 'im in such a surprised and disappointed sort o' way that 'e didn't like the look of it at all.

“I could just do it for a couple o' days, Sam,” he ses at last, “but it'll leave me very short.”

“That's right,” ses his uncle, smiling. “My nevvy, Peter Russet, will lend it to you, Mr. Small, of 'is own free will. He 'as offered afore he was asked, and that's the proper way to do it, in my opinion.”

He reached acrost the table and shook 'ands with Peter, and said that generosity ran in their family, and something seemed to tell 'im as Peter wouldn't lose by it. Everybody seemed pleased with each other, and arter

Ginger Dick and Peter 'ad gone out Mr. Goodman took the five pounds off of old Sam and stowed 'em away very careful in the match-box.



He reached acrost the table and shook 'ands with Peter.

"It's nice to 'ave money agin," he ses. "There's enough for a week's enjoyment here."

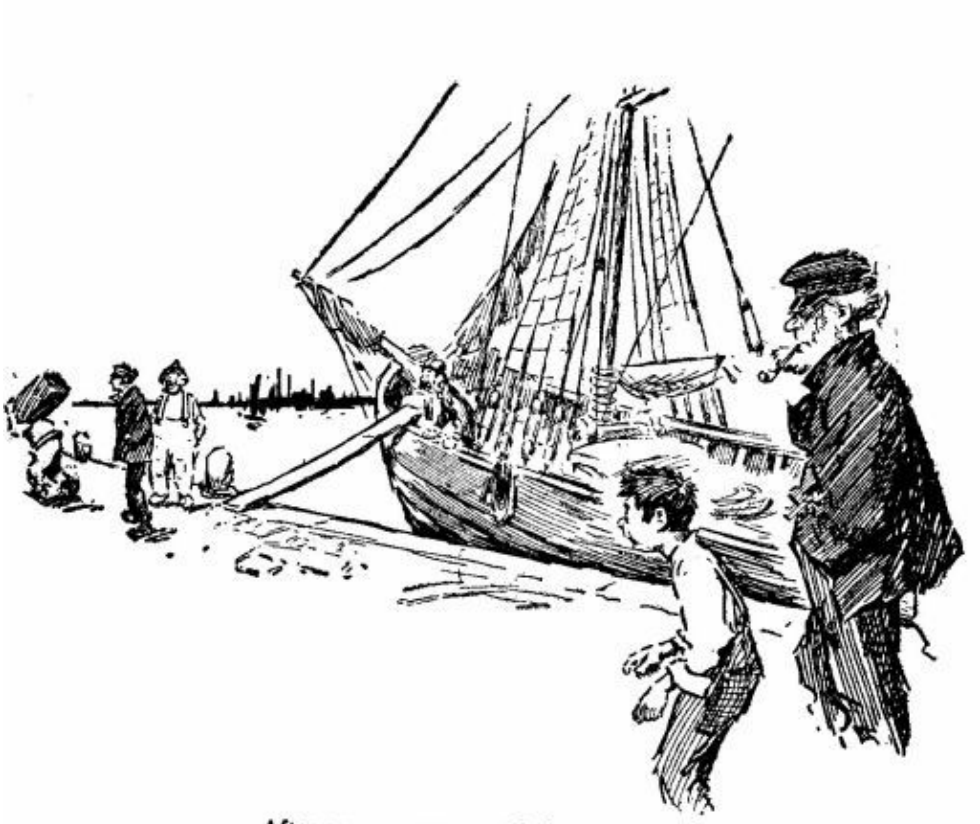
"Yes," ses Sam, slow-like; "but wot I want to know is, wot about the day arter to-morrow, when Peter expects 'is money?"

Mr. Goodman patted 'im on the shoulder. "Don't you worry about Peter's troubles," he ses. "I know exactly wot to do; it's all planned out. Now I'm going to 'ave a lay down for an hour—I didn't get much sleep last night—and if you'll call me at twelve o'clock we'll go somewhere. Knock loud."

He patted 'im on the shoulder agin, and Sam, arter fidgeting about a bit, went out. The last time he ever see Peter's uncle he was laying on the bed with 'is eyes shut, smiling in his sleep. And Peter Russet didn't see Sam for eighteen months.

THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY

Mr. Letts had left his ship by mutual arrangement, and the whole of the crew had mustered to see him off and to express their sense of relief at his departure. After some years spent in long voyages, he had fancied a trip on a coaster as a change, and, the schooner Curlew having no use for a ship's carpenter, had shipped as cook. He had done his best, and the unpleasant epithets that followed him along the quay at Dunchurch as he followed in the wake of his sea-chest were the result. Master and mate nodded in grim appreciation of the crew's efforts.



After some years spent in long voyages

He put his chest up at a seamen's lodging-house, and, by no means perturbed at this sudden change in his fortunes, sat on a seat overlooking the sea, with a cigarette between his lips, forming plans for his future. His eyes closed, and he opened them with a start to find that a middle-aged woman of pleasant but careworn appearance had taken the other end of the bench.

“Fine day,” said Mr. Letts, lighting another cigarette.

The woman assented and sat looking over the sea.

“Ever done any cooking?” asked Mr. Letts, presently.

“Plenty,” was the surprised reply. “Why?”

“I just wanted to ask you how long you would boil a bit o' beef,” said Mr. Letts. “Only from curiosity; I should never ship as cook again.”

He narrated his experience of the last few days, and, finding the listener sympathetic, talked at some length about himself and his voyages; also of his plans for the future.

“I lost my son at sea,” said the woman, with a sigh. “You favor him rather.”

Mr. Letts's face softened. “Sorry,” he said. “Sorry you lost him, I mean.”

“At least, I suppose he would have been like you,” said the other; “but it's nine years ago now. He was just sixteen.”

Mr. Letts—after a calculation—nodded. “Just my age,” he said. “I was twenty-five last March.”

“Sailed for Melbourne,” said the woman. “My only boy.”

Mr. Letts cleared his throat, sympathetically.

“His father died a week after he sailed,” continued the other, “and three months afterwards my boy's ship went down. Two years ago, like a fool, I married again. I don't know why I'm talking to you like this. I suppose it is because you remind me of him.”

“You talk away as much as you like,” said Mr. Letts, kindly. “I've got nothing to do.”

He lit another cigarette, and, sitting in an attitude of attention, listened to a recital of domestic trouble that made him congratulate himself upon remaining single.

“Since I married Mr. Green I can't call my soul my own,” said the victim of matrimony as she rose to depart. “If my poor boy had lived things would have been different. His father left the house and furniture to him, and that's all my second married me for, I'm sure. That and the bit o' money that was left to me. He's selling some of my boy's furniture at this very moment. That's why I came out; I couldn't bear it.”

“P'r'aps he'll turn up after all,” said Mr. Letts. “Never say die.”

Mrs. Green shook her head.

“I s'pose,” said Mr. Letts, regarding her—“I s'pose you don't let lodgings for a night or two?” Mrs. Green shook her head again.

“It don't matter,” said the young man. “Only I would sooner stay with you than at a lodging-house. I've taken a fancy to you. I say, it would be a

lark if you did, and I went there and your husband thought I was your son, wouldn't it?"

Mrs. Green caught her breath, and sitting down again took his arm in her trembling fingers.

"Suppose," she said, unsteadily—"suppose you came round and pretended to be my son—pretended to be my son, and stood up for me?"

Mr. Letts stared at her in amazement, and then began to laugh.

"Nobody would know," continued the other, quickly. "We only came to this place just before he sailed, and his sister was only ten at the time. She wouldn't remember."

Mr. Letts said he couldn't think of it, and sat staring, with an air of great determination, at the sea. Arguments and entreaties left him unmoved, and he was just about to express his sorrow for her troubles and leave, when she gave a sudden start and put her arm through his.

"Here comes your sister!" she exclaimed.

Mr. Letts started in his turn.

"She has seen me holding your arm," continued Mrs. Green, in a tense whisper. "It's the only way I can explain it. Mind, your name is Jack Foster and hers is Betty."

Mr. Letts gazed at her in consternation, and then, raising his eyes, regarded with much approval the girl who was approaching. It seemed impossible that she could be Mrs. Green's daughter, and in the excitement of the moment he nearly said so.

"Betty," said Mrs. Green, in a voice to which nervousness had imparted almost the correct note—"Betty, this is your brother Jack!"

Mr. Letts rose sheepishly, and then to his great amazement a pair of strong young arms were flung round his neck, and a pair of warm lips—after but slight trouble—found his. Then and there Mr. Letts's mind was made up.



Then and there Mr. Letts's mind was made up.

"Oh, Jack!" said Miss Foster, and began to cry softly.

"Oh, Jack!" said Mrs. Green, and, moved by thoughts, perhaps, of what might have been, began to cry too.

"There, there!" said Mr. Letts.

He drew Miss Foster to the seat, and, sitting between them, sat with an arm round each. There was nothing in sight but a sail or two in the far distance, and he allowed Miss Foster's head to lie upon his shoulder undisturbed. An only child, and an orphan, he felt for the first time the blessing of a sister's love.

"Why didn't you come home before?" murmured the girl.

Mr. Letts started and squinted reproachfully at the top of her hat. Then he turned and looked at Mrs. Green in search of the required information. "He was shipwrecked," said Mrs. Green.

"I was shipwrecked," repeated Mr. Letts, nodding.

"And had brain-fever after it through being in the water so long, and lost his memory," continued Mrs. Green.

“It's wonderful what water will do—salt water,” said Mr. Letts, in confirmation.

Miss Foster sighed, and, raising the hand which was round her waist, bent her head and kissed it. Mr. Letts colored, and squeezed her convulsively.

Assisted by Mrs. Green he became reminiscent, and, in a low voice, narrated such incidents of his career as had escaped the assaults of the brain-fever. That his head was not permanently injured was proved by the perfect manner in which he remembered incidents of his childhood narrated by his newly found mother and sister. He even volunteered one or two himself which had happened when the latter was a year or two old.

“And now,” said Mrs. Green, in a somewhat trembling voice, “we must go and tell your step-father.”

Mr. Letts responded, but without briskness, and, with such moral support as an arm of each could afford, walked slowly back. Arrived at a road of substantial cottages at the back of the town, Mrs. Green gasped, and, coming to a standstill, nodded at a van that stood half-way up the road.

“There it is,” she exclaimed.

“What?” demanded Mr. Letts.

“The furniture I told you about,” said Mrs. Green. “The furniture that your poor father thought such a lot of, because it used to belong to his grandfather. He's selling it to Simpson, though I begged and prayed him not to.”

Mr. Letts encouraged himself with a deep cough. “My furniture?” he demanded.

Mrs. Green took courage. “Yes,” she said, hopefully; “your father left it to you.”

Mr. Letts, carrying his head very erect, took a firmer grip of their arms and gazed steadily at a disagreeable-looking man who was eying them in some astonishment from the doorway. With arms still linked they found the narrow gateway somewhat difficult, but they negotiated it by a turning movement, and, standing in the front garden, waited while Mrs. Green tried to find her voice.



A disagreeable-looking man was eying them in some astonishment from the doorway.

“Jack,” she said at last, “this is your stepfather.”

Mr. Letts, in some difficulty as to the etiquette on such occasions, released his right arm and extended his hand.

“Good-evening, stepfather,” he said, cheerfully.

Mr. Green drew back a little and regarded him unfavorably.

“We—we thought you was drowned,” he said at last.

“I was nearly,” said Mr. Letts.

“We all thought so,” pursued Mr. Green, grudgingly. “Everybody thought so.”

He stood aside, as a short, hot-faced man, with a small bureau clasped in his arms and supported on his knees, emerged from the house and staggered towards the gate. Mr. Letts reflected.

“Halloa!” he said, suddenly. “Why, are you moving, mother?”

Mrs. Green sniffed sadly and shook her head. “Well,” said Mr. Letts, with an admirable stare, “what's that chap doing with my furniture?”

“Eh?” spluttered Mr. Green. “What?”

“I say, what's he doing with my furniture?” repeated Mr. Letts, sternly.

Mr. Green waved his arm. “That's all right,” he said, conclusively; “he's bought it. Your mother knows.”

“But it ain't all right,” said Mr. Letts. “Here! bring that back, and those chairs too.”

The dealer, who had just placed the bureau on the tail-board of the van, came back wiping his brow with his sleeve.

“Wots the little game?” he demanded.

Mr. Letts left the answer to Mr. Green, and going to the van took up the bureau and walked back to the house with it. Mr. Green and the dealer parted a little at his approach, and after widening the parting with the bureau he placed it in the front room while he went back for the chairs. He came back with three of them, and was, not without reason, called a porcupine by the indignant dealer.

He was relieved to find, after Mr. Simpson had taken his departure, that Mr. Green was in no mood for catechising him, and had evidently accepted the story of his escape and return as a particularly disagreeable fact. So disagreeable that the less he heard of it the better.

"I hope you've not come home after all these years to make things unpleasant?" he remarked presently, as they sat at tea.

"I couldn't be unpleasant if I tried," said Mr. Letts.

"We've been very happy and comfortable here—me and your mother and sister," continued Mr. Green. "Haven't we, Emily?"

"Yes," said his wife, with nervous quickness.

"And I hope you'll be the same," said Mr. Green. "It's my wish that you should make yourself quite comfortable here—till you go to sea again."

"Thankee," said Mr. Letts; "but I don't think I shall go to sea any more. Ship's carpenter is my trade, and I've been told more than once that I should do better ashore. Besides, I don't want to lose mother and Betty again."

He placed his arm round the girl's waist, and, drawing her head on to his shoulder, met with a blank stare the troubled gaze of Mrs. Green.

"I'm told there's wonderful openings for carpenters in Australia," said Mr. Green, trying to speak in level tones. "Wonderful! A good carpenter can make a fortune there in ten years, so I'm told."

Mr. Letts, with a slight wink at Mrs. Green and a reassuring squeeze with his left arm, turned an attentive ear.

"O' course, there's a difficulty," he said, slowly, as Mr. Green finished a vivid picture of the joys of carpentering in Australia.

"Difficulty?" said the other.

"Money to start with," explained Mr. Letts. "It's no good starting without money. I wonder how much this house and furniture would fetch? Is it all mine, mother?"

"M-m-most of it," stammered Mrs. Green, gazing in a fascinated fashion at the contorted visage of her husband.

"All except a chair in the kitchen and three stair-rods," said Betty.

“Speak when you're spoke to, miss!” snarled her stepfather. “When we married we mixed our furniture up together—mixed it up so that it would be impossible to tell which is which. Nobody could.”

“For the matter o' that, you could have all the kitchen chairs and all the stair-rods,” said Mr. Letts, generously. “However, I don't want to do anything in a hurry, and I shouldn't dream of going to Australia without Betty. It rests with her.”

“She's going to be married,” said Mr. Green, hastily; “and if she wasn't she wouldn't turn her poor, ailing mother out of house and home, that I'm certain of. She's not that sort. We've had a word or two at times—me and her—but I know a good daughter when I see one.”

“Married?” echoed Mr. Letts, as his left arm relaxed its pressure. “Who to?”

“Young fellow o' the name of Henry Widden,” replied Mr. Green, “a very steady young fellow; a great friend of mine.”

“Oh!” said Mr. Letts, blankly.

“I'd got an idea, which I've been keeping as a little surprise,” continued Mr. Green, speaking very rapidly, “of them living here with us, and saving house-rent and furniture.”

Mr. Letts surveyed him with a dejected eye.

“It would be a fine start for them,” continued the benevolent Mr. Green.

Mr. Letts, by a strong effort, regained his composure.

“I must have a look at him first,” he said, briskly. “He mightn't meet with my approval.”

“Eh?” said Mr. Green, starting. “Why, if Betty——”

“I must think it over,” interrupted Mr. Letts, with a wave of his hand. “Betty is only nineteen, and, as head of the family, I don't think she can marry without my consent. I'm not sure, but I don't think so. Anyway, if she does, I won't have her husband here sitting in my chairs, eating off my tables, sleeping in my beds, wearing out my stair-rods, helping himself——”

“Stow it,” said Miss Foster, calmly.

Mr. Letts started, and lost the thread of his discourse. “I must have a look at him,” he concluded, lamely; “he may be all right, but then, again, he mightn't.”

He finished his tea almost in silence, and, the meal over, emphasized his position as head of the family by taking the easy-chair, a piece of furniture sacred to Mr. Green, and subjecting that injured man to a catechism which strained his powers of endurance almost to breaking-point.

“Well, I sha'n't make any change at present,” said Mr. Letts, when the task was finished. “There's plenty of room here for us all, and, so long as you and me agree, things can go on as they are. To-morrow morning I shall go out and look for a job.”

He found a temporary one almost at once, and, determined to make a favorable impression, worked hard all day. He came home tired and dirty, and was about to go straight to the wash-house to make his toilet when Mr. Green called him in.

“My friend, Mr. Widden,” he said, with a satisfied air, as he pointed to a slight, fair young man with a well-trimmed moustache.

Mr. Letts shook hands.

“Fine day,” said Mr. Widden.

“Beautiful,” said the other. “I'll come in and have a talk about it when I've had a wash.”

“Me and Miss Foster are going out for a bit of a stroll,” said Mr. Widden.

“Quite right,” agreed Mr. Letts. “Much more healthy than staying indoors all the evening. If you just wait while I have a wash and a bit o' something to eat I'll come with you.”

“Co-come with us!” said Mr. Widden, after an astonished pause.

Mr. Letts nodded. “You see, I don't know you yet,” he explained, “and as head of the family I want to see how you behave yourself. Properly speaking, my consent ought to have been asked before you walked out with her; still, as everybody thought I was drowned, I'll say no more about it.”

“Mr. Green knows all about me,” said Mr. Widden, rebelliously.

“It's nothing to do with him,” declared Mr. Letts. “And, besides, he's not what I should call a judge of character. I dare say you are all right, but I'm going to see for myself. You go on in the ordinary way with your love-making, without taking any notice of me. Try and forget I'm watching you. Be as natural as you can be, and if you do anything I don't like I'll soon tell you of it.”

The bewildered Mr. Widden turned, but, reading no hope of assistance in the infuriated eyes of Mr. Green, appealed in despair to Betty.

“I don't mind,” she said. “Why should I?”

Mr. Widden could have supplied her with many reasons, but he refrained, and sat in sulky silence while Mr. Letts got ready. From his point of view the experiment was by no means a success, his efforts to be natural being met with amazed glances from Mr. Letts and disdainful requests from Miss Foster to go home if he couldn't behave himself. When he relapsed into moody silence Mr. Letts cleared his throat and spoke.

“There's no need to be like a monkey-on-a-stick, and at the same time there's no need to be sulky,” he pointed out; “there's a happy medium.”

“Like you, I s'pose?” said the frantic suitor. “Like me,” said the other, gravely. “Now, you watch; fall in behind and watch.”

He drew Miss Foster's arm through his and, leaning towards her with tender deference, began a long conversation. At the end of ten minutes Mr. Widden intimated that he thought he had learned enough to go on with.

“Ah! that's only your conceit,” said Mr. Letts over his shoulder. “I was afraid you was conceited.”

He turned to Miss Foster again, and Mr. Widden, with a despairing gesture, abandoned himself to gloom. He made no further interruptions, but at the conclusion of the walk hesitated so long on the door-step that Mr. Letts had to take the initiative.

“Good-night,” he said, shaking hands. “Come round to-morrow night and I'll give you another lesson. You're a slow learner, that's what you are; a slow learner.”

He gave Mr. Widden a lesson on the following evening, but cautioned him sternly against imitating the display of brotherly fondness of which, in

a secluded lane, he had been a wide-eyed observer.

"When you've known her as long as I have—nineteen years," said Mr. Letts, as the other protested, "things'll be a bit different. I might not be here, for one thing."

By exercise of great self-control Mr. Widden checked the obvious retort and walked doggedly in the rear of Miss Foster. Then, hardly able to believe his ears, he heard her say something to Mr. Letts.

"Eh?" said that gentleman, in amazed accents.

"You fall behind," said Miss Foster.

"That—that's not the way to talk to the head of the family," said Mr. Letts, feebly.

"It's the way I talk to him," rejoined the girl.

It was a position for which Mr. Letts was totally unprepared, and the satisfied smile of Mr. Widden as he took the vacant place by no means improved matters. In a state of considerable dismay Mr. Letts dropped farther and farther behind until, looking up, he saw Miss Foster, attended by her restive escort, quietly waiting for him. An odd look in her eyes as they met his gave him food for thought for the rest of the evening.

At the end of what Mr. Letts was pleased to term a month's trial, Mr. Widden was still unable to satisfy him as to his fitness for the position of brother-in-law. In a spirit of gloom he made suggestions of a mutinous nature to Mr. Green, but that gentleman, who had returned one day pale and furious, but tamed, from an interview that related to his treatment of his wife, held out no hopes of assistance.

"I wash my hands of him," he said bitterly. "You stick to it; that's all you can do."

"They lost me last night," said the unfortunate. "I stayed behind just to take a stone out of my shoe, and the earth seemed to swallow them up. He's so strong. That's the worst of it."

"Strong?" said Mr. Green.

Mr. Widden nodded. "Tuesday evening he showed her how he upset a man once and stood him on his head," he said, irritably. "I was what he

showed her with."

"Stick to it!" counselled Mr. Green again. "A brother and sister are bound to get tired of each other before long; it's nature."

Mr. Widden sighed and obeyed. But brother and sister showed no signs of tiring of each other's company, while they displayed unmistakable signs of weariness with his. And three weeks later Mr. Letts, in a few well-chosen words, kindly but firmly dismissed him.

"I should never give my consent," he said, gravely, "so it's only wasting your time. You run off and play."

Mr. Widden ran off to Mr. Green, but before he could get a word out discovered that something unusual had happened. Mrs. Green, a picture of distress, sat at one end of the room with a handkerchief to her eyes; Mr. Green, in a condition compounded of joy and rage, was striding violently up and down the room.

"He's a fraud!" he shouted. "A fraud! I've had my suspicions for some time, and this evening I got it out of her."

Mr. Widden stared in amazement.

"I got it out of her," repeated Mr. Green, pointing at the trembling woman. "He's no more her son than what you are."

"What?" said the amazed listener.

"She's been deceiving me," said Mr. Green, with a scowl, "but I don't think she'll do it again in a hurry. You stay here," he shouted, as his wife rose to leave the room. "I want you to be here when he comes in."

Mrs. Green stayed, and the other two, heedless of her presence, discussed the situation until the front door was heard to open, and Mr. Letts and Betty came into the room. With a little cry the girl ran to her mother.

"What's the matter?" she cried.

"She's lost another son," said Mr. Green, with a ferocious sneer—"a flash, bullying, ugly chap of the name o' Letts."

"Halloa!" said Mr. Letts, starting.

“A chap she picked up out of the street, and tried to pass off on me as her son,” continued Mr. Green, raising his voice. “She ain't heard the end of it yet, I can tell you.”

Mr. Letts fidgeted. “You leave her alone,” he said, mildly. “It's true I'm not her son, but it don't matter, because I've been to see a lawyer about her, and he told me that this house and half the furniture belongs by law to Betty. It's got nothing to do with you.”

“Indeed!” said Mr. Green. “Now you take yourself off before I put the police on to you. Take your face off these premises.”

Mr. Letts, scratching his head, looked vaguely round the room.

“Go on!” vociferated Mr. Green. “Or will you have the police to put you out?”

Mr. Letts cleared his throat and moved towards the door. “You stick up for your rights, my girl,” he said, turning to Betty. “If he don't treat your mother well, give him back his kitchen chair and his three stair-rods and pack him off.”

“Henry,” said Mr. Green, with dangerous calm, “go and fetch a policeman.”

“I'm going,” said Mr. Letts, hastily. “Good-by, Betty; good-by, mother. I sha'n't be long. I'm only going as far as the post-office. And that reminds me. I've been talking so much that I quite forget to tell you that Betty and me were married yesterday morning.”

He nodded pleasantly at the stupefied Mr. Green, and, turning to Mr. Widden, gave him a friendly dig in the ribs with his finger.

“What's mine is Betty's,” he said, in a clear voice, “and what's Betty's is MINE! D'ye understand, step-father?”

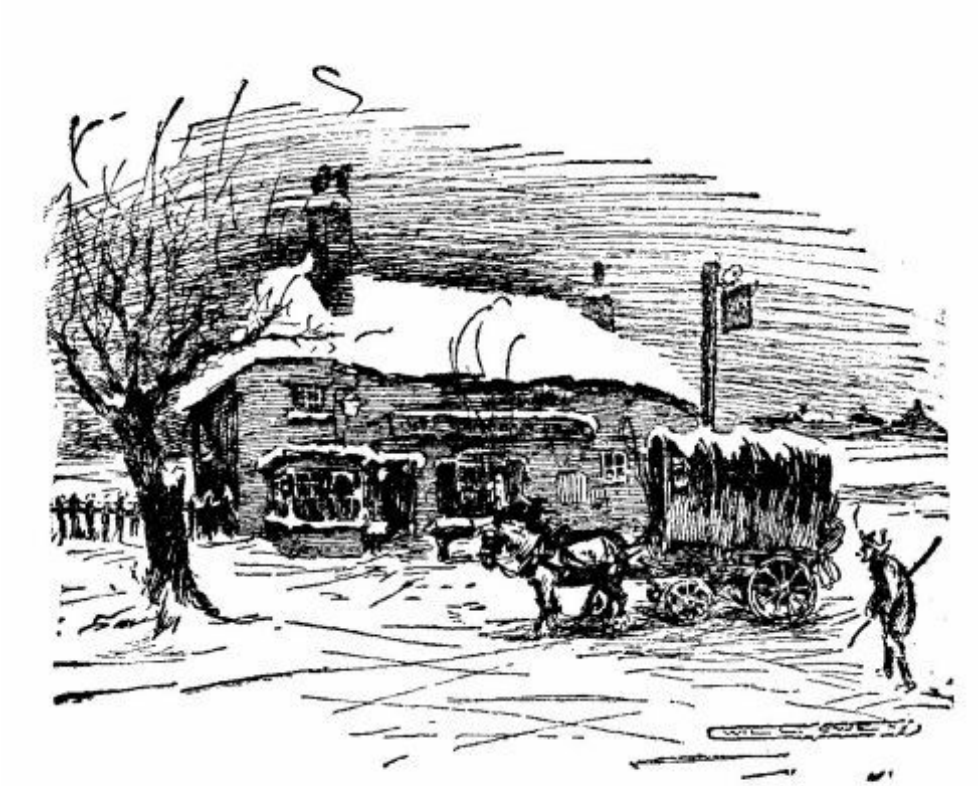
He stepped over to Mrs. Green, and putting a strong arm around her raised her to her feet. “And what's mine is mother's,” he concluded, and, helping her across the room, placed her in the best arm-chair.



"What's mine is mother's," he concluded.

PRIZE MONEY

The old man stood by the window, gazing at the frozen fields beyond. The sign of the Cauliflower was stiff with snow, and the breath of a pair of waiting horses in a wagon beneath ascended in clouds of steam.



The sign of the Cauliflower was stiff with snow

"Amusements" he said slowly, as he came back with a shiver and, resuming his seat by the tap-room fire, looked at the wayfarer who had been idly questioning him. "Claybury men don't have much time for amusements. The last one I can call to mind was Bill Chambers being nailed up in a pigsty he was cleaning out, but there was such a fuss made over that —by Bill —that it sort o' disheartened people."

He got up again restlessly, and, walking round the table, gazed long and hard into three or four mugs.

"Sometimes a little gets left in them," he explained, meeting the stranger's inquiring glance. The latter started, and, knocking on the table with the handle of his knife, explained that he had been informed by a man outside that his companion was the bitterest teetotaller in Claybury.

"That's one o' Bob Pretty's larks," said the old man, flushing. "I see you talking to 'im, and I thought as 'ow he warn't up to no good. Biggest rascal in Claybury, he is. I've said so afore, and I'll say so agin."

He bowed to the donor and buried his old face in the mug.

“A poacher!” he said, taking breath. “A thief!” he continued, after another draught. “I wonder whether Smith spilt any of this a-carrying of it in?”

He put down the empty mug and made a careful examination of the floor, until a musical rapping on the table brought the landlord into the room again.

“My best respects,” he said, gratefully, as he placed the mug on the settle by his side and slowly filled a long clay pipe. Next time you see Bob Pretty ask 'im wot happened to the prize hamper. He's done a good many things has Bob, but it'll be a long time afore Claybury men'll look over that.

It was Henery Walker's idea. Henery 'ad been away to see an uncle of 'is wife's wot had money and nobody to leave it to—leastways, so Henery thought when he wasted his money going over to see 'im—and he came back full of the idea, which he 'ad picked up from the old man.

“We each pay twopence a week till Christmas,” he ses, “and we buy a hamper with a goose or a turkey in it, and bottles o' rum and whiskey and gin, as far as the money'll go, and then we all draw lots for it, and the one that wins has it.”

It took a lot of explaining to some of 'em, but Smith, the landlord, helped Henery, and in less than four days twenty-three men had paid their tuppences to Henery, who 'ad been made the seckitary, and told him to hand them over to Smith in case he lost his memory.

Bob Pretty joined one arternoon on the quiet, and more than one of 'em talked of 'aving their money back, but, arter Smith 'ad explained as 'ow he would see fair play, they thought better of it.

“He'll 'ave the same chance as all of you,” he ses. “No more and no less.”

“I'd feel more easy in my mind, though, if 'e wasn't in it,” ses Bill Chambers, staring at Bob. “I never knew 'im to lose anything yet.”

“You don't know everything, Bill,” ses Bob, shaking his 'ead. “You don't know me; else you wouldn't talk like that. I've never been caught doing wrong yet, and I 'ope I never shall.”

“It's all right, Bill,” ses George Kettle. “Mr. Smith'll see fair, and I'd sooner win Bob Pretty's money than anybody's.”

“I 'ope you will, mate,” ses Bob; “that's what I joined for.”

“Bob's money is as good as anybody else's,” ses George Kettle, looking round at the others. “It don't signify to me where he got it from.”

“Ah, I don't like to hear you talk like that George,” ses Bob Pretty. “I've thought more than once that you 'ad them ideas.”

He drank up his beer and went off 'ome, shaking his 'ead, and, arter three or four of 'em 'ad explained to George Kettle wot he meant, George went off 'ome, too.

The week afore Christmas, Smith, the landlord, said as 'ow he 'ad got enough money, and three days arter we all came up 'ere to see the prize drawn. It was one o' the biggest hampers Smith could get; and there was a fine, large turkey in it, a large goose, three pounds o' pork sausages, a bottle o' whiskey, a bottle o' rum, a bottle o' brandy, a bottle o' gin, and two bottles o' wine. The hamper was all decorated with holly, and a little flag was stuck in the top.

On'y men as belonged was allowed to feel the turkey and the goose, and arter a time Smith said as 'ow p'r'aps they'd better leave off, and 'e put all the things back in the hamper and fastened up the lid.

“How are we going to draw the lottery?” ses John Biggs, the blacksmith.

“There'll be twenty-three bits o' paper,” ses Smith, “and they'll be numbered from one to twenty-three. Then they'll be twisted up all the same shape and put in this 'ere paper bag, which I shall 'old as each man draws. The chap that draws the paper with the figger '1' on it wins.”

He tore up twenty-three bits o' paper all about the same size, and then with a black-lead pencil 'e put the numbers on, while everybody leaned over 'im to see fair play. Then he twisted every bit o' paper up and held them in his 'and.

“Is that satisfactory?” he ses.

“Couldn't be fairer,” ses Bill Chambers.

“Mind,” ses Smith, putting them into a tall paper bag that had 'ad sugar in it and shaking them up, “Number 1 wins the prize. Who's going to draw fust?”

All of 'em hung back and looked at each other; they all seemed to think they'd 'ave a better chance when there wasn't so many numbers left in the bag.

“Come on,” ses Smith, the landlord. “Somebody must be fust.”

“Go on, George Kettle,” ses Bob Pretty. “You're sure to win. I 'ad a dream you did.”

“Go on yourself,” ses George.

“I never 'ave no luck,” ses Bob; “but if Henery Walker will draw fust, I'll draw second. Somebody must begin.”

“O' course they must,” ses Henery, “and if you're so anxious why don't you 'ave fust try?”

Bob Pretty tried to laugh it off, but they wouldn't 'ave it, and at last he takes out a pocket-'andkerchief and offers it to Smith, the landlord.

“All right, I'll go fust if you'll blindfold me,” he ses.

“There ain't no need for that, Bob,” ses Mr. Smith. “You can't see in the bag, and even if you could it wouldn't help you.”

“Never mind; you blindfold me,” ses Bob; “it'll set a good example to the others.”

Smith did it at last, and when Bob Pretty put his 'and in the bag and pulled out a paper you might ha' heard a pin drop.

“Open it and see what number it is, Mr. Smith,” ses Bob Pretty. “Twenty-three, I expect; I never 'ave no luck.”

Smith rolled out the paper, and then 'e turned pale and 'is eyes seemed to stick right out of his 'ead.

“He's won it!” he ses, in a choky voice. “It's Number 1. Bob Pretty 'as won the prize.”



"He's won it!" he ses, in a choky voice. "It's Number 1."

You never 'eard such a noise in this 'ere public-'ouse afore or since; everybody shouting their 'ardest, and Bill Chambers stamping up and down the room as if he'd gone right out of his mind.

"Silence!" ses Mr. Smith, at last. "Silence! How dare you make that noise in my 'ouse, giving it a bad name? Bob Pretty 'as won it fair and square. Nothing could ha' been fairer. You ought to be ashamed o' yourselves."

Bob Pretty wouldn't believe it at fust. He said that Smith was making game of 'im, and, when Smith held the paper under 'is nose, he kept the handkerchief on his eyes and wouldn't look at it.

"I've seen you afore to-day," he says, nodding his 'ead. "I like a joke as well as anybody, but it ain't fair to try and make fun of a pore, 'ard-working man like that."

I never see a man so astonished in my life as Bob Pretty was, when 'e found out it was really true. He seemed fair 'mazed-like, and stood there scratching his 'ead, as if he didn't know where 'e was. He come round at last, arter a pint o' beer that Smith 'ad stood 'im, and then he made a little speech, thanking Smith for the fair way he 'ad acted, and took up the hamper.

"'Strewth, it is heavy," he ses, getting it up on his back. "Well, so long, mates."

"Ain't you—ain't you going to stand us a drink out o' one o' them bottles?" ses Peter Gubbins, as Bob got to the door.

Bob Pretty went out as if he didn't 'ear; then he stopped, sudden-like, and turned round and put his 'ead in at the door agin, and stood looking at 'em.

"No, mates," he ses, at last, "and I wonder at you for asking, arter what you've all said about me. I'm a pore man, but I've got my feelings. I drawed fust becos nobody else would, and all the thanks I get for it is to be called a thief."

He went off down the road, and by and by Bill Chambers, wot 'ad been sitting staring straight in front of 'im, got up and went to the door, and stood looking arter 'im like a man in a dream. None of 'em seemed to be able to believe that the lottery could be all over so soon, and Bob Pretty going off with it, and when they did make up their minds to it, it was one o' the most miserable sights you ever see. The idea that they 'ad been paying a pint a week for Bob Pretty for months nearly sent some of 'em out of their minds.

"It can't be 'elped," ses Mr. Smith. "He 'ad the pluck to draw fust, and he won; anybody else might ha' done it. He gave you the offer, George Kettle, and you, too, Henery Walker."

Henery Walker was too low-spirited to answer 'im; and arter Smith 'ad said "Hush!" to George Kettle three times, he up and put 'im outside for the sake of the 'ouse.

When 'e came back it was all quiet and everybody was staring their 'ardest at little Dicky Weed, the tailor, who was sitting with his head in his 'ands, thinking, and every now and then taking them away and looking up at the ceiling, or else leaning forward with a start and looking as if 'e saw something crawling on the wall.

"Wot's the matter with you?" ses Mr. Smith.

Dicky Weed didn't answer 'im. He shut his eyes tight and then 'e jumps up all of a sudden. "I've got it!" he says. "Where's that bag?"

"Wot bag?" ses Mr. Smith, staring at 'im. "The bag with the papers in," ses Dicky.

“Where Bob Pretty ought to be,” ses Bill Chambers. “On the fire.”

“Wot?” screams Dicky Weed. “Now you've been and spoilt everything!”

“Speak English,” ses Bill.

“I will!” ses Dicky, trembling all over with temper. “Who asked you to put it on the fire? Who asked you to put yourself forward? I see it all now, and it's too late.”

“Wot's too late?” ses Sam Tones.

“When Bob Pretty put his 'and in that bag,” ses Dicky Weed, holding up 'is finger and looking at them, “he'd got a bit o' paper already in it—a bit o' paper with the figger 1 on it. That's 'ow he done it. While we was all watching Mr. Smith, he was getting 'is own bit o' paper ready.”

He 'ad to say it three times afore they understood 'im, and then they went down on their knees and burnt their fingers picking up bits o' paper that 'ad fallen in the fireplace. They found six pieces in all, but not one with the number they was looking for on it, and then they all got up and said wot ought to be done to Bob Pretty.

“You can't do anything,” ses Smith, the landlord. “You can't prove it. After all, it's only Dicky's idea.”

Arf-a-dozen of 'em all began speaking at once, but Bill Chambers gave 'em the wink, and pretended to agree with 'im.

“We're going to have that hamper back,” he ses, as soon as Mr. Smith 'ad gone back to the bar, “but it won't do to let 'im know. He don't like to think that Bob Pretty was one too many for 'im.”

“Let's all go to Bob Pretty's and take it,” ses Peter Gubbins, wot 'ad been in the Militia.

Dicky Weed shook his 'ead. “He'd 'ave the lor on us for robbery,” he ses; “there's nothing he'd like better.”

They talked it over till closing-time, but nobody seemed to know wot to do, and they stood outside in the bitter cold for over arf an hour still trying to make up their minds 'ow to get that hamper back. Fust one went off 'ome and then another, and at last, when there was on'y three or four of 'em left, Henery Walker, wot prided himself on 'is artfulness, 'ad an idea.

“One of us must get Bob Pretty up 'ere to-morrow night and stand 'im a pint, or p'r'aps two pints,” he ses. “While he's here two other chaps must 'ave a row close by his 'ouse and pretend to fight. Mrs. Pretty and the young 'uns are sure to run out to look at it, and while they are out another chap can go in quiet-like and get the hamper.”

It seemed a wunnerful good idea, and Bill Chambers said so; and 'e flattered Henery Walker up until Henery didn't know where to look, as the saying is.

“And wot's to be done with the hamper when we've got it?” ses Sam Jones.

“Have it drawed for agin,” ses Henery. “It'll 'ave to be done on the quiet, o' course.”

Sam Jones stood thinking for a bit. “Burn the hamper and draw lots for everything separate,” 'e ses, very slow. “If Bob Pretty ses it's 'is turkey and goose and spirits, tell 'im to prove it. We sha'n't know nothing about it.”

Henery Walker said it was a good plan; and arter talking it over they walked 'ome all very pleased with theirselves. They talked it over next day with the other chaps; and Henery Walker said arterwards that p'r'aps it was talked over a bit too much.

It took 'em some time to make up their minds about it, but at last it was settled that Peter Gubbins was to stand Bob Pretty the beer; Ted Brown, who was well known for his 'ot temper, and Joe Smith was to 'ave the quarrel; and Henery Walker was to slip in and steal the hamper, and 'ide the things up at his place.

Bob Pretty fell into the trap at once. He was standing at 'is gate in the dark, next day, smoking a pipe, when Peter Gubbins passed, and Peter, arter stopping and asking 'im for a light, spoke about 'is luck in getting the hamper, and told 'im he didn't bear no malice for it.

“You 'ad the pluck to draw fust,” he ses, “and you won.”

Bob Pretty said he was a Briton, and arter a little more talk Peter asked 'im to go and 'ave a pint with 'im to show that there was no ill-feeling. They came into this 'ere Cauliflower public-'ouse like brothers, and in less than

ten minutes everybody was making as much fuss o' Bob Pretty as if 'e'd been the best man in Claybury.

"Arter all, a man can't 'elp winning a prize," ses Bill Chambers, looking round.

"I couldn't," ses Bob.

He sat down and 'elped hisself out o' Sam Jones's baccy-box; and one or two got up on the quiet and went outside to listen to wot was going on down the road. Everybody was wondering wot was happening, and when Bob Pretty got up and said 'e must be going, Bill Chambers caught 'old of him by the coat and asked 'im to have arf a pint with 'im.

Bob had the arf-pint, and arter that another one with Sam Jones, and then 'e said 'e really must be going, as his wife was expecting 'im. He pushed Bill Chambers's 'at over his eyes—a thing Bill can't abear—and arter filling 'is pipe agin from Sam Jones's box he got up and went.

"Mind you," ses Bill Chambers, looking round, "if 'e comes back and ses somebody 'as taken his hamper, nobody knows nothing about it."

"I 'ope Henery Walker 'as got it all right," ses Dicky Weed. "When shall we know?"

"He'll come up 'ere and tell us," ses Bill Chambers. "It's time 'e was here, a'most."

Five minutes arterwards the door opened and Henery Walker came staggering in. He was as white as a sheet, his 'at was knocked on one side of his 'ead, and there was two or three nasty-looking scratches on 'is cheek. He came straight to Bill Chambers's mug—wot 'ad just been filled—and emptied it, and then 'e sat down on a seat gasping for breath.



The door opened and Henery Walker came staggering in.

"Wots the matter, Henery?" ses Bill, staring at 'im with 'is mouth open.

Henery Walker groaned and shook his 'ead. "Didn't you get the hamper?" ses Bill, turning pale. Henery Walker shook his 'ead agin.

"Shut up!" he ses, as Bill Chambers started finding fault. "I done the best I could. Nothing could ha' 'appened better—to start with. Directly Ted Brown and Joe Smith started, Mrs. Pretty and her sister, and all the kids excepting the baby, run out, and they'd 'ardly gone afore I was inside the back door and looking for that hamper, and I'd hardly started afore I heard them coming back agin. I was at the foot o' the stairs at the time, and, not knowing wot to do, I went up 'em into Bob's bedroom."

"Well?" ses Bill Chambers, as Henery Walker stopped and looked round.

"A'most direckly arterwards I 'eard Mrs. Pretty and her sister coming upstairs," ses Henery Walker, with a shudder. "I was under the bed at the time, and afore I could say a word Mrs. Pretty gave a loud screech and scratched my face something cruel. I thought she'd gone mad."

"You've made a nice mess of it!" ses Bill Chambers.

"Mess!" ses Henery, firing up. "Wot would you ha' done?"

“I should ha' managed diff'rent,” ses Bill Chambers. “Did she know who you was?”

“Know who I was?” ses Henery. “O' course she did. It's my belief that Bob knew all about it and told 'er wot to do.”

“Well, you've done it now, Henery,” ses Bill Chambers. “Still, that's your affair.”

“Ho, is it?” ses Henery Walker. “You 'ad as much to do with it as I 'ad, excepting that you was sitting up 'ere in comfort while I was doing all the work. It's a wonder to me I got off as well as I did.”

Bill Chambers sat staring at 'im and scratching his 'ead, and just then they all 'eard the voice of Bob Pretty, very distinct, outside, asking for Henery Walker. Then the door opened, and Bob Pretty, carrying his 'ead very 'igh, walked into the room.

“Where's Henery Walker?” he ses, in a loud voice.



“Where's Henery Walker?” he ses, in a loud voice.

Henery Walker put down the empty mug wot he'd been pretending to drink out of and tried to smile at 'im.

“Halloa, Bob!” he ses.

“What was you doing in my 'ouse?” ses Bob Pretty, very severe.

“I—I just looked in to see whether you was in, Bob,” ses Henery.

“That's why you was found under my bed, I s'pose?” ses Bob Pretty. “I want a straight answer, Henery Walker, and I mean to 'ave it, else I'm going off to Cudford for Policeman White.”

“I went there to get that hamper,” ses Henery Walker, plucking up spirit. “You won it unfair last night, and we determined for to get it back. So now you know.”

“I call on all of you to witness that,” ses Bob, looking round. “Henery Walker went into my 'ouse to steal my hamper. He ses so, and it wasn't 'is fault he couldn't find it. I'm a pore man and I can't afford such things; I sold it this morning, a bargain, for thirty bob.”

“Well, then there's no call to make a fuss over it, Bob,” ses Bill Chambers.

“I sold it for thirty bob,” ses Bob Pretty, “and when I went out this evening I left the money on my bedroom mantelpiece—one pound, two arf-crowns, two two-shilling pieces, and two sixpences. My wife and her sister both saw it there. That they'll swear to.”

“Well, wot about it?” ses Sam Jones, staring at 'im.

“Arter my pore wife 'ad begged and prayed Henery Walker on 'er bended knees to spare 'er life and go,” ses Bob Pretty, “she looked at the mantelpiece and found the money 'ad disappeared.”

Henery Walker got up all white and shaking and flung 'is arms about, trying to get 'is breath.

“Do you mean to say I stole it?” he ses, at last.

“O' course I do,” ses Bob Pretty. “Why, you said yourself afore these witnesses and Mr. Smith that you came to steal the hamper. Wot's the difference between stealing the hamper and the money I sold it for?”

Henery Walker tried for to answer 'im, but he couldn't speak a word.

“I left my pore wife with 'er apron over her 'ead sobbing as if her 'art would break,” ses Bob Pretty; “not because o' the loss of the money so much, but to think of Henery Walker doing such a thing—and 'aving to go to jail for it.”

“I never touched your money, and you know it,” ses Henery Walker, finding his breath at last. “I don't believe it was there. You and your wife 'ud swear anything.”

“As you please, Henery,” ses Bob Pretty. “Only I'm going straight off to Cudford to see Policeman White; he'll be glad of a job, I know. There's three of us to swear to it, and you was found under my bed.”

“Let bygones be bygones, Bob,” ses Bill Chambers, trying to smile at 'im.

“No, mate,” ses Bob Pretty. “I'm going to 'ave my rights, but I don't want to be 'ard on a man I've known all my life; and if, afore I go to my bed to-night, the thirty shillings is brought to me, I won't say as I won't look over it.”

He stood for a moment shaking his 'ead at them, and then, still holding it very 'igh, he turned round and walked out.

“He never left no money on the mantelpiece,” ses Sam Jones, at last.

“Don't you believe it. You go to jail, Henery.”

“Anything sooner than be done by Bob Pretty,” ses George Kettle.

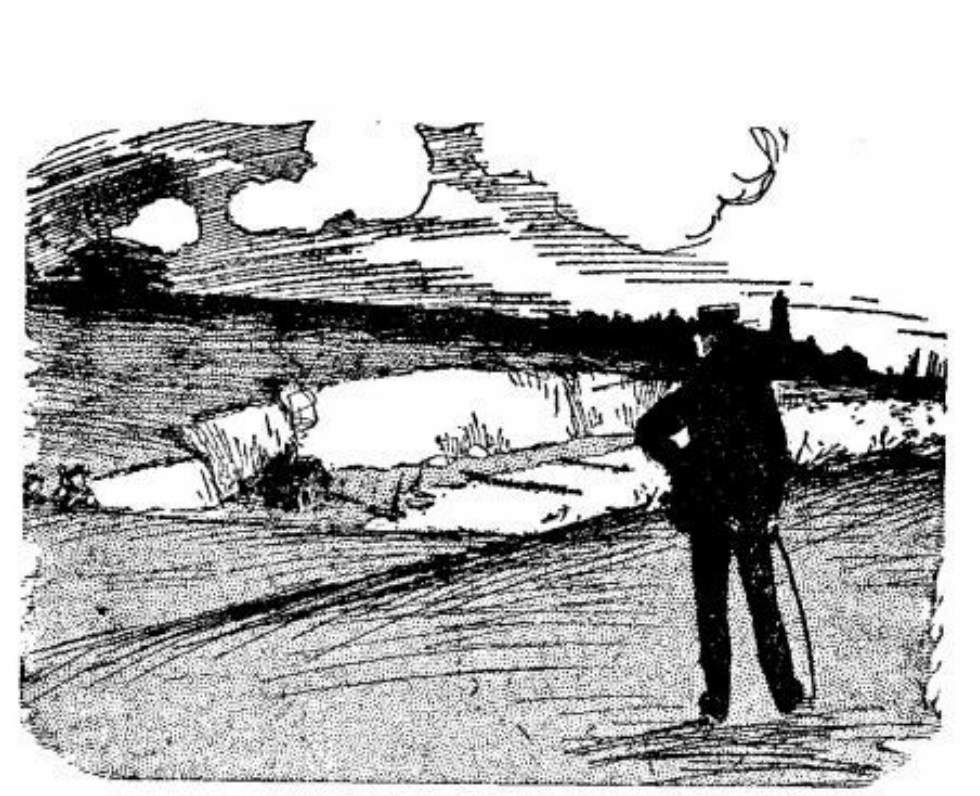
“There's not much doing now, Henery,” ses Bill Chambers, in a soft voice.

Henery Walker wouldn't listen to 'em, and he jumped up and carried on like a madman. His idea was for 'em all to club together to pay the money, and to borrow it from Smith, the landlord, to go on with. They wouldn't 'ear of it at fust, but arter Smith 'ad pointed out that they might 'ave to go to jail with Henery, and said things about 'is license, they gave way. Bob Pretty was just starting off to see Policeman White when they took the money, and instead o' telling 'im wot they thought of 'im, as they 'ad intended, Henery Walker 'ad to walk alongside of 'im and beg and pray of 'im to take the

money. He took it at last as a favor to Henery, and bought the hamper back with it next morning—cheap. Leastways, he said so.

DOUBLE DEALING

Mr. Fred Carter stood on the spacious common, inhaling with all the joy of the holiday-making Londoner the salt smell of the sea below, and regarding with some interest the movements of a couple of men who had come to a stop a short distance away. As he looked they came on again, eying him closely as they approached—a strongly built, shambling man of fifty, and a younger man, evidently his son.



Stood on the spacious common, inhaling the salt smell of the sea below.

“Good-evening,” said the former, as they came abreast of Mr. Carter.

“Good-evening,” he replied.

“That's him,” said both together.

They stood regarding him in a fashion unmistakably hostile. Mr. Carter, with an uneasy smile, awaited developments.

“What have you got to say for yourself?” demanded the elder man, at last. “Do you call yourself a man?”

“I don't call myself anything,” said the puzzled Mr. Carter. “Perhaps you're mistaking me for somebody else.”

“Didn't I tell you,” said the younger man, turning to the other—“didn't I tell you he'd say that?”

“He can say what he likes,” said the other, “but we've got him now. If he gets away from me he'll be cleverer than what he thinks he is.”

“What are we to do with him now we've got him?” inquired his son.

The elder man clenched a huge fist and eyed Mr. Carter savagely. “If I was just considering myself,” he said, “I should hammer him till I was tired and then chuck him into the sea.”

His son nodded. “That wouldn't do Nancy much good, though,” he remarked.

“I want to do everything for the best,” said the other, “and I s'pose the right and proper thing to do is to take him by the scruff of his neck and run him along to Nancy.”

“You try it,” said Mr. Carter, hotly. “Who is Nancy?”

The other growled, and was about to aim a blow at him when his son threw himself upon him and besought him to be calm.

“Just one,” said his father, struggling, “only one. It would do me good; and perhaps he'd come along the quieter for it.”

“Look here!” said Mr. Carter. “You're mistaking me for somebody else, that's what you are doing. What am I supposed to have done?”

“You're supposed to have come courting my daughter, Mr. Somebody Else,” said the other, releasing himself and thrusting his face into Mr. Carter's, “and, after getting her promise to marry you, nipping off to London to arrange for the wedding. She's been mourning over you for four years now, having an idea that you had been made away with.”

“Being true to your memory, you skunk,” said the son.

“And won't look at decent chaps that want to marry her,” added the other.

“It's all a mistake,” said Mr. Carter. “I came down here this morning for the first time in my life.”

“Bring him along,” said the son, impatiently. “It's a waste of time talking to him.”

Mr. Carter took a step back and parleyed. “I'll come along with you of my own free will,” he said, hastily, “just to show you that you are wrong;

but I won't be forced."

He turned and walked back with them towards the town, pausing occasionally to admire the view. Once he paused so long that an ominous growl arose from the elder of his captors.

"I was just thinking," said Mr. Carter, eying him in consternation; "suppose that she makes the same mistake that you have made? Oh, Lord!"

"Keeps it up pretty well, don't he, Jim?" said the father.

The other grunted and, drawing nearer to Mr. Carter as they entered the town, stepped along in silence. Questions which Mr. Carter asked with the laudable desire of showing his ignorance concerning the neighborhood elicited no reply. His discomfiture was increased by the behavior of an elderly boatman, who, after looking at him hard, took his pipe from his mouth and bade him "Good-evening." Father and son exchanged significant glances.



An elderly boatman, after looking at him hard, took his pipe from his mouth and bade him "Good-evening."

They turned at last into a small street, and the elder man, opening the door of a neat cottage, laid his hand on the prisoner's shoulder and motioned him in. Mr. Carter obeyed, and, entering a spotless living-room, removed his hat and with affected composure seated himself in an easy-chair.

"I'll go up and tell Nan," said Jim. "Don't let him run away."

He sprang up the stairs, which led from a corner of the room, and the next moment the voice of a young lady, laboring under intense excitement, fell on the ears of Mr. Carter. With a fine attempt at unconcern he rose and inspected an aged engraving of "The Sailor's Return."

"She'll be down in a minute," said Jim, returning.

"P'r'aps it's as well that I didn't set about him, after all," said his father. "If I had done what I should like to do, his own mother wouldn't have

known him."

Mr. Carter sniffed defiantly and, with a bored air, resumed his seat. Ten minutes passed—fifteen; at the end of half an hour the elder man's impatience found vent in a tirade against the entire sex.

"She's dressing up; that's what it is," explained Jim. "For him!"

A door opened above and a step sounded on the stairs. Mr. Carter looked up uneasily, and, after the first sensation of astonishment had passed, wondered vaguely what his double had run away for. The girl, her lips parted and her eyes bright, came swiftly down into the room.

"Where is he?" she said, quickly.

"Eh?" said her father, in surprise. "Why, there! Can't you see?"

The light died out of the girl's face and she looked round in dismay. The watchful Mr. Carter thought that he also detected in her glance a spice of that temper which had made her relatives so objectionable.

"That!" she said, loudly. "That! That's not my Bert!"

"That's what I told 'em," said Mr. Carter, deferentially, "over and over again."

"What!" said her father, loudly. "Look again."

"If I looked all night it wouldn't make any difference," said the disappointed Miss Evans. "The idea of making such a mistake!"

"We're all liable to mistakes," said Mr. Carter, magnanimously, "even the best of us."

"You take a good look at him," urged her brother, "and don't forget that it's four years since you saw him. Isn't that Bert's nose?"

"No," said the girl, glancing at the feature in question, "not a bit like it. Bert had a beautiful nose."

"Look at his eyes," said Jim.

Miss Evans looked, and meeting Mr. Carter's steady gaze tossed her head scornfully and endeavored to stare him down. Realizing too late the magnitude of the task, but unwilling to accept defeat, she stood confronting him with indignant eyes.

“Well?” said Mr. Evans, misunderstanding.

“Not a bit like,” said his daughter, turning thankfully. “And if you don't like Bert, you needn't insult him.”

She sat down with her back towards Mr. Carter and looked out at the window.

“Well, I could ha' sworn it was Bert Simmons,” said the discomfited Mr. Evans.

“Me, too,” said his son. “I'd ha' sworn to him anywhere. It's the most extraordinary likeness I've ever seen.”

He caught his father's eye, and with a jerk of his thumb telegraphed for instructions as to the disposal of Mr. Carter.

“He can go,” said Mr. Evans, with an attempt at dignity; “he can go this time, and I hope that this'll be a lesson to him not to go about looking like other people. If he does, next time, p'r'aps, he won't escape so easy.”

“You're quite right,” said Mr. Carter, blandly. “I'll get a new face first thing to-morrow morning. I ought to have done it before.”

He crossed to the door and, nodding to the fermenting Mr. Evans, bowed to the profile of Miss Evans and walked slowly out. Envy of Mr. Simmons was mingled with amazement at his deplorable lack of taste and common sense. He would willingly have changed places with him. There was evidently a strong likeness, and——

Busy with his thoughts he came to a standstill in the centre of the footpath, and then, with a sudden air of determination, walked slowly back to the house.

“Yes?” said Mr. Evans, as the door opened and the face of Mr. Carter was thrust in. “What have you come back for?”

The other stepped into the room and closed the door softly behind him. “I have come back,” he said, slowly—“I have come back because I feel ashamed of myself.”

“Ashamed of yourself?” repeated Mr. Evans, rising and confronting him.

Mr. Carter hung his head and gazed nervously in the direction of the girl. “I can't keep up this deception,” he said, in a low but distinct voice. “I am Bert Simmons. At least, that is the name I told you four years ago.”

“I knew I hadn't made a mistake,” roared Mr. Evans to his son. “I knew him well enough. Shut the door, Jim. Don't let him go.”

“I don't want to go,” said Mr. Carter, with a glance in the direction of Nancy. “I have come back to make amends.”

“Fancy Nancy not knowing him!” said Jim, gazing at the astonished Miss Evans.

“She was afraid of getting me into trouble,” said Mr. Carter, “and I just gave her a wink not to recognize me; but she knew me well enough, bless her.”

“How dare you!” said the girl, starting up. “Why, I've never seen you before in my life.”

“All right, Nan,” said the brazen Mr. Carter; “but it's no good keeping it up now. I've come back to act fair and square.”

Miss Evans struggled for breath.

“There he is, my girl,” said her father, patting her on the back. “He's not much to look at, and he treated you very shabby, but if you want him I suppose you must have him.”

“Want him?” repeated the incensed Miss Evans. “Want him? I tell you it's not Bert. How dare he come here and call me Nan?”

“You used not to mind it,” said Mr. Carter, plaintively.

“I tell you,” said Miss Evans, turning to her father and brother, “it's not Bert. Do you think I don't know?”

“Well, he ought to know who he is,” said her father, reasonably.

“Of course I ought,” said Mr. Carter, smiling at her. “Besides, what reason should I have for saying I am Bert if I am not?”

“That's a fair question,” said Jim, as the girl bit her lip. “Why should he?”

“Ask him,” said the girl, tartly.

“Look here, my girl,” said Mr. Evans, in ominous accents. “For four years you've been grieving over Bert, and me and Jim have been hunting high and low for him. We've got him at last, and now you've got to have him.”

“If he don't run away again,” said Jim. “I wouldn't trust him farther than I could see him.”

Mr. Evans sat and glowered at his prospective son-in-law as the difficulties of the situation developed themselves. Even Mr. Carter's reminders that he had come back and surrendered of his own free will failed to move him, and he was hesitating between tying him up and locking him in the attic and hiring a man to watch him, when Mr. Carter himself suggested a way out of the difficulty.

“I'll lodge with you,” he said, “and I'll give you all my money and things to take care of. I can't run away without money.”

He turned out his pockets on the table. Seven pounds eighteen shillings and fourpence with his return ticket made one heap; his watch and chain, penknife, and a few other accessories another. A suggestion of Jim's that he should add his boots was vetoed by the elder man as unnecessary.

“There you are,” said Mr. Evans, sweeping the things into his own pockets; “and the day you are married I hand them back to you.”

His temper improved as the evening wore on. By the time supper was finished and his pipe alight he became almost jocular, and the coldness of Miss Evans was the only drawback to an otherwise enjoyable evening.

“Just showing off a little temper,” said her father, after she had withdrawn; “and wants to show she ain't going to forgive you too easy. Not but what you behaved badly; however, let bygones be bygones, that's my idea.”

The behavior of Miss Evans was so much better next day that it really seemed as though her father's diagnosis was correct. At dinner, when the men came home from work, she piled Mr. Carter's plate up so generously that her father and brother had ample time at their disposal to watch him eat. And when he put his hand over his glass she poured half a pint of good beer, that other men would have been thankful for, up his sleeve.



She piled Mr. Carter's plate up so generously that her father and brother had ample time to watch him eat.

She was out all the afternoon, but at tea time she sat next to Mr. Carter, and joined brightly in the conversation concerning her marriage. She addressed him as Bert, and when he furtively pressed her hand beneath the table-cloth she made no attempt to withdraw it.

"I can't think how it was you didn't know him at first," said her father. "You're usually wide-awake enough."

"Silly of me," said Nancy; "but I am silly sometimes."

Mr. Carter pressed her hand again, and gazing tenderly into her eyes received a glance in return which set him thinking. It was too cold and calculating for real affection; in fact, after another glance, he began to doubt if it indicated affection at all.

"It's like old times, Bert," said Miss Evans, with an odd smile. "Do you remember what you said that afternoon when I put the hot spoon on your neck?"

"Yes," was the reply.

“What was it?” inquired the girl.

“I won't repeat it,” said Mr. Carter, firmly.

He was reminded of other episodes during the meal, but, by the exercise of tact and the plea of a bad memory, did fairly well. He felt that he had done very well indeed when, having cleared the tea-things away, Nancy came and sat beside him with her hand in his. Her brother grunted, but Mr. Evans, in whom a vein of sentiment still lingered, watched them with much satisfaction.

Mr. Carter had got possession of both hands and was murmuring fulsome flatteries when the sound of somebody pausing at the open door caused them to be hastily withdrawn.

“Evening, Mr. Evans,” said a young man, putting his head in. “Why, halloa! Bert! Well, of all the— —”

“Halloa!” said Mr. Carter, with attempted enthusiasm, as he rose from his chair.

“I thought you was lost,” said the other, stepping in and gripping his hand. “I never thought I was going to set eyes on you again. Well, this is a surprise. You ain't forgot Joe Wilson, have you?”

“Course I haven't, Joe,” said Mr. Carter. “I'd have known you anywhere.”

He shook hands effusively, and Mr. Wilson, after a little pretended hesitation, accepted a chair and began to talk about old times.

“I lay you ain't forgot one thing, Bert,” he said at last.

“What's that?” inquired the other.

“That arf-quid I lent you,” said Mr. Wilson.

Mr. Carter, after the first shock of surprise, pretended to think, Mr. Wilson supplying him with details as to time and place, which he was in no position to dispute. He turned to Mr. Evans, who was still acting as his banker, and, after a little hesitation, requested him to pay the money. Conversation seemed to fail somewhat after that, and Mr. Wilson, during an awkward pause, went off whistling.

“Same old Joe,” said Mr. Carter, lightly, after he had gone. “He hasn't altered a bit.”

Miss Evans glanced at him, but said nothing. She was looking instead towards a gentleman of middle age who was peeping round the door indulging in a waggish game of peep-bo with the unconscious Mr. Carter. Finding that he had at last attracted his attention, the gentleman came inside and, breathing somewhat heavily after his exertions, stood before him with outstretched hand.



A gentleman of middle age was peeping round the door.

“How goes it?” said Mr. Carter, forcing a smile and shaking hands.

“He's grown better-looking than ever,” said the gentleman, subsiding into a chair.

“So have you,” said Mr. Carter. “I should hardly have known you.”

“Well, I' m glad to see you again,” said the other in a more subdued fashion. “We're all glad to see you back, and I 'ope that when the wedding cake is sent out there'll be a bit for old Ben Prout.”

“You'll be the first, Ben,” said Mr. Carter, quickly.

Mr. Prout got up and shook hands with him again. “It only shows what mistakes a man can make,” he said, resuming his seat. “It only shows how easy it is to misjudge one's fellow-creeturs. When you went away sudden four years ago, I says to myself, 'Ben Prout,' I says, 'make up your mind to it, that two quid has gorn.'”

The smile vanished from Mr. Carter's face, and a sudden chill descended upon the company.

“Two quid?” he said, stiffly. “What two quid?”

“The two quid I lent you,” said Mr. Prout, in a pained voice.

“When?” said Mr. Carter, struggling.

“When you and I met him that evening on the pier,” said Miss Evans, in a matter-of-fact voice.

Mr. Carter started, and gazed at her uneasily. The smile on her lip and the triumphant gleam in her eye were a revelation to him. He turned to Mr. Evans and in as calm a voice as he could assume, requested him to discharge the debt. Mr. Prout, his fingers twitching, stood waiting “Well, it's your money,” said Mr. Evans, grudgingly extracting a purse from his trouser-pocket; “and I suppose you ought to pay your debts; still——”

He put down two pounds on the table and broke off in sudden amazement as Mr. Prout, snatching up the money, bolted headlong from the room. His surprise was shared by his son, but the other two made no sign. Mr. Carter was now prepared for the worst, and his voice was quite calm as he gave instructions for the payment of the other three gentlemen who presented claims during the evening endorsed by Miss Evans. As the last departed Mr. Evans, whose temper had been gradually getting beyond his control, crossed over and handed him his watch and chain, a few coppers, and the return half of his railway ticket.

“I think we can do without you, after all,” he said, breathing thickly. “I've no doubt you owe money all over England. You're a cadger, that's what you

are."

He pointed to the door, and Mr. Carter, after twice opening his lips to speak and failing, blundered towards it. Miss Evans watched him curiously.

"Cheats never prosper," she said, with gentle severity.

"Good-by," said Mr. Carter, pausing at the door.

"It's your own fault," continued Miss Evans, who was suffering from a slight touch of conscience. "If you hadn't come here pretending to be Bert Simmons and calling me 'Nan' as if you had known me all my life, I wouldn't have done it."

"It doesn't matter," said Mr. Carter. "I wish I was Bert Simmons, that's all. Good-by."

"Wish you was!" said Mr. Evans, who had been listening in open-mouthed astonishment. "Look here! Man to man—are you Bert Simmons or are you not?"

"No," said Mr. Carter.

"Of course not," said Nancy.

"And you didn't owe that money?"

"Nobody owed it," said Nancy. "It was done just to punish him."

Mr. Evans, with a strange cry, blundered towards the door. "I'll have that money out of 'em," he roared, "if I have to hold 'em up and shake it out of their trouser-pockets. You stay here."

He hurried up the road, and Jim, with the set face of a man going into action against heavy odds, followed him.

"Your father told me to stay," said Mr. Carter, coming farther into the room.

Nancy looked up at him through her eyelashes. "You need not unless you want to," she said, very softly.

KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

“Everybody is superstitious,” said the night-watchman, as he gave utterance to a series of chirruping endearments to a black cat with one eye that had just been using a leg of his trousers as a serviette; “if that cat 'ad stole some men's suppers they'd have acted foolish, and suffered for it all the rest of their lives.”

He scratched the cat behind the ear, and despite himself his face darkened. “Slung it over the side, they would,” he said, longingly, “and chucked bits o' coke at it till it sank. As I said afore, everybody is superstitious, and those that ain't ought to be night-watchmen for a time—that 'ud cure 'em. I knew one man that killed a black cat, and arter that for the rest of his life he could never get three sheets in the wind without seeing its ghost. Spoilt his life for 'im, it did.”

He scratched the cat's other ear. “I only left it a moment, while I went round to the Bull's Head,” he said, slowly filling his pipe, “and I thought I'd put it out o' reach. Some men——”

His fingers twined round the animal's neck; then, with a sigh, he rose and took a turn or two on the jetty.

Superstitiousness is right and proper, to a certain extent, he said, resuming his seat; but, o' course, like everything else, some people carry it too far—they'd believe anything. Weak-minded they are, and if you're in no hurry I can tell you a tale of a pal o' mine, Bill Burtenshaw by name, that'll prove my words.



Superstitiousness is right and proper, to a certain extent.

His mother was superstitious afore 'im, and always knew when 'er friends died by hearing three loud taps on the wall. The on'y mistake she ever made was one night when, arter losing no less than seven friends, she found out it was the man next door hanging pictures at three o'clock in the morning. She found it out by 'im hitting 'is thumb-nail.

For the first few years arter he grew up Bill went to sea, and that on'y made 'im more superstitious than ever. Him and a pal named Silas Winch went several v'y'ges together, and their talk used to be that creepy that some o' the chaps was a'most afraid to be left on deck alone of a night. Silas was a long-faced, miserable sort o' chap, always looking on the black side o' things, and shaking his 'ead over it. He thought nothing o' seeing ghosts, and pore old Ben Huggins slept on the floor for a week by reason of a ghost with its throat cut that Silas saw in his bunk. He gave Silas arf a dollar and a neck-tie to change bunks with 'im.

When Bill Burtenshaw left the sea and got married he lost sight of Silas altogether, and the on'y thing he 'ad to remind him of 'im was a piece o' paper which they 'ad both signed with their blood, promising that the fust one that died would appear to the other. Bill agreed to it one evenin' when he didn't know wot he was doing, and for years arterwards 'e used to get the cold creeps down 'is back when he thought of Silas dying fust. And the idea of dying fust 'imself gave 'im cold creeps all over.

Bill was a very good husband when he was sober, but 'is money was two pounds a week, and when a man has all that and on'y a wife to keep out of it, it's natural for 'im to drink. Mrs. Burtenshaw tried all sorts o' ways and means of curing 'im, but it was no use. Bill used to think o' ways, too, knowing the 'arm the drink was doing 'im, and his fav'rite plan was for 'is missis to empty a bucket o' cold water over 'im every time he came 'ome the worse for licker. She did it once, but as she 'ad to spend the rest o' the night in the back yard it wasn't tried again.

Bill got worse as he got older, and even made away with the furniture to get drink with. And then he used to tell 'is missis that he was drove to the pub because his 'ome was so uncomfortable.

Just at that time things was at their worst Silas Winch, who 'appened to be ashore and 'ad got Bill's address from a pal, called to see 'im. It was a Saturday arternoon when he called, and, o' course, Bill was out, but 'is missis showed him in, and, arter fetching another chair from the kitchen, asked 'im to sit down.

Silas was very perlite at fust, but arter looking round the room and seeing 'ow bare it was, he gave a little cough, and he ses, “I thought Bill was doing well?” he ses.



Silas was very perlite at fust.

“So he is,” ses Mrs. Burtenshaw.

Silas Winch coughed again.

“I suppose he likes room to stretch 'imself about in?” he ses, looking round.

Mrs. Burtenshaw wiped 'er eyes and then, knowing 'ow Silas had been an old friend o' Bill's, she drew 'er chair a bit closer and told him 'ow it was. “A better 'usband, when he's sober, you couldn't wish to see,” she ses, wiping her eyes agin. “He'd give me anything—if he 'ad it.”

Silas's face got longer than ever. “As a matter o' fact,” he ses, “I'm a bit down on my luck, and I called round with the 'ope that Bill could lend me a bit, just till I can pull round.”

Mrs. Burtenshaw shook her 'ead.

“Well, I s'pose I can stay and see 'im?” ses Silas. “Me and 'im used to be great pals at one time, and many's the good turn I've done him. Wot time'll

he be 'ome?"

"Any time after twelve," ses Mrs. Burtenshaw; "but you'd better not be here then. You see, 'im being in that condition, he might think you was your own ghost come according to promise and be frightened out of 'is life. He's often talked about it."

Silas Winch scratched his head and looked at 'er thoughtful-like.

"Why shouldn't he mistake me for a ghost?" he ses at last; "the shock might do 'im good. And, if you come to that, why shouldn't I pretend to be my own ghost and warn 'im off the drink?"

Mrs. Burtenshaw got so excited at the idea she couldn't 'ardly speak, but at last, arter saying over and over agin she wouldn't do such a thing for worlds, she and Silas arranged that he should come in at about three o'clock in the morning and give Bill a solemn warning. She gave 'im her key, and Silas said he'd come in with his 'air and cap all wet and pretend he'd been drowned.

"It's very kind of you to take all this trouble for nothing," ses Mrs. Burtenshaw as Silas got up to go.

"Don't mention it," ses Silas. "It ain't the fust time, and I don't suppose it'll be the last, that I've put myself out to help my feller-creeturs. We all ought to do wot we can for each other."

"Mind, if he finds it out," ses Mrs. Burtenshaw, all of a tremble, "I don't know nothing about it. P'r'aps to make it more life-like I'd better pretend not to see you."

"P'r'aps it would be better," ses Silas, stopping at the street door. "All I ask is that you'll 'ide the poker and anything else that might be laying about handy. And you 'ad better oil the lock so as the key won't make a noise."

Mrs. Burtenshaw shut the door arter 'im, and then she went in and 'ad a quiet sit-down all by 'erself to think it over. The only thing that comforted 'er was that Bill would be in licker, and also that 'e would believe anything in the ghost line.

It was past twelve when a couple o' pals brought him 'ome, and, arter offering to fight all six of 'em, one after the other, Bill hit the wall for getting in 'is way, and tumbled upstairs to bed. In less than ten minutes 'e was fast

asleep, and pore Mrs. Burtenshaw, arter trying her best to keep awake, fell asleep too.

She was woke up suddenly by a noise that froze the marrer in 'er bones—the most 'art-rending groan she 'ad ever heard in 'er life; and, raising her 'ead, she saw Silas Winch standing at the foot of the bed. He 'ad done his face and hands over with wot is called loominous paint, his cap was pushed at the back of his 'ead, and wet wisps of 'air was hanging over his eyes. For a moment Mrs. Burtenshaw's 'art stood still and then Silas let off another groan that put her on edge all over. It was a groan that seemed to come from nothing a'most until it spread into a roar that made the room tremble and rattled the jug in the wash-stand basin. It shook everything in the room but Bill, and he went on sleeping like an infant. Silas did two more groans, and then 'e leaned over the foot o' the bed, and stared at Bill, as though 'e couldn't believe his eyesight.



She saw Silas Winch standing at the foot of the bed.

"Try a squeaky one," ses Mrs. Burtenshaw.

Silas tried five squeaky ones, and then he 'ad a fit o' coughing that would ha' woke the dead, as they say, but it didn't wake Bill.

“Now some more deep ones,” ses Mrs. Burtenshaw, in a w'isper.

Silas licked his lips—forgetting the paint—and tried the deep ones agin.

“Now mix 'em a bit,” ses Mrs. Burtenshaw.

Silas stared at her. “Look 'ere,” he ses, very short, “do you think I'm a fog-horn, or wot?”

He stood there sulky for a moment, and then 'e invented a noise that nothing living could miss hearing; even Bill couldn't. He moved in 'is sleep, and arter Silas 'ad done it twice more he turned and spoke to 'is missis about it. “D'ye hear?” he ses; “stop it. Stop it at once.”

Mrs. Burtenshaw pretended to be asleep, and Bill was just going to turn over agin when Silas let off another groan. It was on'y a little one this time, but Bill sat up as though he 'ad been shot, and he no sooner caught sight of Silas standing there than 'e gave a dreadful 'owl and, rolling over, wropped 'imself up in all the bed-clothes 'e could lay his 'ands on. Then Mrs. Burtenshaw gave a 'owl and tried to get some of 'em back; but Bill, thinking it was the ghost, only held on tighter than ever.

“Bill!” ses Silas Winch, in an awful voice.

Bill gave a kick, and tried to bore a hole through the bed.

“Bill,” ses Silas agin, “why don't you answer me? I've come all the way from the bottom of the Pacific Ocean to see you, and this is all I get for it. Haven't you got anything to say to me?”

“Good-by,” ses Bill, in a voice all smothered with the bed-clothes.

Silas Winch groaned agin, and Bill, as the shock 'ad made a'most sober, trembled all over.

“The moment I died,” ses Silas, “I thought of my promise towards you. 'Bill's expecting me,' I ses, and, instead of staying in comfort at the bottom of the sea, I kicked off the body of the cabin-boy wot was clinging round my leg, and 'ere I am.”

“It was very—t-t-thoughtful—of you—Silas,” ses Bill; “but you always — w-w-was—thoughtful. Good-by.”

Afore Silas could answer, Mrs. Burtenshaw, who felt more comfortable, 'aving got a bit o' the clothes back, thought it was time to put 'er spoke in.

“Lor' bless me, Bill,” she ses. “Wotever are you a-talking to yourself like this for? 'Ave you been dreaming?”

“Dreaming!” ses pore Bill, catching hold of her 'and and gripping it till she nearly screamed. “I wish I was. Can't you see it?”

“See it?” ses his wife. “See wot?”

“The ghost,” ses Bill, in a 'orrible whisper; “the ghost of my dear, kind old pal, Silas Winch. The best and noblest pal a man ever 'ad. The kindest-'arted——”

“Rubbish,” ses Mrs. Burtenshaw. “You've been dreaming. And as for the kindest-'arted pal, why I've often heard you say—”

“H'sh!” ses Bill. “I didn't. I'll swear I didn't. I never thought of such a thing.”

“You turn over and go to sleep,” ses his wife, “hiding your 'ead under the clothes like a child that's afraid o' the dark! There's nothing there, I tell you. Wot next will you see, I wonder? Last time it was a pink rat.”

“This is fifty million times worse than pink rats,” ses Bill. “I on'y wish it was a pink rat.”

“I tell you there is nothing there,” ses his wife. “Look!”

Bill put his 'ead up and looked, and then 'e gave a dreadful scream and dived under the bed-clothes agin.

“Oh, well, 'ave it your own way, then,” ses his wife. “If it pleases you to think there is a ghost there, and to go on talking to it, do so, and welcome.”

She turned over and pretended to go to sleep agin, and arter a minute or two Silas spoke agin in the same hollow voice.

“Bill!” he ses.

“Yes,” ses Bill, with a groan of his own.

“She can't see me,” ses Silas, “and she can't 'ear me; but I'm 'ere all right. Look!”

“I 'ave looked,” ses Bill, with his 'ead still under the clothes.

“We was always pals, Bill, you and me,” ses Silas; “many a v'y'ge 'ave we had together, mate, and now I'm a-laying at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean, and you are snug and 'appy in your own warm bed. I 'ad to come to see you, according to promise, and over and above that, since I was drowned my eyes 'ave been opened. Bill, you're drinking yourself to death!”

“I—I—didn't know it,” ses Bill, shaking all over. “I'll knock it—off a bit, and—thank you—for—w-w-warning me. G-G-Good-by.”

“You'll knock it off altogether,” ses Silas Winch, in a awful voice. “You're not to touch another drop of beer, wine, or spirits as long as you live. D'ye hear me?”

“Not—not as medicine?” ses Bill, holding the clothes up a bit so as to be more distinct.

“Not as anything,” ses Silas; “not even over Christmas pudding. Raise your right arm above your 'ead and swear by the ghost of pore Silas Winch, as is laying at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean, that you won't touch another drop.”

Bill Burtenshaw put 'is arm up and swore it.

Then 'e took 'is arm in agin and lay there wondering wot was going to 'appen next.

“If you ever break your oath by on'y so much as a teaspoonful,” ses Silas, “you'll see me agin, and the second time you see me you'll die as if struck by lightning. No man can see me twice and live.”

Bill broke out in a cold perspiration all over. “You'll be careful, won't you, Silas?” he ses. “You'll remember you 'ave seen me once, I mean?”

“And there's another thing afore I go,” ses Silas. “I've left a widder, and if she don't get 'elp from some one she'll starve.”

“Pore thing,” ses Bill. “Pore thing.”

“If you 'ad died afore me,” ses Silas, “I should 'ave looked arter your good wife—wot I've now put in a sound sleep—as long as I lived.”

Bill didn't say anything.

“I should 'ave given 'er fifteen shillings a week,” ses Silas.

“'Ow much?” ses Bill, nearly putting his 'ead up over the clothes, while 'is wife almost woke up with surprise and anger.

“Fifteen shillings,” ses Silas, in 'is most awful voice. “You'll save that over the drink.”

“I—I'll go round and see her,” ses Bill. “She might be one o' these 'ere independent—”

“I forbid you to go near the place,” ses Silas. “Send it by post every week; 15 Shap Street will find her. Put your arm up and swear it; same as you did afore.”

Bill did as 'e was told, and then 'e lay and trembled, as Silas gave three more awful groans.

“Farewell, Bill,” he ses. “Farewell. I am going back to my bed at the bottom o' the sea. So long as you keep both your oaths I shall stay there. If you break one of 'em or go to see my pore wife I shall appear agin. Farewell! Farewell! Farewell!”

Bill said “Good-by,” and arter a long silence he ventured to put an eye over the edge of the clothes and discovered that the ghost 'ad gone. He lay awake for a couple o' hours, wondering and saying over the address to himself so that he shouldn't forget it, and just afore it was time to get up he fell into a peaceful slumber. His wife didn't get a wink, and she lay there trembling with passion to think 'ow she'd been done, and wondering 'ow she was to alter it.

Bill told 'er all about it in the morning; and then with tears in his eyes 'e went downstairs and emptied a little barrel o' beer down the sink. For the fust two or three days 'e went about with a thirst that he'd ha' given pounds for if 'e'd been allowed to satisfy it, but arter a time it went off, and then, like all teetotallers, 'e began to run down drink and call it pison.



With tears in his eyes 'e emptied a little barrel o' beer down the sink.

The fust thing 'e did when 'e got his money on Friday was to send off a post-office order to Shap Street, and Mrs. Burtenshaw cried with rage and 'ad to put it down to the headache. She 'ad the headache every Friday for a month, and Bill, wot was feeling stronger and better than he 'ad done for years, felt quite sorry for her.

By the time Bill 'ad sent off six orders she was worn to skin and bone a'most a-worrying over the way Silas Winch was spending her money. She dursn't undeceive Bill for two reasons: fust of all, because she didn't want 'im to take to drink agin; and secondly, for fear of wot he might do to 'er if 'e found out 'ow she'd been deceiving 'im.

She was laying awake thinking it over one night while Bill was sleeping peaceful by her side, when all of a sudden she 'ad an idea. The more she thought of it the better it seemed; but she laid awake for ever so long afore she dared to do more than think. Three or four times she turned and looked

at Bill and listened to 'im breathing, and then, trembling all over with fear and excitement, she began 'er little game.

“He did send it,” she ses, with a piercing scream. “He did send it.”

“W-w-wot's the matter?” ses Bill, beginning to wake up.

Mrs. Burtenshaw didn't take any notice of 'im.

“He did send it,” she ses, screaming agin. “Every Friday night reg'lar. Oh, don't let 'im see you agin.”

Bill, wot was just going to ask 'er whether she 'ad gone mad, gave a awful 'owl and disappeared right down in the middle o' the bed.

“There's some mistake,” ses Mrs. Burtenshaw, in a voice that could ha' been 'eard through arf-a-dozen beds easy. “It must ha' been lost in the post. It must ha' been.”

She was silent for a few seconds, then she ses, “All right,” she ses, “I'll bring it myself, then, by hand every week. No, Bill sha'n't come; I'll promise that for 'im. Do go away; he might put his 'ead up at any moment.”

She began to gasp and sob, and Bill began to think wot a good wife he 'ad got, when he felt 'er put a couple of pillers over where she judged his 'ead to be, and hold 'em down with her arm.

“Thank you, Mr. Winch,” she ses, very loud. “Thank you. Good-by, Good-by.”

She began to quieten down a bit, although little sobs, like wimmen use when they pretend that they want to leave off crying but can't, kept breaking out of 'er. Then, by and by, she quieted down altogether and a husky voice from near the foot of the bed ses: “Has it gorn?”

“Oh, Bill,” she ses, with another sob, “I've seen the ghost!”

“Has it gorn?” ses Bill, agin.

“Yes, it's gorn,” ses his wife, shivering. “Oh, Bill, it stood at the foot of the bed looking at me, with its face and 'ands all shiny white, and damp curls on its forehead. Oh!”

Bill came up very slow and careful, but with 'is eyes still shut.

“His wife didn't get the money this week,” ses Mrs. Burtenshaw; “but as he thought there might be a mistake somewhere he appeared to me instead of to you. I've got to take the money by hand.”

“Yes, I heard,” ses Bill; “and mind, if you should lose it or be robbed of it, let me know at once. D'ye hear? At once!”

“Yes, Bill,” ses 'is wife.

They lay quiet for some time, although Mrs. Burtenshaw still kept trembling and shaking; and then Bill ses. “Next time a man tells you he 'as seen a ghost, p'r'aps you'll believe in 'im.”

Mrs. Burtenshaw took out the end of the sheet wot she 'ad stuffed in 'er mouth when 'e began to speak.

“Yes, Bill,” she ses.

Bill Burtenshaw gave 'er the fifteen shillings next morning and every Friday night arterwards; and that's 'ow it is that, while other wimmen 'as to be satisfied looking at new hats and clothes in the shop-winders, Mrs. Burtenshaw is able to wear 'em.



Other wimmen 'as to be satisfied looking at new hats.



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