William Wymark Jacobs

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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 theirselves 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 naming '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 sealskin case

and ordered 'im a glass of sherry wine.

"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 inside 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.

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 workhouse, 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 given '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.

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, 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.

"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 handkerchief.

"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 curtains 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."

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.

“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 wile'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.

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 pre-tends 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."

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 tr 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 'cad; "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.

"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 of 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, whatever 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 'cad that put 'im alongside o' Ginger, arter which Sam turned and trotted off down the Hill like a dancing-bear.

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."

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