

**WILLIAM
WYMARK
JACOBS**

SENTENCE DEFERRED

William Wymark Jacobs

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Sentence Deferred / Sailor's Knots, Part 4.:

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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 Wood-hatch, 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.

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