

**WILLIAM
WYMARK
JACOBS**

CAPTAINS ALL

William Wymark Jacobs
Captains All

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CAPTAINS ALL

Every sailorman grumbles about the sea, said the night-watchman, thoughtfully. It's human nature to grumble, and I s'pose they keep on grumbling and sticking to it because there ain't much else they can do. There's not many shore-going berths that a sailorman is fit for, and those that they are—such as a night-watchman's, for instance—wants such a good character that there's few as are to equal it.

Sometimes they get things to do ashore. I knew one man that took up butchering, and 'e did very well at it till the police took him up. Another man I knew gave up the sea to marry a washerwoman, and they hadn't been married six months afore she died, and back he 'ad to go to sea agin, pore chap.

A man who used to grumble awful about the sea was old Sam Small—a man I've spoke of to you before. To hear 'im go on about the sea, arter he 'ad spent four or five months' money in a fortnight, was 'artbreaking. He used to ask us wot was going to happen to 'im in his old age, and when we pointed out that he

wouldn't be likely to 'ave any old age if he wasn't more careful of 'imself he used to fly into a temper and call us everything 'e could lay his tongue to.

One time when 'e was ashore with Peter Russet and Ginger Dick he seemed to 'ave got it on the brain. He started being careful of 'is money instead o' spending it, and three mornings running he bought a newspaper and read the advertisements, to see whether there was any comfortable berth for a strong, good-'arted man wot didn't like work.

He actually went arter one situation, and, if it hadn't ha' been for seventy-nine other men, he said he believed he'd ha' had a good chance of getting it. As it was, all 'e got was a black eye for shoving another man, and for a day or two he was so down-'arted that 'e was no company at all for the other two.

For three or four days 'e went out by 'imself, and then, all of a sudden, Ginger Dick and Peter began to notice a great change in him. He seemed to 'ave got quite cheerful and 'appy. He answered 'em back pleasant when they spoke to 'im, and one night he lay in 'is bed whistling comic songs until Ginger and Peter Russet 'ad to get out o' bed to him. When he bought a new necktie and a smart cap and washed 'imself twice in one day they fust began to ask each other wot was up, and then they asked him.

"Up?" ses Sam; "nothing."

"He's in love," ses Peter Russet.

"You're a liar," ses Sam, without turning round.

"He'll 'ave it bad at 'is age," ses Ginger.

Sam didn't say nothing, but he kept fidgeting about as though 'e'd got something on his mind. Fust he looked out o' the winder, then he 'ummed a tune, and at last, looking at 'em very fierce, he took a tooth-brush wrapped in paper out of 'is pocket and began to clean 'is teeth.

"He is in love," ses Ginger, as soon as he could speak.

"Or else 'e's gorn mad," ses Peter, watching 'im. "Which is it, Sam?"

Sam made believe that he couldn't answer 'im because o' the tooth-brush, and arter he'd finished he 'ad such a raging toothache that 'e sat in a corner holding 'is face and looking the pictur' o' misery. They couldn't get a word out of him till they asked 'im to go out with them, and then he said 'e was going to bed. Twenty minutes arterwards, when Ginger Dick stepped back for 'is pipe, he found he 'ad gorn.

He tried the same game next night, but the other two wouldn't 'ave it, and they stayed in so long that at last 'e lost 'is temper, and, arter wondering wot Ginger's father and mother could ha' been a-thinking about, and saying that he believed Peter Russet 'ad been changed at birth for a sea-sick monkey, he put on 'is cap and went out. Both of 'em follered 'im sharp, but when he led 'em to a mission-hall, and actually went inside, they left 'im and went off on their own.

They talked it over that night between themselves, and next evening they went out fust and hid themselves round the corner. Ten minutes arterwards old Sam came out, walking as though

'e was going to catch a train; and smiling to think 'ow he 'ad shaken them off. At the corner of Commercial Road he stopped and bought 'imself a button-hole for 'is coat, and Ginger was so surprised that 'e pinched Peter Russet to make sure that he wasn't dreaming.

Old Sam walked straight on whistling, and every now and then looking down at 'is button-hole, until by-and-by he turned down a street on the right and went into a little shop. Ginger Dick and Peter waited for 'im at the corner, but he was inside for so long that at last they got tired o' waiting and crept up and peeped through the winder.

It was a little tobacconist's shop, with newspapers and penny toys and such-like; but, as far as Ginger could see through two rows o' pipes and the *Police News*, it was empty. They stood there with their noses pressed against the glass for some time, wondering wot had 'appened to Sam, but by-and-by a little boy went in and then they began to 'ave an idea wot Sam's little game was.

As the shop-bell went the door of a little parlour at the back of the shop opened, and a stout and uncommon good-looking woman of about forty came out. Her 'ead pushed the *Police News* out o' the way and her 'and came groping into the winder arter a toy.

Ginger 'ad a good look at 'er out o' the corner of one eye, while he pretended to be looking at a tobacco-jar with the other. As the little boy came out 'im and Peter Russet went in.

"I want a pipe, please," he ses, smiling at 'er; "a clay pipe—one o' your best." The woman handed 'im down a box to choose from, and just then Peter, wot 'ad been staring in at the arf-open door at a boot wot wanted lacing up, gave a big start and ses, "Why! Halloa!"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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