

**WILLIAM
WYMARK
JACOBS**

THE GUARDIAN ANGEL

William Wymark Jacobs

The Guardian Angel

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W. W. Jacobs

The Guardian Angel / Ship's Company, Part 7

THE GUARDIAN ANGEL

The night-watchman shook his head. "I never met any of these phil— philanthropists, as you call 'em," he said, decidedly. "If I 'ad they wouldn't 'ave got away from me in a hurry, I can tell you. I don't say I don't believe in 'em; I only say I never met any of 'em. If people do you a kindness it's generally because they want to get something out of you; same as a man once—a perfick stranger—wot stood me eight 'arf-pints becos I reminded 'im of his dead brother, and then borrered five bob off of me.

"O' course, there must be some kind-'arted people in the world—all men who get married must 'ave a soft spot somewhere, if it's only in the 'ead—but they don't often give things away. Kind-'artedness is often only another name for artfulness, same as Sam Small's kindness to Ginger Dick and Peter Russet.

"It started with a row. They was just back from a v'y'ge and 'ad taken a nice room together in Wapping, and for the fust day or two, wot with 'aving plenty o' money to spend and nothing to do, they was like three brothers. Then, in a little, old-fashioned public-'ouse down Poplar way, one night they fell out over a little joke Ginger played on Sam.

"It was the fust drink that evening, and Sam 'ad just ordered a pot o' beer and three glasses, when Ginger winked at the landlord and offered to bet Sam a level 'arf-dollar that 'e wouldn't drink off that pot o' beer without taking breath. The landlord held the money, and old Sam, with a 'appy smile on 'is face, 'ad just taken up the mug, when he noticed the odd way in which they was all watching him. Twice he took the mug up and put it down agin without starting and asked 'em wot the little game was, but they on'y laughed. He took it up the third time and started, and he 'ad just got about 'arf-way through when Ginger turns to the landlord and ses—

"'Did you catch it in the mouse-trap,' he ses, 'or did it die of poison?'

"Pore Sam started as though he 'ad been shot, and, arter getting rid of the beer in 'is mouth, stood there 'olding the mug away from 'im and making such 'orrible faces that they was a'most frightened.

"'Wot's the matter with him? I've never seen 'im carry on like that over a drop of beer before,' ses Ginger, staring.

"'He usually likes it,' ses Peter Russet.

"'Not with a dead mouse in it,' ses Sam, trembling with passion.

"'Mouse?' ses Ginger, innercent-like. 'Mouse? Why, I didn't say it was in your beer, Sam. Wotever put that into your 'ead?'

"'And made you lose your bet,' ses Peter.

"Then old Sam see 'ow he'd been done, and the way he carried on when the landlord gave Ginger the 'arf-dollar, and said it was won fair and honest, was a disgrace. He 'opped about that bar 'arf crazy, until at last the landlord and 'is brother, and a couple o' soldiers, and a helpless cripple wot was selling matches, put 'im outside and told 'im to stop there.

"He stopped there till Ginger and Peter came out, and then, drawing 'imself up in a proud way, he told 'em their characters and wot he thought about 'em. And he said 'e never wanted to see wot they called their faces agin as long as he lived.

"'I've done with you,' he ses, 'both of you, for ever.'

"'All right,' ses Ginger moving off. 'Ta-ta for the present. Let's 'ope he'll come 'ome in a better temper, Peter.'

"'Ome?' ses Sam, with a nasty laugh, "'ome? D'ye think I'm coming back to breathe the same air as you, Ginger? D'ye think I want to be suffocated?"

"He held his 'ead up very 'igh, and, arter looking at them as if they was dirt, he turned round and walked off with his nose in the air to spend the evening by 'imself.

"His temper kept him up for a time, but arter a while he 'ad to own up to 'imself that it was very dull, and the later it got the more he thought of 'is nice warm bed. The more 'e thought of it the nicer and warmer it seemed, and, arter a struggle between his pride and a few 'arf-pints, he got 'is good temper back agin and went off 'ome smiling.

"The room was dark when 'e got there, and, arter standing listening a moment to Ginger and Peter snoring, he took off 'is coat and sat down on 'is bed to take 'is boots off. He only sat down for a flash, and then he bent down and hit his 'ead an awful smack against another 'ead wot 'ad just started up to see wot it was sitting on its legs.

"He thought it was Peter or Ginger in the wrong bed at fust, but afore he could make it out Ginger 'ad got out of 'is own bed and lit the candle. Then 'e saw it was a stranger in 'is bed, and without saying a word he laid 'old of him by the 'air and began dragging him out.

"'Here, stop that!' ses Ginger catching hold of 'im. 'Lend a hand 'ere, Peter.'

"Peter lent a hand and screwed it into the back o' Sam's neck till he made 'im leave go, and then the stranger, a nasty-looking little chap with a yellow face and a little dark moustache, told Sam wot he'd like to do to him.

"'Who are you?' ses Sam, 'and wot are you a-doing of in my bed?'

"'It's our lodger,' ses Ginger.

"'Your wot?' ses Sam, 'ardly able to believe his ears.

"'Our lodger,' ses Peter Russet. 'We've let 'im the bed you said you didn't want for sixpence a night. Now you take yourself off.'

"Old Sam couldn't speak for a minute; there was no words that he knew bad enough, but at last he licks 'is lips and he ses, 'I've paid for that bed up to Saturday, and I'm going to have it.'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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