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JACOBS**

SELF-HELP

William Wymark Jacobs
Self-Help

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Self-Help / Sailor's Knots, Part 3.:*

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W. W. Jacobs

Self-Help / Sailor's Knots, Part 3

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 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 '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."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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