

**WILLIAM
WYMARK
JACOBS**

PAYING OFF

William Wymark Jacobs
Paying Off

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W. W. Jacobs

Paying Off / Deep Waters, Part 2

PAYING OFF

My biggest fault, said the night-watchman, gloomily, has been good nature. I've spent the best part of my life trying to do my fellow-creeturs a good turn. And what do I get for it? If all the people I've helped was to come 'ere now there wouldn't be standing room for them on this wharf. 'Arf of them would be pushed overboard—and a good place for 'em, too.

I've been like it all my life. I was good-natured enough to go to sea as a boy because a skipper took a fancy to me and wanted my 'elp, and when I got older I was good-natured enough to get married. All my life I've given 'elp and advice free, and only a day or two ago one of 'em wot I 'ad given it to came round here with her 'usband and 'er two brothers and 'er mother and two or three people from the same street, to see her give me "wot for."

Another fault o' mine has been being sharp. Most people make mistakes, and they can't bear to see anybody as don't. Over and over agin I have showed people 'ow silly they 'ave been to do certain things, and told 'em wot I should ha' done in their place,

but I can't remember one that ever gave me a "thank you" for it.

There was a man 'ere 'arf an hour ago that reminded me of both of these faults. He came in a-purpose to remind me, and 'e brought a couple o' grinning, brass-faced monkeys with 'im to see 'im do it. I was sitting on that barrel when he came, and arter two minutes I felt as if I was sitting on red-'ot cinders. He purtended he 'ad come in for the sake of old times and to ask arter my 'ealth, and all the time he was doing 'is best to upset me to amuse them two pore objectks 'e 'ad brought with 'im.

Capt'in Mellun is his name, and 'e was always a foolish, soft-'eaded sort o' man, and how he 'as kept 'is job I can't think. He used to trade between this wharf and Bristol on a little schooner called the *Firefly*, and seeing wot a silly, foolish kind o' man he was, I took a little bit o' notice of 'im. Many and many a time when 'e was going to do something he'd ha' been sorry for arterwards I 'ave taken 'im round to the Bear's Head and stood 'im pint arter pint until he began to see reason and own up that I was in the right.

His crew was a'most as bad as wot he was, and all in one month one o' the 'ands gave a man ten shillings for a di'mond ring he saw 'im pick up, wot turned out to be worth fourpence, and another one gave five bob for a meerschaum pipe made o' chalk. When I pointed out to 'em wot fools they was they didn't like it, and a week arterwards, when the skipper gave a man in a pub 'is watch and chain and two pounds to hold, to show 'is confidence in 'im, and I told 'im exactly wot I thought of him, 'e didn't like it.

"You're too sharp, Bill," he says, sneering like. "My opinion is that the pore man was run over. He told me 'e should only be away five minutes. And he 'ad got an honest face: nice open blue eyes, and a smile that done you good to look at."

"You've been swindled," I ses, "and you know it. If I'd been done like that I should never hold up my 'ead agin. Why, a child o' five would know better. You and your crew all seem to be tarred with the same brush. You ain't fit to be trusted out alone."

I believe 'e told his 'ands wot I said; anyway, two bits o' coke missed me by 'arf an inch next evening, and for some weeks not one of 'em spoke a word to me. When they see me coming they just used to stand up straight and twist their nose.

It didn't 'urt me, o' course. I took no notice of 'em. Even when one of 'em fell over the broom I was sweeping with I took no notice of 'im. I just went on with my work as if 'e wasn't there.

I suppose they 'ad been in the sulks about a month, and I was sitting 'ere one evening getting my breath arter a couple o' hours' 'ard work, when one of 'em, George Tebb by name, came off the ship and nodded to me as he passed.

"Evening, Bill," he ses.

"Evening," I ses, rather stiff.

"I wanted a word with you, Bill," he ses, in a low voice. "In fact, I might go so far as to say I want to ask you to do me a favour."

I looked at him so 'ard that he coughed and looked away.

"We might talk about it over a 'arf-pint," he ses.

"No, thank you," I ses. "I 'ad a 'arf-pint the day before yesterday, and I'm not thirsty."

He stood there fidgeting about for a bit, and then he puts his 'and on my shoulder.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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