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JACOBS**

BOB'S REDEMPTION

William Wymark Jacobs

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W. W. Jacobs

Bob's Redemption / Captains All, Book 5

BOB'S REDEMPTION

"GRATITOODE!" said the night-watchman, with a hard laugh. "*Hmf!* Don't talk to me about gratioode; I've seen too much of it. If people wot I've helped in my time 'ad only done arf their dooty—arf, mind you—I should be riding in my carriage."

Forgetful of the limitations of soap-boxes he attempted to illustrate his remark by lolling, and nearly went over backwards. Recovering himself by an effort he gazed sternly across the river and smoked fiercely. It was evident that he was brooding over an ill-used past.

'Arry Thomson was one of them, he said, at last. For over six months I wrote all 'is love-letters for him, 'e being an iggernerant sort of man and only being able to do the kisses at the end, which he always insisted on doing 'imself: being jealous. Only three weeks arter he was married 'e come up to where I was standing one day and set about me without saying a word. I was a single man at the time and I didn't understand it. My idea was that he 'ad gone mad, and, being pretty artful and always 'aving a horror of mad people, I let 'im chase me into a police-station. Leastways, I would ha' let 'im, but he didn't come, and I all but got fourteen days for being drunk and disorderly.

Then there was Bill Clark. He 'ad been keeping comp'ny with a gal and got tired of it, and to oblige 'im I went to her and told 'er he was a married man with five children. Bill was as pleased as Punch at fust, but as soon as she took up with another chap he came round to see me and said as I'd ruined his life. We 'ad words about it—naturally—and I did ruin it then to the extent of a couple o' ribs. I went to see 'im in the horsepittle—place I've always been fond of—and the langwidge he used to me was so bad that they sent for the Sister to 'ear it.

That's on'y two out of dozens I could name. Arf the unpleasantnesses in my life 'ave come out of doing kindnesses to people, and all the gratioode I've 'ad for it I could put in a pint-pot with a pint o' beer already in it.

The only case o' real gratioode I ever heard of 'appened to a shipmate o' mine—a young chap named Bob Evans. Coming home from Auckland in a barque called the *Dragon Fly* he fell overboard, and another chap named George Crofts, one o' the best swimmers I ever knew, went overboard arter 'im and saved his life.

We was hardly moving at the time, and the sea was like a duck pond, but to 'ear Bob Evans talk you'd ha' thought that George Crofts was the bravest-'arted chap that ever lived. He 'adn't liked him afore, same as the rest of us, George being a sly, mean sort o' chap; but arter George 'ad saved his life 'e couldn't praise 'im enough. He said that so long as he 'ad a crust George should share it, and wotever George asked 'im he should have.

The unfortnit part of it was that George took 'im at his word, and all the rest of the v'y'ge he acted as though Bob belonged to 'im, and by the time we got into the London river Bob couldn't call his soul 'is own. He used to take a room when he was ashore and live very steady, as 'e was saving up to get married, and as soon as he found that out George invited 'imself to stay with him.

"It won't cost you a bit more," he ses, "not if you work it properly."

Bob didn't work it properly, but George having saved his life, and never letting 'im forget it, he didn't like to tell him so. He thought he'd let 'im see gradual that he'd got to be careful because of 'is gal, and the fust evening they was ashore 'e took 'im along with 'im there to tea.

Gerty Mitchell—that was the gal's name—'adn't heard of Bob's accident, and when she did she gave a little scream, and putting 'er arms round his neck, began to kiss 'im right in front of George and her mother.

"You ought to give him one too," ses Mrs. Mitchell, pointing to George.

George wiped 'is mouth on the back of his 'and, but Gerty pretended not to 'ear.

"Fancy if you'd been drowned!" she ses, hugging Bob agin.

"He was pretty near," ses George, shaking his 'ead. "I'm a pore swimmer, but I made up my mind either to save 'im or else go down to a watery grave myself."

He wiped his mouth on the back of his 'and agin, but all the notice Gerty took of it was to send her young brother Ted out for some beer. Then they all 'ad supper together, and Mrs. Mitchell drank good luck to George in a glass o' beer, and said she 'oped that 'er own boy would grow up like him. "Let 'im grow up a good and brave man, that's all I ask," she ses. "I don't care about 'is looks."

"He might have both," ses George, sharp-like. "Why not?"

Mrs. Mitchell said she supposed he might, and then she cuffed young Ted's ears for making a noise while 'e was eating, and then cuffed 'im agin for saying that he'd finished 'is supper five minutes ago.

George and Bob walked 'ome together, and all the way there George said wot a pretty gal Gerty was and 'ow lucky it was for Bob that he 'adn't been drowned. He went round to tea with 'im the next day to Mrs. Mitchell's, and arter tea, when Bob and Gerty said they was going out to spend the evening together, got 'imself asked too.

They took a tram-car and went to a music-hall, and Bob paid for the three of 'em. George never seemed to think of putting his 'and in his pocket, and even arter the music-hall, when they all went into a shop and 'ad stewed eels, he let Bob pay.

As I said afore, Bob Evans was chock-full of gratefulness, and it seemed only fair that he shouldn't grumble at spending a little over the man wot 'ad risked 'is life to save his; but wot with keeping George at his room, and paying for 'im every time they went out, he was spending a lot more money than 'e could afford.

"You're on'y young once, Bob," George said to him when 'e made a remark one arternoon as to the fast way his money was going, "and if it hadn't ha' been for me you'd never 'ave lived to grow old."

Wot with spending the money and always 'aving George with them when they went out, it wasn't long afore Bob and Gerty 'ad a quarrel. "I don't like a pore-spirited man," she ses. "Two's company and three's none, and, besides, why can't he pay for 'imself? He's big enough. Why should you spend your money on 'im? He never pays a farthing."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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