

**WILLIAM  
WYMARK  
JACOBS**

A GOLDEN VENTURE

William Wymark Jacobs

**A Golden Venture**

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# W. W. Jacobs

## A Golden Venture / The Lady of the Barge and Others, Part 11

### A GOLDEN VENTURE

The elders of the Tidger family sat at breakfast—Mrs. Tidger with knees wide apart and the youngest Tidger nestling in the valley of print-dress which lay between, and Mr. Tidger bearing on one moleskin knee a small copy of himself in a red flannel frock and a slipper. The larger Tidger children took the solids of their breakfast up and down the stone-flagged court outside, coming in occasionally to gulp draughts of very weak tea from a gallipot or two which stood on the table, and to wheedle Mr. Tidger out of any small piece of bloater which he felt generous enough to bestow.

"Peg away, Ann," said Mr. Tidger, heartily.

His wife's elder sister shook her head, and passing the remains of her slice to one of her small nephews, leaned back in her chair. "No appetite, Tidger," she said, slowly.

"You should go in for carpentering," said Mr. Tidger, in justification of the huge crust he was carving into mouthfuls with his pocket-knife. "Seems to me I can't eat enough sometimes. Hullo, who's the letter for?"

He took it from the postman, who stood at the door amid a bevy of Tidges who had followed him up the court, and slowly read the address.

"Mrs. Ann Pullen," he said, handing it over to his sister-in-law; "nice writing, too."

Mrs. Pullen broke the envelope, and after a somewhat lengthy search for her pocket, fumbled therein for her spectacles. She then searched the mantelpiece, the chest of drawers, and the dresser, and finally ran them to earth on the copper.

She was not a good scholar, and it took her some time to read the letter, a proceeding which she punctuated with such "Ohs" and "Ahs" and gaspings and "God bless my souls" as nearly drove the carpenter and his wife, who were leaning forward impatiently, to the verge of desperation.

"Who's it from?" asked Mr. Tidger for the third time.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Pullen. "Good gracious, who ever would ha' thought it!"

"Thought what, Ann?" demanded the carpenter, feverishly.

"Why don't people write their names plain?" demanded his sister-in-law, impatiently. "It's got a printed name up in the corner; perhaps that's it. Well, I never did—I don't know whether I'm standing on my head or my heels."

"You're sitting down, that's what you're a-doing," said the carpenter, regarding her somewhat unfavourably.

"Perhaps it's a take-in," said Mrs. Pullen, her lips trembling. "I've heard o' such things. If it is, I shall never get over it—never."

"Get—over—what?" asked the carpenter.

"It don't look like a take-in," soliloquized Mrs. Pullen, "and I shouldn't think anybody'd go to all that trouble and spend a penny to take in a poor thing like me."

Mr. Tidger, throwing politeness to the winds, leaped forward, and snatching the letter from her, read it with feverish haste, tempered by a defective education.

"It's a take-in, Ann," he said, his voice trembling; "it must be."

"What is?" asked Mrs. Tidger, impatiently.

"Looks like it," said Mrs. Pullen, feebly.

"What is it?" screamed Mrs. Tidger, wrought beyond all endurance.

Her husband turned and regarded her with much severity, but Mrs. Tidger's gaze was the stronger, and after a vain attempt to meet it, he handed her the letter.

Mrs. Tidger read it through hastily, and then snatching the baby from her lap, held it out with both arms to her husband, and jumping up, kissed her sister heartily, patting her on the back in her excitement until she coughed with the pain of it.

"You don't think it's a take-in, Polly?" she inquired.

"Take-in?" said her sister; "of course it ain't. Lawyers don't play jokes; their time's too valuable. No, you're an heiress all right, Ann, and I wish you joy. I couldn't be more pleased if it was myself."

She kissed her again, and going to pat her back once more, discovered that she had sunk down sufficiently low in her chair to obtain the protection of its back.

"Two thousand pounds," said Mrs. Pullen, in an awestruck voice.

"Ten hundreded pounds twice over," said the carpenter, mouthing it slowly; "twenty hundreded pounds."

He got up from the table, and instinctively realizing that he could not do full justice to his feelings with the baby in his arms, laid it on the teatray in a puddle of cold tea and stood looking hard at the heiress.

"I was housekeeper to her eleven years ago," said Mrs. Pullen. "I wonder what she left it to me for?"

"Didn't know what to do with it, I should think," said the carpenter, still staring openmouthed.

"Tidger, I'm ashamed of you," said his wife, snatching her infant to her bosom. "I expect you was very good to her, Ann."

"I never 'ad no luck," said the impenitent carpenter. "Nobody ever left me no money. Nobody ever left me so much as a fi-pun note."

He stared round disdainfully at his poor belongings, and drawing on his coat, took his bag from a corner, and hoisting it on his shoulder, started to his work. He scattered the news as he went, and it ran up and down the little main street of Thatcham, and thence to the outlying lanes and cottages. Within a couple of hours it was common property, and the fortunate legatee was presented with a congratulatory address every time she ventured near the door.

It is an old adage that money makes friends; the carpenter was surprised to find that the mere fact of his having a moneyed relation had the same effect, and that men to whom he had hitherto shown a certain amount of respect due to their position now sought his company. They stood him beer at the "Bell," and walked by his side through the street. When they took to dropping in of an evening to smoke a pipe the carpenter was radiant with happiness.

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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