

WILLIAM WYMARK JACOBS

THE SKIPPER'S WOOING,
AND THE BROWN MAN'S
SERVANT

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W. W. Jacobs

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CHAPTER I

The schooner Seamew, of London, Captain Wilson master and owner, had just finished loading at Northfleet with cement for Brittlesea. Every inch of space was packed. Cement, exuded from the cracks, imparted to the hairy faces of honest seamen a ghastly appearance sadly out of keeping with their characters, and even took its place, disguised as thickening, among the multiple ingredients of a sea-pie that was cooking for dinner.

It was not until the decks were washed and the little schooner was once more presentable that the mate gave a thought to his own toilet. It was a fine, warm morning in May, and some of the cargo had got into his hair and settled in streaks on his hot, good-humored face. The boy had brought aft a wooden bucket filled with fair water, and placed upon the hatch by its side a piece of yellow soap and a towel. Upon these preparations the mate smiled pleasantly, and throwing off his shirt and girding his loins with his braces, he bent over and with much zestful splashing began his ablutions.

Twice did the ministering angel, who was not of an age to be in any great concern about his own toilet, change the water before the mate was satisfied; after which the latter, his face and neck aglow with friction, descended to the cabin for a change of raiment.

He did not appear on deck again until after dinner, which, in the absence of the skipper, he ate alone. The men, who had also dined, were lounging forward, smoking, and the mate, having filled his own pipe, sat down by himself and smoked in silence.

"I'm keeping the skipper's dinner 'ot in a small sorsepan, sir," said the cook, thrusting his head out of the galley.

"All right," said the mate.

"It's a funny thing where the skipper gets to these times," said the cook, addressing nobody in particular, but regarding the mate out of the corner of his eye.

"Very rum," said the mate, who was affably inclined just then.

The cook came out of the galley, and, wiping his wet hands on his dirty canvas trousers, drew near and gazed in a troubled fashion ashore.

"E's the best cap'n I ever sailed under," he said slowly. "Ain't it struck you, sir, he's been worried like these 'ere last few trips? I told 'im as 'e was goin' ashore as there was sea-pie for dinner, and 'e ses, 'All right, Joe' 'e ses, just as if I'd said boiled beef and taters, or fine mornin', sir, or anythink like that!"

The mate shook his head, blew out a cloud of smoke and watched it lazily as it disappeared.

"It strikes me as 'ow 'e's arter fresh cargo or something," said a stout old seaman who had joined the cook. "Look 'ow 'e's dressing nowadays! Why, the cap'n of a steamer ain't smarter!"

"Not so smart, Sam," said the remaining seaman, who, encouraged by the peaceful aspect of the mate had also drawn near. "I don't think it's cargo he's after, though—cement pays all right."

"It ain't cargo," said a small but confident voice.

"You clear out!" said old Sam. "A boy o' your age shovin' his spoke in when 'is elders is talkin'! What next, I wonder!"

"Where am I to clear to? I'm my own end of the ship anyway," said the youth vindictively.

The men started to move, but it was too late. The mate's latent sense of discipline was roused and he jumped up in a fury.

"My —!" he said, "if there ain't the whole blasted ship's company aft—every man Jack of 'em! Come down in the cabin, gentlemen, come down and have a drop of Hollands and a cigar apiece. All the riffraff o' the foc'sle sitting aft and prattling about the skipper like a parcel o' washerwomen. And smoking, by —! smoking! Well, when the skipper comes aboard he'll have to get a fresh crew or a fresh mate. I'm sick of it. Why, it might be a barge for all the discipline that's kept! The boy's the only sailor among you."

He strode furiously up and down the deck; the cook disappeared into the galley, and the two seamen began to bustle about forward. The small expert who had raised the storm, by no

means desirous of being caught in the tail of it, put his pipe in his pocket and looked round for a job.

"Come here!" said the mate sternly.

The boy came towards him.

"What was that you were saying about the skipper?" demanded the other.

"I said it wasn't cargo he was after," said Henry.

"Oh, a lot you know about it!" said the mate.

Henry scratched his leg, but said nothing.

"A lot you know about it!" repeated the mate in rather a disappointed tone.

Henry scratched the other leg.

"Don't let me hear you talking about your superior officer's affairs again," said the mate sharply. "Mind that!"

"No, sir," said the boy humbly. "It ain't my business, o' course."

"What isn't your business?" said the mate carelessly. "His," said Henry.

The mate turned away seething, and hearing a chuckle from the galley, went over there and stared at the cook—a wretched being with no control at all over his feelings—for quite five minutes. In that short space of time he discovered that the galley was the dirtiest hole under the sun and the cook the uncleanest person that ever handled food. He imparted his discoveries to the cook, and after reducing him to a state of perspiring imbecility, turned round and rated the men again. Having charged them with

insolence when they replied, and with sulkiness when they kept silent, he went below, having secured a complete victory, and the incensed seamen, after making sure that he had no intention of returning, went towards Henry to find fault with him.

"If you was my boy," said Sam, breathing heavily, "I'd thrash you to within a inch of your life."

"If I was your boy I should drown myself," said Henry very positively.

Henry's father had frequently had occasion to remark that his son favored his mother, and his mother possessed a tongue which was famed throughout Wapping, and obtained honorable mention in distant Limehouse.

"You can't expect discipline aboard a ship where the skipper won't let you 'it the boy," said Dick moodily. "It's bad for 'im too."

"Don't you worry about me, my lads," said Henry with offensive patronage. "I can take care of myself all right. You ain't seen me come aboard so drunk that I've tried to get down the foc'sle without shoving the scuttle back. You never knew me to buy a bundle o' forged pawn-tickets. You never—"

"Listen to 'im," said Sam, growing purple; "I'll be 'ung for 'im yet."

"If you ain't, I will," growled Dick, with whom the matter of the pawn-tickets was a sore subject.

"Boy!" yelled the mate, thrusting his head out at the companion.

"Coming, sir!" said Henry. "Sorry I can't stop any longer," he said politely; "but me an' the mate's going to have a little chat."

"I'll have to get another ship," said Dick, watching the small spindly figure as it backed down the companion-ladder. "I never was on a ship afore where the boy could do as he liked."

Sam shook his head and sighed. "It's the best ship I was ever on, barrin' that," he said sternly.

"What'll 'e be like when he grows up?" demanded Dick, as he lost himself in the immensity of the conjecture. "It ain't right t' the boy to let him go on like that. One good hidin' a week would do 'im good and us too."

Meantime the object of their care had reached the cabin, and, leaning against the fireplace, awaited the mate's pleasure.

"Where's the cap'n?" demanded the latter, plunging at once into the subject.

Henry turned and looked at the small clock.

"Walkin' up and down a street in Gravesend," he said deliberately.

"Oh, you've got the second-sight, I s'pose," said the mate reddening. "And what's he doing that for?"

"To see 'er come out," said the boy.

The mate restrained himself, but with difficulty.

"And what'll he do when she does come out?" he demanded.

"Nothin'," replied the seer with conviction. "What are you lookin' for?" he inquired, with a trace of anxiety in his voice, as the mate rose from the locker, and, raising the lid, began groping

for something in the depths.

"Bit o' rope," was the reply.

"Well, what did yer ask me for?" said Henry with hasty tearfulness. "It's the truth. 'E won't do nothin'; 'e never does—only stares."

"D'you mean to say you ain't been gammoning me?" demanded the mate, seizing him by the collar.

"Come and see for yourself," said Henry.

The mate released him, and stood eyeing him with a puzzled expression as a thousand-and-one little eccentricities on the part of the skipper suddenly occurred to him.

"Go and make yourself tidy," he said sharply; "and mind if I find you've been doing me I'll flay you alive."

The boy needed no second bidding. He dashed up on deck and, heedless of the gibes of the crew, began a toilet such as he had never before been known to make within the memory of man.

"What's up, kiddy?" inquired the cook, whose curiosity became unbearable.

"Wot d'you mean?" demanded Henry with dignity.

"Washin', and all that," said the cook, who was a plain creature.

"Don't you ever wash yourself, you dirty pig?" said Henry elegantly. "I s'pose you think doin' the cookin' keeps you clean, though."

The cook wrung his hands, and, unconscious of plagiarism,

told Sam he'd be 'ung for 'im.

"Me and the mate are goin' for a little stroll, Sam," observed the youth as he struggled into his jersey. "Keep your eyes open, and don't get into mischief. You can give Slushy a 'and with the sorsepans if you've got nothin' better to do. Don't stand about idle."

The appearance of the mate impeded Sam's utterance, and he stood silently by the others, watching the couple as they clambered ashore. It was noticed that Henry carried his head very erect, but whether this was due to the company he was keeping or the spick-and-span appearance he made, they were unable to determine.

"Easy—go easy," panted the mate, mopping his red face with a handkerchief. "What are you in such a hurry for?"

"We shall be too late if we don't hurry," said Henry; "then you'll think I've been tellin' lies."

The mate made no further protest, and at the same rapid pace they walked on until they reached a quiet road on the outskirts of Gravesend.

"There he is!" said Henry triumphantly, as he stopped and pointed up the road at the figure of a man slowly pacing up and down. "She's at a little school up at the other end. A teacher or somethin'. Here they come."

As he spoke a small damsel with a satchel and a roll of music issued from a house at the other end of the road, the advanced guard of a small company which in twos and threes now swarmed

out and went their various ways.

"Nice girls, some of 'em!" said Henry, glancing approvingly at them as they passed. "Oh, here she comes! I can't say I see much in her myself."

The mate looked up and regarded the girl as she approached with considerable interest. He saw a pretty girl with nice gray eyes and a flush, which might be due to the master of the Seamew—who was following at a respectful distance behind her—trying to look unconcerned at this unexpected appearance.

"Halloa, Jack!" he said carelessly.

"Halloa!" said the mate, with a great attempt at surprise. "Who'd ha' thought o' seeing you here!"

The skipper, disdaining to reply to this hypocrisy, stared at Henry until an intelligent and friendly grin faded slowly from that youth's face and left it expressionless. "I've just been having a quiet stroll," he said, slowly turning to the mate.

"Well, so long!" said the latter, anxious to escape.

The other nodded, and turned to resume his quiet stroll at a pace which made the mate hot to look at him. "He'll have to look sharp if he's going to catch her now," he said thoughtfully.

"He won't catch her," said Henry; "he never does—leastways if he does he only passes and looks at her out of the corner of his eye. He writes letters to her of a night, but he never gives 'em to her."

"How do you know?" demanded the other.

"Cos I look at 'im over his shoulder while I'm puttin' things in

the cupboard," said Henry.

The mate stopped and regarded his hopeful young friend fixedly.

"I s'pose you look over my shoulder too, sometimes?" he suggested.

"You never write to anybody except your wife," said Henry carelessly, "or your mother. Leastways I've never known you to."

"You'll come to a bad end, my lad," said the mate thickly; "that's what you'll do."

"What 'e does with 'em I can't think," continued Henry, disregarding his future. "'E don't give 'em to 'er. Ain't got the pluck, I s'pose. Phew! Ain't it 'ot!"

They had got down to the river again, and he hesitated in front of a small beer-shop whose half open door and sanded floor offered a standing invitation to passers-by.

"Could you do a bottle o' ginger-beer?" inquired the mate, attracted in his turn.

"No," said Henry shortly, "I couldn't. I don't mind having what you're going to have."

The mate grinned, and, leading the way in, ordered refreshment for two, exchanging a pleasant wink with the proprietor as that humorist drew the lad's half-pint in a quart pot.

"Ain't you goin' to blow the head off, sir?" inquired the landlord as Henry, after glancing darkly into the depths and nodding to the mate, buried his small face in the pewter. "You'll get your moustache all mussed up if you don't."

The boy withdrew his face, and, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, regarded the offender closely. "So long as it don't turn it red I don't mind," he said patiently, "and I don't think as 'ow your swipes would hurt anythin'."

He went out, followed by the mate, leaving the landlord wiping down the counter with one hand while he mechanically stroked his moustache with the other. By the time a suitable retort occurred to him the couple were out of earshot.

CHAPTER II

Captain Wilson, hot with the combined effects of exercise and wrath, continued the pursuit, but the pause to say sweet nothings to the second in command was fatal to his success. He had often before had occasion to comment ruefully upon the pace of the quarry, and especially at such times when he felt that he had strung his courage almost up to speaking point. To-day he was just in time to see her vanish into the front garden of a small house, upon the door of which she knocked with expressive vigor. She disappeared into the house just as he reached the gate.

"Damn the mate!" he said irritably—"and the boy," he added, anxious to be strictly impartial.

He walked on aimlessly at a slow pace until the houses ended and the road became a lane shaded with tall trees and flanked by hawthorn hedges. Along this he walked a little way, and then, nervously fingering a note in his jacket pocket, retraced his steps.

"I'll see her and speak to her anyway," he muttered. "Here goes."

He walked slowly back to the house, and, with his heart thumping, and a choking sensation in his throat, walked up to the door and gave a little whisper of a knock upon it. It was so faint that, after waiting a considerable time, he concluded that it had not been heard, and raised the knocker again. Then the door opened suddenly, and the knocker, half detained in his

grasp, slipped from his fingers and fell with a crash that made him tremble at his hardihood. An elderly woman with white hair opened the door. She repressed a start and looked at him inquiringly.

"Cap'n Jackson in?" inquired the skipper, his nerves thoroughly upset by the knocker.

"Who?" said the other.

"Cap'n Jackson," repeated the skipper, reddening.

"There is no such man here," said the old woman. "Are you sure it is Captain Jackson you want?" she added.

"I'm—I'm not sure," said Wilson truthfully.

The old woman looked at him eagerly. "Will you come in?" she said slowly, and, without giving him time to refuse, led the way into the small front room. The skipper followed her with the conscience of a fox invited into a poultry yard, and bringing up in the doorway, gazed uncomfortably at the girl who had risen at his entrance.

"This gentleman is inquiring for a Captain Jackson," said the old woman, turning to the girl. "I thought he—he doesn't seem quite sure whether it is Captain Jackson he wants—he may bring news," she concluded incoherently.

"It's not likely, mother," said the girl, regarding the adventurous mariner by no means favorably. "There is no Captain Jackson here, sir."

"Have you been looking for him long?" inquired the mother.

"Years and years," said the other, forgetting himself.

The old woman sighed sympathetically. "Won't you sit down?" she said.

"Thank you," said the skipper, and took the edge of the sofa.

"You're not quite certain of the name?" suggested the girl coldly.

"It—it sounded like Jackson," murmured the intruder in a small, modest voice. "It might have been Blackson, or Dackson, or even Snackson—I won't swear to it."

The old woman put her hand to her brow. "I thought perhaps you might have brought me some news of my poor husband," she said at length. "I lost him some years ago, and when you came here inquiring for a seafaring man I thought you might somehow have brought news."

"You must see, mother, that this gentleman is looking for somebody else," said the girl; "you are hindering him from finding Captain Jackson."

"If he's been looking for him for years," said the old woman, bridling mildly, "a few minutes will not make much difference."

"Certainly not," said Wilson, in a voice which he tried in vain to make stronger. "When you say lost, ma'am, you mean missing?"

"Five years," said the old woman, shaking her head and folding her hands in her lap. "How long do you say you've been looking for Captain Jackson?"

"Seven," said the skipper with a calmness which surprised himself.

"And you haven't given up hope, I suppose?"

"Not while life lasts," said the other, studying the carpet.

"That's the way I feel," said the old woman energetically.

"What a surprise it'll be when you meet him!"

"For both of them," said the girl.

"It's five years last May—the 20th of May," said the old woman, "since I last saw my poor husband. He—"

"It can't be of any interest to this gentleman, mother," interposed the girl.

"I'm very much interested, ma'am," said the skipper defiantly; "besides, when I'm looking for poor Jackson, who knows I mightn't run up against the other."

"Ah! who knows but what you might," said the old woman. "There's one gentleman looking for him now—Mr. Glover, my daughter's husband that is to be."

There was a long pause, then the skipper, by dint of combining his entire stock of Christianity and politeness, found speech. "I hope he finds him," he said slowly.

"All that a man can do he's doing," said the old lady. "He's a commercial traveller by trade, and he gets about a great deal in the way of business."

"Have you tried advertising?" inquired the skipper, striving manfully to keep his interest up to its former pitch.

The other shook her head and looked uneasily at her daughter.

"It wouldn't be any good," she said in a low voice—"it wouldn't be any good."

"Well, I don't want to pry into your business in any way," said Wilson, "but I go into a good many ports in the course of the year, and if you think it would be any use my looking about I'll be pleased and proud to do so, if you'll give me some idea of who to look for."

The old lady fidgeted with all the manner of one half desiring and half fearing to divulge a secret.

"You see we lost him in rather peculiar circumstances," she said, glancing uneasily at her daughter again. "He—"

"I don't want to know anything about that, you know, ma'am," interposed the skipper gently.

"It would be no good advertising for my father," said the girl in her clear voice, "because he can neither read nor write. He is a very passionate, hasty man, and five years ago he struck a man down and thought he had killed him. We have seen nothing and heard nothing of him since."

"He must have been a strong man," commented the skipper.

"He had something in his hand," said the girl, bending low over her work. "But he didn't hurt him really. The man was at work two days after, and he bears him no ill-will at all."

"He might be anywhere," said the skipper, meditating.

"He would be sure to be where there are ships," said the old lady; "I'm certain of it. You see he was captain of a ship himself a good many years, and for one thing he couldn't live away from the water, and for another it's the only way he has of getting a living, poor man—unless he's gone to sea again, which isn't likely."

"Coasting trade, I suppose?" said the skipper, glancing at two or three small craft which were floating in oil round the walls.

The old lady nodded. "Those were his ships," she said, following his glance; "but the painters never could get the clouds to please him. I shouldn't think there was a man in all England harder to please with clouds than he was."

"What sort of looking man is he?" inquired Wilson.

"I'll get you a portrait," said the old lady, and she rose and left the room.

The girl from her seat in the window by the geraniums stitched on steadily. The skipper, anxious to appear at his ease, coughed gently three times, and was on the very verge of a remark—about the weather—when she turned her head and became absorbed in something outside. The skipper fell to regarding the clouds again with even more disfavor than the missing captain himself could have shown.

"That was taken just before he disappeared," said the old lady, entering the room again and handing him a photograph. "You can keep that."

The skipper took it and gazed intently at the likeness of a sturdy full-bearded man of about sixty. Then he placed it carefully in his breast-pocket and rose to his feet.

"And if I should happen to drop across him," he said slowly, "what might his name be?"

"Gething," said the old lady, "Captain Gething. If you should see him, and would tell him that he has nothing to fear, and that

his wife and his daughter Annis are dying to see him, you will have done what I can never, never properly thank you for."

"I'll do my best," said the other warmly. "Good-afternoon."

He shook hands with the old woman, and then, standing with his hands by his side, looked doubtfully at Annis.

"Good-afternoon," she said cheerfully.

Mrs. Gething showed him to the door.

"Any time you are at Gravesend, captain, we shall be pleased to see you and hear how you get on," she said as she let him out.

The captain thanked her, pausing at the gate to glance covertly at the window; but the girl was bending over her work again, and he walked away rapidly.

Until he had reached his ship and was sitting down to his belated dinner he had almost forgotten, in the joyful excitement of having something to do for Miss Gething, the fact that she was engaged to another man. As he remembered this he pushed his plate from him, and, leaning his head on his hand, gave way to a fit of deep melancholy. He took the photograph from his pocket, and, gazing at it intently, tried to discover a likeness between the father and daughter. There was not sufficient to warrant him in bestowing a chaste salute upon it.

"What do you think o' that?" he inquired, handing it over to the mate, who had been watching him curiously.

"Any friend o' yours?" inquired the mate, cautiously.

"No," said the other.

"Well, I don't think much of him," said the mate. "Where

d'you get it?"

"It was given to me," said the skipper. "He's missing, and I've got to find him if I can. You might as well keep your eyes open too."

"Where are you going to look for him?" asked the mate.

"Everywhere," said the other. "I'm told that he's likely to be in a seaport town, and if you'll be on the look-out I'll take it as a favor."

"I'll do that, o' course," said the mate. "What's he been doing?"

"Nothing that I know of," said the skipper; "but he's been missing some five years, and I promised I'd do my best to find him."

"Friends are anxious, I s'pose?" said the mate.

"Yes," said the other.

"I always find," continued the mate, "that women are more anxious in these sort o' cases than men."

"More tender-hearted," said the skipper.

"It ain't a bad sort o' face, now I come to look at it," said the baffled mate, regarding it closely. "Seems to me I've seen somebody very much like it—a girl, I think—but I can't say where."

"Bearded lady at a fair, I should think," said the skipper bluffly.

Conversation was interrupted by the appearance of Henry, who, seeing the photograph in the mate's hand, at once began putting the butter away. A glance told him that the mate was

holding it upside down, and conscience told him that this was for his benefit. He therefore rigidly averted his gaze while clearing the table, and in a small mental ledger, which he kept with scrupulous care for items such as these, made a debit entry in the mate's account.

"Boy," said the skipper suddenly.

"Sir," said Henry.

"You're a fairly sharp youngster, I think," said the skipper.

"Take hold o' that photo there."

Henry's face suffused with a great joy. He looked derisively at the mate and took the photograph from him, listening intently to much the same instructions as had been previously given to the mate. "And you can take it for'ard," concluded the skipper, "and let the men see it."

"The men?" said Henry in astonishment.

"Yes, the men; don't I speak plain?" retorted the skipper.

"Very plain, sir," said the boy; "but they'll only make a muddle of it, sir. Fancy fat Sam and the cook and Dick!"

"Do as you're told!" said the other irascibly.

"O' course, sir," said Henry, "but they'll only worry me with a lot o' questions as to who 'e is an' wot you want 'im for."

"You take it for'ard," said the skipper, "and tell them there's a couple of sovereigns for the first man that finds him."

The youth took the photograph, and after another careful scrutiny, with the object of getting a start in the race for wealth, took it forward. Fat Sam, it seemed, had seen the very man only

two days before at Poplar; the cook knew his features as well as he knew those of his own mother, while Dick had known him for years as an old and respected inhabitant of Plymouth. Henry went back to the skipper, and, having furnished him with this information, meekly suggested that they should drag Gravesend first.

It was midnight when they got the anchor up and dropped silently down the river. Gravesend was silent, and the dotted lines of street lamps shone over a sleeping town as the Seamew crept softly by.

A big steamer in front whistled warningly for the pilot's boat, and slowing up as the small craft shot out from the shore to meet it, caused a timely diversion to the skipper's melancholy by lying across his bows. By the time he had fully recovered from the outrage and had drunk a cup of coffee, which had been prepared in the galley, Gravesend had disappeared round the bend, and his voluntary search had commenced.

CHAPTER III

They made Brittlesea in four days—days in which the skipper, a prey to gentle melancholy, left things mostly to the mate. Whereupon melancholia became contagious, and Sam's concertina having been impounded by the energetic mate, disaffection reared its ugly head in the foc'sle and called him improper names when he was out of earshot.

They entered the small river on which stands the ancient town of Brittlesea at nightfall. Business for the day was over. A few fishermen, pipe in mouth, lounged upon the quay, while sounds of revelry, which in some mysterious way reminded the crew of their mission to find Captain Gething, proceeded from the open doors of a small tavern opposite. The most sanguine of them hardly expected to find him the first time; but, as Sam said, the sooner they started the better. For all they knew he might be sitting in that very public-house waiting to be found.

They went ashore a little later and looked for him there, but without success. All they did find was a rather hot-tempered old man, who, irritated by the searching scrutiny of the cook, asked him shortly whether he had lost anything, because, if so, and he, the cook, thought he was sitting on it, perhaps he'd be good enough to say so. The cook having replied in fitting terms, they moved off down the quay to the next tavern. Here they fared no better, Dick declaring that the beer was if anything worse

than the other, and that nobody who had lived in the place any time would spend his money there. They therefore moved on once more, and closing time came before their labors were half completed.

"It's quite a little romans," said Sam thickly, as he was pushed outside the last house of call, and a bolt shot desolately behind him. "Where shall we go now?"

"Get back to the ship," said Dick; "come along."

"Not 'fore I foun' 'im," said Sam solemnly, as he drew back from Dick's detaining hand.

"You won't find him to-night, Sam," said the cook humorsomely.

"Why not?" said Sam, regarding him with glassy eyes. "We came out fin' 'im!"

"Cos it's dark, for one thing," said the cook.

Sam laughed scornfully.

"Come on!" said Dick, catching him by the arm again.

"I come out fin' cap'n, cap'n—fin' 'im," said Sam. "I'm not goin' back 'thout 'im."

He rolled off down the road, and the two men, the simple traditions of whose lives forbade them to leave a shipmate when in that condition, followed him, growling. For half an hour they walked with him through the silent streets of the little town. Dick with difficulty repressing his impatience as the stout seaman bent down at intervals and thoroughly searched doorsteps and other likely places for the missing man. Finally, he stopped in front of

a small house, walked on a little way, came back, and then, as though he had suddenly made up his mind, walked towards it.

"Hold him, cook!" shouted Dick, throwing his arms around him.

The cook flung his arms round Sam's neck, and the two men, panting fiercely, dragged him away.

"Now you come aboard, you old fool!" said Dick, losing his temper; "we've had enough o' your games."

"Leg go!" said Sam, struggling.

"You leave that knocker alone, then," said Dick warningly.

"E's in there!" said Sam, nodding wisely at the house.

"You come back, you old fool!" repeated Dick. "You never 'ort to 'ave nothin' stronger than milk."

"Ole my coat, cookie!" said Sam, his manner changing suddenly to an alarming sternness.

"Don't be a fool, Sam!" said the cook entreatingly.

"Ole my coat!" repeated Sam, eyeing him haughtily.

"You know you haven't got a coat on," said the cook appealingly. "Can't you see it's a jersey? You ain't so far gone as all that!"

"Well, 'ole me while I take it off," said Sam, sensibly.

Against his better sense the cook steadied the stout seaman while he proceeded to peel, Dick waited until the garment—a very tight one—was over his head, and then, pushing the cook aside, took his victim and made him slowly gyrate on the pavement.

"Turn round three times and catch who you can, Sam," he said cruelly. "Well, sit down, then."

He lowered him to the pavement, and, accompanied by the cook, drew off and left him to his fate. Their last glance showed them a stout, able-bodied seaman, with his head and arms confined in a jersey, going through contortions of an extraordinary nature to free himself, and indulging in language which, even when filtered by the garment in question, was of a singularly comprehensive and powerful description. He freed himself at last, and after flinging the garment away in his anger, picked it up again, and, carrying it under his arm, zigzagged his way back to the ship.

His memory when he awoke next morning was not quite clear, but a hazy recollection of having been insulted led him to treat Dick and the cook with marked coldness, which did not wear off until they were all busy on deck. Working at cement is a dry job, and, after hardening his heart for some time, the stout seaman allowed the cook to call him to the galley and present him with a mug of cold coffee left from the cabin table.

The cook washed the mug up, and, preferring the dusty deck to the heat of the fire, sat down to wash a bowl of potatoes. It was a task which lent itself to meditation, and his thoughts, as he looked wistfully at the shore, reverted to Captain Gething and the best means of finding him. It was clear that the photograph was an important factor in the search, and, possessed with a new idea, he left the potatoes and went down to the cabin in search of

it. He found it on a shelf in the skipper's state-room, and, passing up on deck again, stepped ashore.

From the first three people he spoke to he obtained no information whatever. They all inspected the photograph curiously and indulged in comments, mostly unfavorable, but all agreed that there was nobody like it in Brittlesea. He had almost given it up as a bad job, and was about to return, when he saw an aged fisherman reclining against a post.

"Fine day, mate," said the cook.

The old man courteously removed a short clay pipe from his puckered mouth in order to nod, and replacing it, resumed his glance seaward.

"Ever seen anybody like that?" inquired the cook, producing the portrait.

The old man patiently removed the pipe again, and taking the portrait, scanned it narrowly.

"It's wonderful how they get these things up nowadays," he said in a quavering voice; "there was nothing like that when you an' me was boys."

"There 'as been improvements," admitted the cook indignantly.

"All oils they was," continued the old man meditatively, "or crains."

"Ave you ever seen anybody like that?" demanded the cook impatiently.

"Why, o' course I have. I'm goin' to tell you in a minute," said

the old man querulously. "Let me see—what's his name again?"

"I don't know 'is name," said the cook untruthfully.

"I should know it if I was to hear it," said the old man slowly.

"Ah, I've got it! I've got it!"

He tapped his head triumphantly, and, with a bleared, shining old eye, winked at the cook.

"My memory's as good as ever it was," he said complacently. "Sometimes I forget things, but they come back. My mother used to be the same, and she lived to ninety-three."

"Lor!" interrupted the anxious cook. "What's the name?"

The old man stopped. "Drat it!" he said, with a worried look, "I've lost it again; but it'll come back."

The cook waited ten minutes for the prodigal. "It ain't Gething, I s'pose?" he said at length.

"No," said the old man; "don't you be in a hurry; it'll come back."

"When?" asked the cook rebelliously.

"It might be in five minutes' time, and it might be in a month," said the old man firmly, "but it'll come back."

He took the portrait from the hands of the now sulky cook and strove to jog his memory with it.

"John Dunn's his name," he cried suddenly. "John Dunn."

"Where does 'e live?" inquired the cook eagerly.

"Holebourne," said the old man—"a little place seven miles off the road."

"Are you sure it's the same," asked the cook in a trembling

voice.

"Sartain," said the other firmly. "He come here first about six years ago, an' then he quarrelled with his landlord and went off to Holebourne."

The cook, with a flushed face, glanced along the quay to the schooner. Work was still proceeding amid a cloud of white dust, and so far his absence appeared to have passed unnoticed.

"If they want any dinner," he muttered, alluding to the powdered figures at work on the schooner, "they must get it for themselves, that's all. Will you come and 'ave a drop, old man?"

The old man, nothing loath, assented, and having tasted of the cook's bounty, crawled beside him through the little town to put him on the road to Holebourne, and after seeing him safe, returned to his beloved post.

The cook went along whistling, thinking pleasantly of the discomfiture of the other members of the crew when they should discover his luck. For three miles he kept on sturdily, until a small signboard, projecting from between a couple of tall elms, attracted his attention to a little inn just off the road, at the porch of which a stout landlord sat on a wooden stool waiting for custom.

The cook hesitated a moment, and then marching slowly up, took a stool which stood opposite and ordered a pint.

The landlord rose and in a heavy, leisurely fashion, entered the house to execute the order, and returned carefully bearing a foaming mug.

"Take the top off," said the cook courteously.

The stout man, with a nod towards him, complied.

"Ave a pint with me," said the cook, after a hasty glance into the interior, as the landlord handed him the mug. "You keep that one," he added.

The stout man drew another pint, and subsiding on to his stool with a little sigh, disposed himself for conversation.

"Taking a country walk?" he inquired.

The cook nodded. "Not all pleasure," he said importantly; "I'm on business."

"Ah, it's you fellows what make all the money," said the landlord. "I've only drawn these two pints this morning. Going far?"

"Holebourne," said the other.

"Know anybody there?" asked the landlord.

"Well, not exactly," said the cook; "I can't say as I know 'im. I'm after a party o' the name o' Dunn."

"You won't get much out of him," said the landlady, who had just joined them. "He's a close un, he is."

The cook closed his eyes and smiled knowingly.

"There's a mystery about that man," said the landlady. "Nobody knows who he is or what he is, and he won't tell 'em. When a man's like that you generally know there's something wrong—leastways I do."

"Insulting, he is," said the landlord.

"Ah," said the cook, "'e won't insult me!"

"You know something about him?" said the landlady.

"A little," said the cook.

The landlord reached over to his wife, who bent her ear readily and dutifully towards him, and the cook distinctly caught the whispered word "'tec."

The landlady, after a curious glance at the cook, withdrew to serve a couple of wagoners who had drawn up at the door. Conversation became general, and it was evident that the wagoners shared the sentiments of the landlord and his wife with regard to Mr. Dunn. They regarded the cook with awe, and after proffering him a pint with respectful timidity, offered to give him a lift to Holebourne.

"I'd sooner go on my own," said the cook, with a glance at the wagons; "I want to get in the place quiet like and 'ave a look round before I do anythin'."

He sat there for some time resting, and evading as best he could the skilful questions of the landlady. The wagons moved off first, jolting and creaking their way to Holebourne, and the cook, after making a modest luncheon of bread and cheese and smoking a pipe, got on the road again.

"Look how he walks!" said the landlord, as the couple watched him up the road.

"Ah!" said his wife.

"Like a bloodhound," said the landlord impressively; "just watch him. I knew what he was directly I clapped eyes on him."

The cook continued his journey, unconscious of the

admiration excited by his movements. He began to think that he had been a trifle foolish in talking so freely. Still, he had not said much, and if people liked to make mistakes, why, that was their business.

In this frame of mind he entered Holebourne, a small village consisting of a little street, an inn, and a church. At the end of the street, in front of a tidy little cottage with a well-kept front garden, a small knot of people were talking.

"Somethin' on," said the cook to himself as he returned with interest the stares of the villagers. "Which is Mr. Dunn's house, boy?"

"There it is, sir," said the boy, pointing to the house where the people were standing. "Are you the detective?"

"No," said the cook sharply.

He walked across to the house and opened the little garden gate, quite a little hum of excitement following him as he walked up to the door and knocked upon it with his knuckles.

"Come in," growled a deep voice.

The cook entered and carefully closed the door behind him. He found himself in a small sitting-room, the only occupant of which was an old man of forbidding aspect sitting in an easy chair with a newspaper open in his hand.

"What do you want?" he demanded, looking up.

"I want to see Mr. Dunn," said the cook nervously.

"I'm Mr. Dunn," said the other, waiting.

The cook's heart sank, for, with the exception of a beard, Mr.

Dunn no more resembled the portrait than he did.

"I'm Mr. Dunn," repeated the old man, regarding him ferociously from beneath his shaggy eyebrows.

The cook smiled, but faintly. He tried to think, but the old man's gaze sent all the ideas out of his head.

"Oh, are you?" he said at length.

"I heard you were looking for me," said the old man, gradually raising his voice to a roar. "All the village knows it, I think, and now you've found me what the devil is it you want?"

"I—I think there's a mistake," stammered the cook.

"Oh," said the old man. "Ha! is there? Pretty detective you are. I'll bring an action against you. I'll have you imprisoned and dismissed the force."

"It's all a mistake," said the cook; "I'm not a detective."

"Come this way," said the old man, rising.

The cook followed him into a smaller room at the back.

"You're not a detective?" said the old man, as he motioned him to a seat. "I suppose you know that impersonating a detective is a serious offence? Just stay here while I fetch a policeman, will you?"

The cook said he wouldn't.

"Ah," said the old man with a savage grin, "I think you will." Then he went to the door and called loudly for "Roger."

Before the dazed cook of the Seamew could collect his scattered senses a pattering sounded on the stairs, and a bulldog came unobtrusively into the room. It was a perfectly bred animal,

with at least a dozen points about it calling for notice and admiration, but all that the cook noticed was the excellent preservation of its teeth.

"Watch him, Roger," said the old man, taking a hat from a sideboard. "Don't let him move."

The animal growled intelligently, and sitting down a yard or two in front of the cook watched him with much interest.

"I'm sure I'm very sorry," muttered the cook. "Don't go away and leave me with this dog, sir."

"He won't touch you unless you move," said the old man.

The cook's head swam; he felt vaguely round for a subtle compliment. "I'd rather you stayed," he quavered, "I would indeed. I don't know any man I've took a greater fancy to at first sight."

"I don't want any of your confounded insolence," said the other sternly. "Watch him, Roger."

Roger growled with all the cheerfulness of a dog who had found a job which suited him, and his owner, after again warning the cook of what would happen if he moved out of the chair, left the room, shutting the door as he went. The cook heard the front door close behind him, and then all was silence, except for the strong breathing of Roger.

For some time the man and dog sat eyeing each other in silence, then the former, moistening his dry lips with his tongue, gave a conciliatory chirrup. Roger responded with a deep growl, and, rising to his feet, yawned expressively.

"Poor Roger!" said the cook in trembling accents, "poor old Rogy-wohy! Good old dog!"

The good old dog came a little nearer and closely inspected the cook's legs, which were knocking together with fright.

"Cats!" said the cook, pointing to the door as an idea occurred to him. "S-cat! Seize 'em, dog! seize 'em!"

"G-w-r-r," said Roger menacingly. The quivering limbs had a strange fascination for him, and coming closer he sniffed at them loudly.

In a perfect panic the cook, after glancing helplessly at the poker, put his hand gently behind him and drew his sheath-knife. Then, with a courage born of fear, he struck the dog suddenly in the body, and before it could recover from the suddenness of the attack, withdrew his knife and plunged it in again. The dog gave a choking growl and, game to the last, made a grab at the cook's leg, and missing it, rolled over on the floor, giving a faint kick or two as the breath left its body.

It had all happened so quickly that the cook, mechanically wiping his blade on the tablecloth, hardly realized the foulness of the crime of which he had been guilty, but felt inclined to congratulate himself upon his desperate bravery. Then as he realized that, in addition to the offence for which the choleric Mr. Dunn was even now seeking the aid of the law, there was a dead bulldog and a spoiled carpet to answer for, he resolved upon an immediate departure. He made his way to the back door, and sheathing his knife, crept stealthily down the garden, and

clambered over the fence at the bottom. Then, with his back to the scene of the murder, he put up his hands and ran.

He crossed two fields and got on to a road, his breath coming painfully as he toiled along with an occasional glance behind him. It was uphill, but he kept on until he had gained the top, and then he threw himself down panting by the side of the road with his face turned in the direction of Holebourne. Five minutes later he started up again and resumed his flight, as several figures burst into the road from the village in hot pursuit.

For a little while he kept to the road, then, as the idea occurred to him that some of his pursuers might use a vehicle, he broke through the hedge and took to the fields. His legs gave way beneath him, and he stumbled rather than ran, but he kept on alternately walking and running until all signs of the pursuit had ceased.

CHAPTER IV

Safe for the time being, but with the memory of his offences pursuing him, the cook first washed his face and hands in a trough, and next removed the stains of the crime from his knife. He then pushed on again rapidly until he struck another road, and begging a lift from a passing wagon, lay full length on top of a load of straw and nervously scanned the landscape as they travelled. Half a dozen miles farther on the wagon halted before a comfortable farmhouse, and the cook, after bestowing on the carter two of the few coins left him, went his way, losing himself, with a view to baffling pursuit, among a maze of small lanes, turning right or left as the fancy took him, until nightfall found him tired and famished on the outskirts of a small village.

Conscious of the power of the telegraph, which he had no doubt was interesting itself in his behalf over the surrounding districts, he skulked behind a hedge until the lights went from the ground floor to the first floor of the cottages and then went out altogether. He then, with the utmost caution, looked round in search of shelter. He came at last to two cottages standing by themselves about half a mile beyond the village, one of which had a wooden shed in the garden which seemed to offer the very shelter he required. Satisfied that the inmates of the cottage were all abed he entered the garden, and, treading on tiptoe, walked towards the shed, fumbled at the hasp and opened the door. It

was pitch dark within and silent, till something rustled uneasily. There was a note of alarm and indignation. The cook tripped on a stone, and only saved himself from falling by clutching at a perch which a dozen fowls instantly vacated with loud and frenzied appeals for assistance. Immediately the shed was full of flapping wings and agitated hens darting wildly between his legs as he made for the door again, only to run into the arms of a man who came from the cottage.

"I've got him, Poll!" shouted the latter, as he dealt the cook a blow with a stick. "I've got him!"

He fetched him another blow and was preparing, for a third, when the cook, maddened with the pain, struck at him wildly and sent him sprawling. He was up again in an instant and, aided by his wife, who had stopped to make a slight concession to appearances in the shape of a flannel petticoat, threw the cook down and knelt on him. A man came out from the adjoining cottage, and having, with great presence of mind, first found a vacant spot on the cook and knelt on it, asked what was the matter.

"After my hens," said the first man breathlessly. "I just heard 'em in time."

"I wasn't after your hens. I didn't know they was there!" gasped the cook.

"Lock him up!" said the second man warmly.

"I'm goin' to," said the other, "Keep still, you thief!"

"Get up!" said the cook faintly; "you're killin' me.

"Take him in the house and tie him up for the night, and we'll take him to Winton police station in the morning," said the neighbor. "He's a desperate character."

As they declined to trust the cook to walk, he was carried into the kitchen, where the woman, leaving him for a moment, struck a match and hastily lit a candle. She then opened a drawer and, to the cook's horror, began pulling out about twenty fathoms of clothes-line.

"The best way and the safest is to tie him in a chair," said the neighbor. "I remember my gran'-father used to tell a tale of how they served a highwayman that way once."

"That would be best, I think," said the woman pondering. "He'd be more comfortable in a chair, though I'm sure he don't deserve it."

They raised the exhausted cook, and placing him in a stout oak chair, lashed him to it until he could scarcely breathe.

"After my gran'father had tied the highwayman in the chair, he gave him a crack on the head with a stick," said the neighbor, regarding the cook thoughtfully.

"They was very brutal in those times," said the cook, before anybody else could speak.

"Just to keep him quiet like," said the neighbor, somewhat chilled by the silence of the other two.

"I think he'll do as he is," said the owner of the fowls, carefully feeling the prisoner's bonds. "If you'll come in in the morning, Pettit, we'll borrow a cart an' take him over to Winton. I expect

there's a lot of things against him."

"I expect there is," said Pettit, as the cook shuddered. "Well, good-night."

He returned to his house, and the couple, after carefully inspecting the cook again, and warning him of the consequences if he moved, blew out the candle and returned to their interrupted slumbers.

For a long time the unfortunate cook sat in a state of dreary apathy, wondering vaguely at the ease with which he had passed from crime to crime, and trying to estimate how much he should get for each. A cricket sang from the hearthstone, and a mouse squeaked upon the floor. Worn out with fatigue and trouble, he at length fell asleep.

He awoke suddenly and tried to leap out of his bunk on to the floor and hop on one leg as a specific for the cramp. Then, as he realized his position, he strove madly to rise and straighten the afflicted limb. He was so far successful that he managed to stand, and in the fantastic appearance of a human snail, to shuffle slowly round the kitchen. At first he thought only of the cramp, but after that had yielded to treatment a wild idea of escape occurred to him. Still bowed with the chair, he made his way to the door, and, after two or three attempts, got the latch in his mouth and opened it. Within five minutes he had shuffled his way through the garden gate, which was fortunately open, and reached the road.

The exertion was so laborious that he sat down again upon his

portable seat and reckoned up his chances. Fear lent him wings, though of a very elementary type, and as soon as he judged he was out of earshot he backed up against a tree and vigorously banged the chair against it.

He shed one cracked hind leg in this way, and the next time he sat down had to perform feats of balancing not unworthy of Blondin himself.

Until day broke did this persecuted man toil painfully along with the chair, and the sun rose and found him sitting carefully in the middle of the road, faintly anathematizing Captain Gething and everything connected with him. He was startled by the sound of footsteps rapidly approaching him, and, being unable to turn his head, he rose painfully to his feet and faced about bodily.

The new-comer stopped abruptly, and, gazing in astonishment at the extraordinary combination of man and chair before him, retired a few paces in disorder. At a little distance he had mistaken the cook for a lover of nature, communing with it at his ease; now he was undecided whether it was a monstrosity or an apparition.

"Mornin', mate," said the cook in a weary voice.

"Morning," said the man, backing still more.

"I 'spose," said the cook, trying to smile cheerfully, "you're surprised to see me like this?"

"I've never seen anything like it afore," said the man guardedly.

"I don't s'pose you 'ave," said the cook. "I'm the only man in

England that can do it."

The man said he could quite believe it.

"I'm doin' it for a bet," said the cook.

"Oh-h," said the man, his countenance clearing, "a bet. I thought you were mad. How much is it?"

"Fifty pounds," said the cook. "I've come all the way from London like this."

"Well, I'm blest!" said the man. "What won't they think of next! Got much farther to go?"

"Oakville," said the cook, mentioning a place he had heard of in his wanderings. "At least I was, but I find it's too much for me. Would you mind doing me the favor of cutting this line?"

"No, no," said the other reproachfully, "don't give up now. Why, it's only another seventeen miles."

"I must give it up," said the cook, with a sad smile.

"Don't be beat," said the man warmly. "Keep your 'art up, and you'll be as pleased as Punch presently to think how near you was losing."

"Cut it off," said the cook, trembling with impatience; "I've earned forty pounds of it by coming so far. If you cut it off I'll send you ten of it."

The man hesitated while an inborn love of sport struggled with his greed.

"I've got a wife and family," he said at last in extenuation, and taking out a clasp-knife, steadied the cook with one hand while he severed his bonds with the other.

"God bless you, mate!" said the cook, trying to straighten his bowed back as the chair fell to the ground.

"My name's Jack Thompson," said his benefactor. "Jack Thompson, Winchgate 'll find me."

"I'll make it twelve pounds," said the grateful cook, "and you can have the chair."

He shook him by the hand, and, freed from his burden, stepped out on his return journey, while his innocent accomplice, shouldering the chair, went back to learn from the rightful owner a few hard truths about his mental capacity.

Not knowing how much start he would have, the cook, despite his hunger and fatigue, pushed on with all the speed of which he was capable. After an hour's journey he ventured to ask the direction of an embryo ploughman, and wheedled out of him a small, a very small, portion of his breakfast. From the top of the next hill he caught a glimpse of the sea, and taking care to keep this friend of his youth in sight, felt his way along by it to Brittlesea. At midday he begged some broken victuals from a gamekeeper's cottage, and with renewed vigor resumed his journey, and at ten o'clock that night staggered on to Brittlesea quay and made his way cautiously to the ship. There was nobody on deck, but a light burned in the foc'sle, and after a careful peep below he descended. Henry, who was playing, a losing game of draughts with Sam, looked up with a start, and overturned the board.

"Lord love us, cookie!" said Sam, "where 'ave you been?"

The cook straightened up, smiling faintly, and gave a wave of his hand which took in all the points of the compass. "Everywhere," he said wearily.

"You've been on the spree," said Sam, regarding him severely.

"Spree!" said the cook with expression. "Spree!"

His feelings choked him, and after a feeble attempt to translate them into words, he abandoned the attempt, and turning a deaf ear to Sam's appeal for information, rolled into his bunk and fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER V

They got under way at four o'clock next morning, and woke the cook up to assist at 3.30. At 3.45 they woke him again, and at 3.50 dragged him from his bunk and tried to arouse him to a sense of his duties. The cook, with his eyes still closed, crawled back again the moment they left him, and though they had him out twice after that, he went back in the same somnambulistic state and resumed his slumbers.

Brittlesea was thirty miles astern when he at length awoke and went on deck, and the schooner was scudding along under a stiff breeze. It was a breeze such as the mate loved, and his face was serene and peaceful until his gaze fell upon the shrinking figure of the cook as it glided softly into the galley.

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