

**WILLIAM
WYMARK
JACOBS**

SHORT CRUISES

William Wymark Jacobs

Short Cruises

«Public Domain»

Jacobs W.

Short Cruises / W. Jacobs — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

THE CHANGELING	5
MIXED RELATIONS	12
HIS LORDSHIP	20
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	24

W. W. Jacobs

Short Cruises

THE CHANGELING

Mr. George Henshaw let himself in at the front door, and stood for some time wiping his boots on the mat. The little house was ominously still, and a faint feeling, only partially due to the lapse of time since breakfast, manifested itself behind his waistcoat. He coughed—a matter-of-fact cough—and, with an attempt to hum a tune, hung his hat on the peg and entered the kitchen.

Mrs. Henshaw had just finished dinner. The neatly cleaned bone of a chop was on a plate by her side; a small dish which had contained a rice-pudding was empty; and the only food left on the table was a small rind of cheese and a piece of stale bread. Mr. Henshaw's face fell, but he drew his chair up to the table and waited.

His wife regarded him with a fixed and offensive stare. Her face was red and her eyes were blazing. It was hard to ignore her gaze; harder still to meet it. Mr. Henshaw, steering a middle course, allowed his eyes to wander round the room and to dwell, for the fraction of a second, on her angry face.

"You've had dinner early?" he said at last, in a trembling voice.

"Have I?" was the reply.

Mr. Henshaw sought for a comforting explanation. "Clock's fast," he said, rising and adjusting it.

His wife rose almost at the same moment, and with slow deliberate movements began to clear the table.

"What—what about dinner?" said Mr. Henshaw, still trying to control his fears.

"Dinner!" repeated Mrs. Henshaw, in a terrible voice. "You go and tell that creature you were on the 'bus with to get your dinner."

Mr. Henshaw made a gesture of despair. "I tell you," he said emphatically, "it wasn't me. I told you so last night. You get an idea in your head and—"

"That'll do," said his wife, sharply. "I saw you, George Henshaw, as plain as I see you now. You were tickling her ear with a bit o' straw, and that good-for-nothing friend of yours, Ted Stokes, was sitting behind with another beauty. Nice way o' going on, and me at 'ome all alone by myself, slaving and slaving to keep things respectable!"

"It wasn't me," reiterated the unfortunate.

"When I called out to you," pursued the unheeding Mrs. Henshaw, "you started and pulled your hat over your eyes and turned away. I should have caught you if it hadn't been for all them carts in the way and falling down. I can't understand now how it was I wasn't killed; I was a mask of mud from head to foot."

Despite his utmost efforts to prevent it, a faint smile flitted across the pallid features of Mr. Henshaw.

"Yes, you may laugh," stormed his wife, "and I've no doubt them two beauties laughed too. I'll take care you don't have much more to laugh at, my man."

She flung out of the room and began to wash up the crockery. Mr. Henshaw, after standing irresolute for some time with his hands in his pockets, put on his hat again and left the house.

He dined badly at a small eating-house, and returned home at six o'clock that evening to find his wife out and the cupboard empty. He went back to the same restaurant for tea, and after a gloomy meal went round to discuss the situation with Ted Stokes. That gentleman's suggestion of a double alibi he thrust aside with disdain and a stern appeal to talk sense.

"Mind, if my wife speaks to you about it," he said, warningly, "it wasn't me, but somebody like me. You might say he 'ad been mistook for me before."

Mr. Stokes grinned and, meeting a freezing glance from his friend, at once became serious again.

"Why not say it was you?" he said stoutly. "There's no harm in going for a 'bus-ride with a friend and a couple o' ladies."

"O' course there ain't," said the other, hotly, "else I shouldn't ha' done it. But you know what my wife is."

Mr. Stokes, who was by no means a favorite of the lady in question, nodded. "You *were* a bit larky, too," he said thoughtfully. "You 'ad quite a little slapping game after you pretended to steal her brooch."

"I s'pose when a gentleman's with a lady he 'as got to make 'imself pleasant?" said Mr. Henshaw, with dignity. "Now, if my missis speaks to you about it, you say that it wasn't me, but a friend of yours up from the country who is as like me as two peas. See?"

"Name o' Dodd," said Mr. Stokes, with a knowing nod. "Tommy Dodd."

"I'm not playing the giddy goat," said the other, bitterly, "and I'd thank you not to."

"All right," said Mr. Stokes, somewhat taken aback. "Any name you like; I don't mind."

Mr. Henshaw pondered. "Any sensible name'll do," he said, stiffly.

"Bell?" suggested Mr. Stokes. "Alfred Bell? I did know a man o' that name once. He tried to borrow a bob off of me."

"That'll do," said his friend, after some consideration; "but mind you stick to the same name. And you'd better make up something about him— where he lives, and all that sort of thing—so that you can stand being questioned without looking more like a silly fool than you can help."

"I'll do what I can for you," said Mr. Stokes, "but I don't s'pose your missis'll come to me at all. She saw you plain enough."

They walked on in silence and, still deep in thought over the matter, turned into a neighboring tavern for refreshment. Mr. Henshaw drank his with the air of a man performing a duty to his constitution; but Mr. Stokes, smacking his lips, waxed eloquent over the brew.

"I hardly know what I'm drinking," said his friend, forlornly. "I suppose it's four-half, because that's what I asked for."

Mr. Stokes gazed at him in deep sympathy. "It can't be so bad as that," he said, with concern.

"You wait till you're married," said Mr. Henshaw, brusquely. "You'd no business to ask me to go with you, and I was a good-natured fool to do it."

"You stick to your tale and it'll be all right," said the other. "Tell her that you spoke to me about it, and that his name is Alfred Bell—B E double L—and that he lives in—in Ireland. Here! I say!"

"Well," said Mr. Henshaw, shaking off the hand which the other had laid on his arm.

"You—you be Alfred Bell," said Mr. Stokes, breathlessly.

Mr. Henshaw started and eyed him nervously. His friend's eyes were bright and, he fancied, a bit wild.

"Be Alfred Bell," repeated Mr. Stokes. "Don't you see? Pretend to be Alfred Bell and go with me to your missis. I'll lend you a suit o' clothes and a fresh neck-tie, and there you are."

"*What?*" roared the astounded Mr. Henshaw.

"It's as easy as easy," declared the other. "Tomorrow evening, in a new rig-out, I walks you up to your house and asks for you to show you to yourself. Of course, I'm sorry you ain't in, and perhaps we walks in to wait for you."

"Show me to myself?" gasped Mr. Henshaw.

Mr. Stokes winked. "On account o' the surprising likeness," he said, smiling. "It is surprising, ain't it? Fancy the two of us sitting there and talking to her and waiting for you to come in and wondering what's making you so late!"

Mr. Henshaw regarded him steadfastly for some seconds, and then, taking a firm hold of his mug, slowly drained the contents.

"And what about my voice?" he demanded, with something approaching a sneer.

"That's right," said Mr. Stokes, hotly; "it wouldn't be you if you didn't try to make difficulties."

"But what about it?" said Mr. Henshaw, obstinately.

"You can alter it, can't you?" said the other.

They were alone in the bar, and Mr. Henshaw, after some persuasion, was induced to try a few experiments. He ranged from bass, which hurt his throat, to a falsetto which put Mr. Stokes's teeth on edge, but in vain. The rehearsal was stopped at last by the landlord, who, having twice come into the bar under the impression that fresh customers had entered, spoke his mind at some length. "Seem to think you're in a blessed monkey-house," he concluded, severely.

"We thought we was," said Mr. Stokes, with a long appraising sniff, as he opened the door. "It's a mistake anybody might make."

He pushed Mr. Henshaw into the street as the landlord placed a hand on the flap of the bar, and followed him out.

"You'll have to 'ave a bad cold and talk in 'usky whispers," he said slowly, as they walked along. "You caught a cold travelling in the train from Ireland day before yesterday, and you made it worse going for a ride on the outside of a 'bus with me and a couple o' ladies. See? Try 'usky whispers now."

Mr. Henshaw tried, and his friend, observing that he was taking but a languid interest in the scheme, was loud in his praises. "I should never 'ave known you," he declared. "Why, it's wonderful! Why didn't you tell me you could act like that?"

Mr. Henshaw remarked modestly that he had not been aware of it himself, and, taking a more hopeful view of the situation, whispered himself into such a state of hoarseness that another visit for refreshment became absolutely necessary.

"Keep your 'art up and practise," said Mr. Stokes, as he shook hands with him some time later. "And if you can manage it, get off at four o'clock to-morrow and we'll go round to see her while she thinks you're still at work."

Mr. Henshaw complimented him upon his artfulness, and, with some confidence in a man of such resource, walked home in a more cheerful frame of mind. His heart sank as he reached the house, but to his relief the lights were out and his wife was in bed.

He was up early next morning, but his wife showed no signs of rising. The cupboard was still empty, and for some time he moved about hungry and undecided. Finally he mounted the stairs again, and with a view to arranging matters for the evening remonstrated with her upon her behavior and loudly announced his intention of not coming home until she was in a better frame of mind. From a disciplinary point of view the effect of the remonstrance was somewhat lost by being shouted through the closed door, and he also broke off too abruptly when Mrs. Henshaw opened it suddenly and confronted him. Fragments of the peroration reached her through the front door.

Despite the fact that he left two hours earlier, the day passed but slowly, and he was in a very despondent state of mind by the time he reached Mr. Stokes's lodging. The latter, however, had cheerfulness enough for both, and, after helping his visitor to change into fresh clothes and part his hair in the middle instead of at the side, surveyed him with grinning satisfaction. Under his directions Mr. Henshaw also darkened his eyebrows and beard with a little burnt cork until Mr. Stokes declared that his own mother wouldn't know him.

"Now, be careful," said Mr. Stokes, as they set off. "Be bright and cheerful; be a sort o' ladies' man to her, same as she saw you with the one on the 'bus. Be as unlike yourself as you can, and don't forget yourself and call her by 'er pet name."

"Pet name!" said Mr. Henshaw, indignantly. "Pet name! You'll alter your ideas of married life when you're caught, my lad, I can tell you!"

He walked on in scornful silence, lagging farther and farther behind as they neared his house. When Mr. Stokes knocked at the door he stood modestly aside with his back against the wall of the next house.

"Is George in?" inquired Mr. Stokes, carelessly, as Mrs. Henshaw opened the door.

"No," was the reply.

Mr. Stokes affected to ponder; Mr. Henshaw instinctively edged away.

"He ain't in," said Mrs. Henshaw, preparing to close the door.

"I wanted to see 'im partikler," said Mr. Stokes, slowly. "I brought a friend o' mine, name o' Alfred Bell, up here on purpose to see 'im."

Mrs. Henshaw, following the direction of his eyes, put her head round the door.

"George!" she exclaimed, sharply.

Mr. Stokes smiled. "That ain't George," he said, gleefully; "That's my friend, Mr. Alfred Bell. Ain't it a extraordinary likeness? Ain't it wonderful? That's why I brought 'im up; I wanted George to see 'im."

Mrs. Henshaw looked from one to the other in wrathful bewilderment.

"His living image, ain't he?" said Mr. Stokes. "This is my pal George's missis," he added, turning to Mr. Bell.

"Good afternoon to you," said that gentleman, huskily.

"He got a bad cold coming from Ireland," explained Mr. Stokes, "and, foolish-like, he went outside a 'bus with me the other night and made it worse."

"Oh-h!" said Mrs. Henshaw, slowly. "Indeed! Really!"

"He's quite curious to see George," said Mr. Stokes. "In fact, he was going back to Ireland tonight if it 'adn't been for that. He's waiting till to-morrow just to see George."

Mr. Bell, in a voice huskier than ever, said that he had altered his mind again.

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Stokes, sternly. "Besides, George would like to see you. I s'pose he won't be long?" he added, turning to Mrs. Henshaw, who was regarding Mr. Bell much as a hungry cat regards a plump sparrow.

"I don't suppose so," she said, slowly.

"I dare say if we wait a little while—" began Mr. Stokes, ignoring a frantic glance from Mr. Henshaw.

"Come in," said Mrs. Henshaw, suddenly.

Mr. Stokes entered and, finding that his friend hung back, went out again and half led, half pushed him indoors. Mr. Bell's shyness he attributed to his having lived so long in Ireland.

"He is quite the ladies' man, though," he said, artfully, as they followed their hostess into the front room. "You should ha' seen 'im the other night on the 'bus. We had a couple o' lady friends o' mine with us, and even the conductor was surprised at his goings on."

Mr. Bell, by no means easy as to the results of the experiment, scowled at him despairingly.

"Carrying on, was he?" said Mrs. Henshaw, regarding the culprit steadily.

"Carrying on like one o'clock," said the imaginative Mr. Stokes. "Called one of 'em his little wife, and asked her where 'er wedding-ring was."

"I didn't," said Mr. Bell, in a suffocating voice. "I didn't."

"There's nothing to be ashamed of," said Mr. Stokes, virtuously. "Only, as I said to you at the time, 'Alfred,' I says, 'it's all right for you as a single man, but you might be the twin-brother of a pal o' mine— George Henshaw by name—and if some people was to see you they might think it was 'im.' Didn't I say that?"

"You did," said Mr. Bell, helplessly.

"And he wouldn't believe me," said Mr. Stokes, turning to Mrs. Henshaw.

"That's why I brought him round to see George."

"I should like to see the two of 'em together myself," said Mrs.

Henshaw, quietly. "I should have taken him for my husband anywhere."

"You wouldn't if you'd seen 'im last night," said Mr. Stokes, shaking his head and smiling.

"Carrying on again, was he?" inquired Mrs. Henshaw, quickly.

"No!" said Mr. Bell, in a stentorian whisper.

His glance was so fierce that Mr. Stokes almost quailed. "I won't tell tales out of school," he said, nodding.

"Not if I ask you to?" said Mrs. Henshaw, with a winning smile.

"Ask 'im," said Mr. Stokes.

"Last night," said the whisperer, hastily, "I went for a quiet walk round Victoria Park all by myself. Then I met Mr. Stokes, and we had one half-pint together at a public-house. That's all."

Mrs. Henshaw looked at Mr. Stokes. Mr. Stokes winked at her.

"It's as true as my name is—Alfred Bell," said that gentleman, with slight but natural hesitation.

"Have it your own way," said Mr. Stokes, somewhat perturbed at Mr. Bell's refusal to live up to the character he had arranged for him.

"I wish my husband spent his evenings in the same quiet way," said Mrs. Henshaw, shaking her head.

"Don't he?" said Mr. Stokes. "Why, he always seems quiet enough to me. Too quiet, I should say. Why, I never knew a quieter man. I chaff 'im about it sometimes."

"That's his artfulness," said Mrs. Henshaw.

"Always in a hurry to get 'ome," pursued the benevolent Mr. Stokes.

"He may say so to you to get away from you," said Mrs. Henshaw, thoughtfully. "He does say you're hard to shake off sometimes."

Mr. Stokes sat stiffly upright and threw a fierce glance in the direction of Mr. Henshaw.

"Pity he didn't tell me," he said bitterly. "I ain't one to force my company where it ain't wanted."

"I've said to him sometimes," continued Mrs. Henshaw, "'Why don't you tell Ted Stokes plain that you don't like his company?'" but he won't. That ain't his way. He'd sooner talk of you behind your back."

"What does he say?" inquired Mr. Stokes, coldly ignoring a frantic headshake on the part of his friend.

"Promise me you won't tell him if I tell you," said Mrs. Henshaw.

Mr. Stokes promised.

"I don't know that I ought to tell you," said Mrs. Henshaw, reluctantly, "but I get so sick and tired of him coming home and grumbling about you."

"Go on," said the waiting Stokes.

Mrs. Henshaw stole a glance at him. "He says you act as if you thought yourself everybody," she said, softly, "and your everlasting clack, clack, clack, worries him to death."

"Go on," said the listener, grimly.

"And he says it's so much trouble to get you to pay for your share of the drinks that he'd sooner pay himself and have done with it."

Mr. Stokes sprang from his chair and, with clenched fists, stood angrily regarding the horrified Mr. Bell. He composed himself by an effort and resumed his seat.

"Anything else?" he inquired.

"Heaps and heaps of things," said Mrs. Henshaw; "but I don't want to make bad blood between you."

"Don't mind me," said Mr. Stokes, glancing balefully over at his agitated friend. "P'raps I'll tell you some things about him some day."

"It would be only fair," said Mrs. Henshaw, quickly. "Tell me now; I don't mind Mr. Bell hearing; not a bit."

Mr. Bell spoke up for himself. "I don't want to hear family secrets," he whispered, with an imploring glance at the vindictive Mr. Stokes. "It wouldn't be right."

"Well, *I* don't want to say things behind a man's back," said the latter, recovering himself. "Let's wait till George comes in, and I'll say 'em before his face."

Mrs. Henshaw, biting her lip with annoyance, argued with him, but in vain. Mr. Stokes was firm, and, with a glance at the clock, said that George would be in soon and he would wait till he came.

Conversation flagged despite the efforts of Mrs. Henshaw to draw Mr. Bell out on the subject of Ireland. At an early stage of the catechism he lost his voice entirely, and thereafter sat silent while Mrs. Henshaw discussed the most intimate affairs of her husband's family with Mr. Stokes. She was in the middle of an anecdote about her mother-in-law when Mr. Bell rose and, with some difficulty, intimated his desire to depart.

"What, without seeing George?" said Mrs. Henshaw. "He can't be long now, and I should like to see you together."

"P'r'aps we shall meet him," said Mr. Stokes, who was getting rather tired of the affair. "Good night."

He led the way to the door and, followed by the eager Mr. Bell, passed out into the street. The knowledge that Mrs. Henshaw was watching him from the door kept him silent until they had turned the corner, and then, turning fiercely on Mr. Henshaw, he demanded to know what he meant by it.

"I've done with you," he said, waving aside the other's denials. "I've got you out of this mess, and now I've done with you. It's no good talking, because I don't want to hear it."

"Good-by, then," said Mr. Henshaw, with unexpected hauteur, as he came to a standstill.

"I'll 'ave my trousers first, though," said Mr. Stokes, coldly, "and then you can go, and welcome."

"It's my opinion she recognized me, and said all that just to try us," said the other, gloomily.

Mr. Stokes scorned to reply, and reaching his lodging stood by in silence while the other changed his clothes. He refused Mr. Henshaw's hand with a gesture he had once seen on the stage, and, showing him downstairs, closed the door behind him with a bang.

Left to himself, the small remnants of Mr. Henshaw's courage disappeared. He wandered forlornly up and down the streets until past ten o'clock, and then, cold and dispirited, set off in the direction of home. At the corner of the street he pulled himself together by a great effort, and walking rapidly to his house put the key in the lock and turned it.

The door was fast and the lights were out. He knocked, at first lightly, but gradually increasing in loudness. At the fourth knock a light appeared in the room above, the window was raised, and Mrs. Henshaw leaned out "*Mr. Bell!*" she said, in tones of severe surprise.

"*Bell?*" said her husband, in a more surprised voice still. "It's me, Polly."

"Go away at once, sir!" said Mrs. Henshaw, indignantly. "How dare you call me by my Christian name? I'm surprised at you!"

"It's me, I tell you—George!" said her husband, desperately. "What do you mean by calling me Bell?"

"If you're Mr. Bell, as I suppose, you know well enough," said Mrs. Henshaw, leaning out and regarding him fixedly; "and if you're George you don't."

"I'm George," said Mr. Henshaw, hastily.

"I'm sure I don't know what to make of it," said Mrs. Henshaw, with a bewildered air. "Ted Stokes brought round a man named Bell this afternoon so like you that I can't tell the difference. I don't know what to do, but I do know this—I don't let you in until I have seen you both together, so that I can tell which is which."

"Both together!" exclaimed the startled Mr. Henshaw. "Here—look here!"

He struck a match and, holding it before his face, looked up at the window. Mrs. Henshaw scrutinized him gravely.

"It's no good," she said, despairingly. "I can't tell. I must see you both together."

Mr. Henshaw ground his teeth. "But where is he?" he inquired.

"He went off with Ted Stokes," said his wife. "If you're George you'd better go and ask him." She prepared to close the window, but Mr. Henshaw's voice arrested her.

"And suppose he is not there?" he said.

Mrs. Henshaw reflected. "If he is not there bring Ted Stokes back with you," she said at last, "and if he says you're George, I'll let you in." The window closed and the light disappeared. Mr. Henshaw waited for some time, but in vain, and, with a very clear idea of the reception he would meet with at the hands of Mr. Stokes, set off to his lodging.

If anything, he had underestimated his friend's powers. Mr. Stokes, rudely disturbed just as he had got into bed, was the incarnation of wrath. He was violent, bitter, and insulting in a breath, but Mr. Henshaw was desperate, and Mr. Stokes, after vowing over and over again that nothing should induce him to accompany him back to his house, was at last so moved by his entreaties that he went upstairs and equipped himself for the journey.

"And, mind, after this I never want to see your face again," he said, as they walked swiftly back.

Mr. Henshaw made no reply. The events of the day had almost exhausted him, and silence was maintained until they reached the house. Much to his relief he heard somebody moving about upstairs after the first knock, and in a very short time the window was gently raised and Mrs. Henshaw looked out.

"What, you've come back?" she said, in a low, intense voice. "Well, of all the impudence! How dare you carry on like this?"

"It's me," said her husband.

"Yes, I see it is," was the reply.

"It's him right enough; it's your husband," said Mr. Stokes. "Alfred Bell has gone."

"How dare you stand there and tell me them falsehoods!" exclaimed Mrs. Henshaw. "I wonder the ground don't open and swallow you up. It's Mr. Bell, and if he don't go away I'll call the police."

Messrs. Henshaw and Stokes, amazed at their reception, stood blinking up at her. Then they conferred in whispers.

"If you can't tell 'em apart, how do you know this is Mr. Bell?" inquired Mr. Stokes, turning to the window again.

"How do I know?" repeated Mrs. Henshaw. "How do I know? Why, because my husband came home almost directly Mr. Bell had gone. I wonder he didn't meet him."

"Came home?" cried Mr. Henshaw, shrilly. "*Came home?*"

"Yes; and don't make so much noise," said Mrs. Henshaw, tartly; "he's asleep."

The two gentlemen turned and gazed at each other in stupefaction. Mr. Stokes was the first to recover, and, taking his dazed friend by the arm, led him gently away. At the end of the street he took a deep breath, and, after a slight pause to collect his scattered energies, summed up the situation.

"She's twigged it all along," he said, with conviction. "You'll have to come home with me tonight, and to-morrow the best thing you can do is to make a clean breast of it. It was a silly game, and, if you remember, I was against it from the first."

MIXED RELATIONS

The brig *Elizabeth Barstow* came up the river as though in a hurry to taste again the joys of the Metropolis. The skipper, leaning on the wheel, was in the midst of a hot discussion with the mate, who was placing before him the hygienic, economical, and moral advantages of total abstinence in language of great strength but little variety.

"Teetotallers eat more," said the skipper, finally.

The mate choked, and his eye sought the galley. "Eat more?" he spluttered. "Yesterday the meat was like brick-bats; to-day it tasted like a bit o' dirty sponge. I've lived on biscuits this trip; and the only tater I ate I'm going to see a doctor about direckly I get ashore. It's a sin and a shame to spoil good food the way 'e does."

"The moment I can ship another cook he goes," said the skipper. "He seems busy, judging by the noise."

"I'm making him clean up everything, ready for the next," explained the mate, grimly. "And he 'ad the cheek to tell me he's improving— improving!"

"He'll go as soon as I get another," repeated the skipper, stooping and peering ahead. "I don't like being poisoned any more than you do. He told me he could cook when I shipped him; said his sister had taught him."

The mate grunted and, walking away, relieved his mind by putting his head in at the galley and bidding the cook hold up each separate utensil for his inspection. A hole in the frying-pan the cook modestly attributed to elbow-grease.

The river narrowed, and the brig, picking her way daintily through the traffic, sought her old berth at Buller's Wharf. It was occupied by a deaf sailing-berge, which, moved at last by self-interest, not unconnected with its paint, took up a less desirable position and consoled itself with adjectives.

The men on the wharf had gone for the day, and the crew of the *Elizabeth Barstow*, after making fast, went below to prepare themselves for an evening ashore. Standing before the largest saucepan-lid in the galley, the cook was putting the finishing touches to his toilet.

A light, quick step on the wharf attracted the attention of the skipper as he leaned against the side smoking. It stopped just behind him, and turning round he found himself gazing into the soft brown eyes of the prettiest girl he had ever seen.

"Is Mr. Jewell on board, please?" she asked, with a smile.

"Jewell?" repeated the skipper. "Jewell? Don't know the name."

"He was on board," said the girl, somewhat taken aback. "This is the *Elizabeth Barstow*, isn't it?"

"What's his Christian name?" inquired the skipper, thoughtfully.

"Albert," replied the girl. "Bert," she added, as the other shook his head.

"Oh, the cook!" said the skipper. "I didn't know his name was Jewell."

Yes, he's in the galley."

He stood eyeing her and wondering in a dazed fashion what she could see in a small, white-faced, slab-sided—

The girl broke in upon his meditations. "How does he cook?" she inquired, smiling.

He was about to tell her, when he suddenly remembered the cook's statement as to his instructor.

"He's getting on," he said, slowly; "he's getting on. Are you his sister?"

The girl smiled and nodded. "Ye—es," she said, slowly. "Will you tell him I am waiting for him, please?"

The skipper started and drew himself up; then he walked forward and put his head in at the galley.

"Bert," he said, in a friendly voice, "your sister wants to see you."

"Who?" inquired Mr. Jewell, in the accents of amazement. He put his head out at the door and nodded, and then, somewhat red in the face with the exercise, drew on his jacket and walked towards her. The skipper followed.

"Thank you," said the girl, with a pleasant smile.

"You're quite welcome," said the skipper.

Mr. Jewell stepped ashore and, after a moment of indecision, shook hands with his visitor.

"If you're down this way again," said the skipper, as they turned away, "perhaps you'd like to see the cabin. We're in rather a pickle just now, but if you should happen to come down for Bert to-morrow night—"

The girl's eyes grew mirthful and her lips trembled. "Thank you," she said.

"Some people like looking over cabins," murmured the skipper.

He raised his hand to his cap and turned away. The mate, who had just come on deck, stared after the retreating couple and gave vent to a low whistle.

"What a fine gal to pick up with Slushy," he remarked.

"It's his sister," said the skipper, somewhat sharply.

"The one that taught him to cook?" said the other, hastily. "Here! I'd like five minutes alone with her; I'd give 'er a piece o' my mind that 'ud do her good. I'd learn 'er. I'd tell her wot I thought of her."

"That'll do," said the skipper; "that'll do. He's not so bad for a beginner; I've known worse."

"Not so bad?" repeated the mate. "Not so bad? Why"—his voice trembled—"ain't you going to give 'im the chuck, then?"

"I shall try him for another vy'ge, George," said the skipper. "It's hard lines on a youngster if he don't have a chance. I was never one to be severe. Live and let live, that's my motto. Do as you'd be done by."

"You're turning soft-'arted in your old age," grumbled the mate.

"Old age!" said the other, in a startled voice. "Old age! I'm not thirty-seven yet."

"You're getting on," said the mate; "besides, you look old."

The skipper investigated the charge in the cabin looking-glass ten minutes later. He twisted his beard in his hand and tried to imagine how he would look without it. As a compromise he went out and had it cut short and trimmed to a point. The glass smiled approval on his return; the mate smiled too, and, being caught in the act, said it made him look like his own grandson.

It was late when the cook returned, but the skipper was on deck, and, stopping him for a match, entered into a little conversation. Mr. Jewell, surprised at first, soon became at his ease, and, the talk drifting in some unknown fashion to Miss Jewell, discussed her with brotherly frankness.

"You spent the evening together, I s'pose?" said the skipper, carelessly.

Mr. Jewell glanced at him from the corner of his eye. "Cooking," he said, and put his hand over his mouth with some suddenness.

By the time they parted the skipper had his hand in a friendly fashion on the cook's shoulder, and was displaying an interest in his welfare as unusual as it was gratifying. So unaccustomed was Mr. Jewell to such consideration that he was fain to pause for a moment or two to regain control of his features before plunging into the lamp-lit fo'c'sle.

The mate made but a poor breakfast next morning, but his superior, who saw the hand of Miss Jewell in the muddy coffee and the cremated bacon, ate his with relish. He was looking forward to the evening, the cook having assured him that his sister had accepted his invitation to inspect the cabin, and indeed had talked of little else. The boy was set to work house-cleaning, and, having gleaned a few particulars, cursed the sex with painstaking thoroughness.

It seemed to the skipper a favorable omen that Miss Jewell descended the companion-ladder as though to the manner born; and her exclamations of delight at the cabin completed his satisfaction.

The cook, who had followed them below with some trepidation, became reassured, and seating himself on a locker joined modestly in the conversation.

"It's like a doll's-house," declared the girl, as she finished by examining the space-saving devices in the state-room. "Well, I mustn't take up any more of your time."

"I've got nothing to do," said the skipper, hastily. "I—I was thinking of going for a walk; but it's lonely walking about by yourself."

Miss Jewell agreed. She lowered her eyes and looked under the lashes at the skipper.

"I never had a sister," continued the latter, in melancholy accents.

"I don't suppose you would want to take her out if you had," said the girl.

The skipper protested. "Bert takes you out," he said.

"He isn't like most brothers," said Miss Jewell, shifting along the locker and placing her hand affectionately on the cook's shoulder.

"If I had a sister," continued the skipper, in a somewhat uneven voice, "I should take her out. This evening, for instance, I should take her to a theatre."

Miss Jewell turned upon him the innocent face of a child. "It would be nice to be your sister," she said, calmly.

The skipper attempted to speak, but his voice failed him. "Well, pretend you are my sister," he said, at last, "and we'll go to one."

"Pretend?" said Miss Jewell, as she turned and eyed the cook. "Bert wouldn't like that," she said, decidedly.

"N—no," said the cook, nervously, avoiding the skipper's eye.

"It wouldn't be proper," said Miss Jewell, sitting upright and looking very proper indeed.

"I—I meant Bert to come, too," said the skipper; "of course," he added.

The severity of Miss Jewell's expression relaxed. She stole an amused glance at the cook and, reading her instructions in his eye, began to temporize. Ten minutes later the crew of the *Elizabeth Barstow* in various attitudes of astonishment beheld their commander going ashore with his cook. The mate so far forgot himself as to whistle, but with great presence of mind cuffed the boy's ear as the skipper turned.

For some little distance the three walked along in silence. The skipper was building castles in the air, the cook was not quite at his ease, and the girl, gazing steadily in front of her, appeared slightly embarrassed.

By the time they reached Aldgate and stood waiting for an omnibus Miss Jewell found herself assailed by doubts. She remembered that she did not want to go to a theatre, and warmly pressed the two men to go together and leave her to go home. The skipper remonstrated in vain, but the cook came to the rescue, and Miss Jewell, still protesting, was pushed on to a 'bus and propelled upstairs. She took a vacant seat in front, and the skipper and Mr. Jewell shared one behind.

The three hours at the theatre passed all too soon, although the girl was so interested in the performance that she paid but slight attention to her companions. During the waits she became interested in her surroundings, and several times called the skipper's attention to smart-looking men in the stalls and boxes. At one man she stared so persistently that an opera-glass was at last levelled in return.

"How rude of him," she said, smiling sweetly at the skipper.

She shook her head in disapproval, but the next moment he saw her gazing steadily at the opera-glasses again.

"If you don't look he'll soon get tired of it," he said, between his teeth.

"Yes, perhaps he will," said Miss Jewell, without lowering her eyes in the least.

The skipper sat in torment until the lights were lowered and the curtain went up again. When it fell he began to discuss the play, but Miss Jewell returned such vague replies that it was evident her thoughts were far away.

"I wonder who he is?" she whispered, gazing meditatively at the box.

"A waiter, I should think," snapped the skipper.

The girl shook her head. "No, he is much too distinguished-looking," she said, seriously. "Well, I suppose he'll know me again."

The skipper felt that he wanted to get up and smash things; beginning with the man in the box. It was his first love episode for nearly ten years, and he had forgotten the pains and penalties which attach to the condition. When the performance was over he darted a threatening glance at the box, and, keeping close to Miss Jewell, looked carefully about him to make sure that they were not followed.

"It was ripping," said the cook, as they emerged into the fresh air.

"Lovely," said the girl, in a voice of gentle melancholy. "I shall come and see it again, perhaps, when you are at sea."

"Not alone?" said the skipper, in a startled voice.

"I don't mind being alone," said Miss Jewell, gently; "I'm used to it."

The other's reply was lost in the rush for the 'bus, and for the second time that evening the skipper had to find fault with the seating arrangements. And when a vacancy by the side of Miss Jewell did occur, he was promptly forestalled by a young man in a check suit smoking a large cigar.

They got off at Aldgate, and the girl thanked him for a pleasant evening. A hesitating offer to see her home was at once negatived, and the skipper, watching her and the cook until they disappeared in the traffic, walked slowly and thoughtfully to his ship.

The brig sailed the next evening at eight o'clock, and it was not until six that the cook remarked, in the most casual manner, that his sister was coming down to see him off. She arrived half an hour late, and, so far from wanting to see the cabin again, discovered an inconvenient love of fresh air. She came down at last, at the instance of the cook, and, once below, her mood changed, and she treated the skipper with a soft graciousness which raised him to the seventh heaven. "You'll be good to Bert, won't you?" she inquired, with a smile at that young man.

"I'll treat him like my own brother," said the skipper, fervently. "No, better than that; I'll treat him like your brother."

The cook sat erect and, the skipper being occupied with Miss Jewell, winked solemnly at the skylight.

"I know *you* will," said the girl, very softly; "but I don't think the men—"

"The men'll do as I wish," said the skipper, sternly. "I'm the master on this ship—she's half mine, too—and anybody who interferes with him interferes with me. If there's anything you don't like, Bert, you tell me."

Mr. Jewell, his small, black eyes sparkling, promised, and then, muttering something about his work, exchanged glances with the girl and went up on deck.

"It is a nice cabin," said Miss Jewell, shifting an inch and a half nearer to the skipper. "I suppose poor Bert has to have his meals in that stuffy little place at the other end of the ship, doesn't he?"

"The fo'c'sle?" said the skipper, struggling between love and discipline. "Yes."

The girl sighed, and the mate, who was listening at the skylight above, held his breath with anxiety. Miss Jewell sighed again and in an absent-minded fashion increased the distance between herself and companion by six inches.

"It's usual," faltered the skipper.

"Yes, of course," said the girl, coldly.

"But if Bert likes to feed here, he's welcome," said the skipper, desperately, "and he can sleep aft, too. The mate can say what he likes."

The mate rose and, walking forward, raised his clenched fists to heaven and availed himself of the permission to the fullest extent of a somewhat extensive vocabulary.

"Do you know what I think you are?" inquired Miss Jewell, bending towards him with a radiant face.

"No," said the other, trembling. "What?"

The girl paused. "It wouldn't do to tell you," she said, in a low voice.

"It might make you vain."

"Do you know what I think you are?" inquired the skipper in his turn.

Miss Jewell eyed him composedly, albeit the corners of her mouth trembled. "Yes," she said, unexpectedly.

Steps sounded above and came heavily down the companion-ladder. "Tide's a'most on the turn," said the mate, gruffly, from the door.

The skipper hesitated, but the mate stood aside for the girl to pass, and he followed her up on deck and assisted her to the jetty. For hours afterwards he debated with himself whether she really had allowed her hand to stay in his a second or two longer than necessary, or whether unconscious muscular action on his part was responsible for the phenomenon.

He became despondent as they left London behind, but the necessity of interfering between a goggle-eyed and obtuse mate and a pallid but no less obstinate cook helped to relieve him.

"He says he is going to sleep aft," choked the mate, pointing to the cook's bedding.

"Quite right," said the skipper. "I told him to. He's going to take his meals here, too. Anything to say against it?"

The mate sat down on a locker and fought for breath. The cook, still pale, felt his small, black mustache and eyed him with triumphant malice. "I told 'im they was your orders," he remarked.

"And I told him I didn't believe him," said the mate. "Nobody would.

Whoever 'eard of a cook living aft? Why, they'd laugh at the idea."

He laughed himself, but in a strangely mirthless fashion, and, afraid to trust himself, went up on deck and brooded savagely apart. Nor did he come down to breakfast until the skipper and cook had finished.

Mr. Jewell bore his new honors badly, and the inability to express their dissatisfaction by means of violence had a bad effect on the tempers of the crew. Sarcasm they did try, but at that the cook could more than hold his own, and, although the men doubted his ability at first, he was able to prove to them by actual experiment that he could cook worse than they supposed.

The brig reached her destination—Creekhaven—on the fifth day, and Mr. Jewell found himself an honored guest at the skipper's cottage. It was a comfortable place, but, as the cook pointed out, too large for one. He also referred, incidentally, to his sister's love of a country life, and, finding himself on a subject of which the other never tired, gave full reins to a somewhat picturesque imagination.

They were back at London within the fortnight, and the skipper learned to his dismay that Miss Jewell was absent on a visit. In these circumstances he would have clung to the cook, but that gentleman, pleading engagements, managed to elude him for two nights out of the three.

On the third day Miss Jewell returned to London, and, making her way to the wharf, was just in time to wave farewells as the brig parted from the wharf.

From the fact that the cook was not visible at the moment the skipper took the salutation to himself. It cheered him for the time, but the next day he was so despondent that the cook, by this time thoroughly in his confidence, offered to write when they got to Creekhaven and fix up an evening.

"And there's really no need for you to come, Bert," said the skipper, cheering up.

Mr. Jewell shook his head. "She wouldn't go without me," he said, gravely. "You've no idea 'ow particular she is. Always was from a child."

"Well, we might lose you," said the skipper, reflecting. "How would that be?"

"We might try it," said the cook, without enthusiasm.

To his dismay the skipper, before they reached London again, had invented at least a score of ways by which he might enjoy Miss Jewell's company without the presence of a third person, some of them so ingenious that the cook, despite his utmost efforts, could see no way of opposing them.

The skipper put his ideas into practice as soon as they reached London. Between Wapping and Charing Cross he lost the cook three times. Miss Jewell found him twice, and the third time she was so difficult that the skipper had to join in the treasure-hunt himself. The cook listened unmoved to a highly-colored picture of his carelessness from the lips of Miss Jewell, and bestowed a sympathetic glance upon the skipper as she paused for breath.

"It's as bad as taking a child out," said the latter, with well-affected indignation.

"Worse," said the girl, tightening her lips.

With a perseverance worthy of a better cause the skipper nudged the cook's arm and tried again. This time he was successful beyond his wildest dreams, and, after ten minutes' frantic search, found that he had lost them both. He wandered up and down for hours, and it was past eleven when he returned to the ship and found the cook waiting for him.

"We thought something 'ad happened to you," said the cook. "Kate has been in a fine way about it. Five minutes after you lost me she found me, and we've been hunting 'igh and low ever since."

Miss Jewell expressed her relief the next evening, and, stealing a glance at the face of the skipper, experienced a twinge of something which she took to be remorse. Ignoring the cook's hints as to theatres, she elected to go for a long 'bus ride, and, sitting in front with the skipper, left Mr. Jewell to keep a chaperon's eye on them from three seats behind.

Conversation was for some time disjointed; then the brightness and crowded state of the streets led the skipper to sound his companion as to her avowed taste for a country life.

"I should love it," said Miss Jewell, with a sigh. "But there's no chance of it; I've got my living to earn."

"You might—might marry somebody living in the country," said the skipper, in trembling tones. Miss Jewell shuddered. "Marry!" she said, scornfully.

"Most people do," said the other.

"Sensible people don't," said the girl. "You haven't," she added, with a smile.

"I'm very thankful I haven't," retorted the skipper, with great meaning.

"There you are!" said the girl, triumphantly.

"I never saw anybody I liked," said the skipper, "be—before."

"If ever I did marry," said Miss Jewell, with remarkable composure, "if ever I was foolish enough to do such a thing, I think I would marry a man a few years younger than myself."

"Younger?" said the dismayed skipper.

Miss Jewell nodded. "They make the best husbands," she said, gravely.

The skipper began to argue the point, and Mr. Jewell, at that moment taking a seat behind, joined in with some heat. A more ardent supporter could not have been found, although his repetition of the phrase "May and December" revealed a want of tact of which the skipper had not thought him capable. What had promised to be a red-letter day in his existence was spoiled, and he went to bed that night with the full conviction that he had better abandon a project so hopeless.

With a fine morning his courage revived, but as voyage succeeded voyage he became more and more perplexed. The devotion of the cook was patent to all men, but Miss Jewell was as changeable as a weather-glass. The skipper would leave her one night convinced that he had better forget her as soon as possible, and the next her manner would be so kind, and her glances so soft, that only the presence of the ever-watchful cook prevented him from proposing on the spot. The end came one evening in October. The skipper had hurried back from the City, laden with stores, Miss Jewell having, after many refusals, consented to grace the tea-table that afternoon. The table, set by the boy, groaned beneath the weight of unusual luxuries, but the girl had not arrived. The cook was also missing, and the only occupant of the cabin was the mate, who, sitting at one corner, was eating with great relish.

"Ain't you going to get your tea?" he inquired.

"No hurry," said the skipper, somewhat incensed at his haste. "It wouldn't have hurt *you* to have waited a bit."

"Waited?" said the other. "What for?"

"For my visitors," was the reply.

The mate bit a piece off a crust and stirred his tea. "No use waiting for them," he said, with a grin. "They ain't coming."

"What do you mean?" demanded the skipper.

"I mean," said the mate, continuing to stir his tea with great enjoyment—"I mean that all that kind'artedness of yours was clean chucked away on that cook. He's got a berth ashore and he's gone for good. He left you 'is love; he left it with Bill Hemp."

"Berth ashore?" said the skipper, staring.

"Ah!" said the mate, taking a large and noisy sip from his cup. "He's been fooling you all along for what he could get out of you. Sleeping aft and feeding aft, nobody to speak a word to 'im, and going out and being treated by the skipper; Bill said he laughed so much when he was telling 'im that the tears was running down 'is face like rain. He said he'd never been treated so much in his life."

"That'll do," said the skipper, quickly.

"You ought to hear Bill tell it," said the mate, regretfully. "I can't do it anything like as well as what he can. Made us all roar, he did. What amused 'em most was you thinking that that gal was cookie's sister."

The skipper, with a sharp exclamation, leaned forward, staring at him.

"They're going to be married at Christmas," said the mate, choking in his cup.

The skipper sat upright again, and tried manfully to compose his features. Many things he had not understood before were suddenly made clear, and he remembered now the odd way in which the girl had regarded him as she bade him good-night on the previous evening. The mate eyed him with interest, and was about to supply him with further details when his attention was attracted by footsteps descending the companion-ladder. Then he put down his cup with great care, and stared in stolid amazement at the figure of Miss Jewell in the doorway.

"I'm a bit late," she said, flushing slightly.

She crossed over and shook hands with the skipper, and, in the most natural fashion in the world, took a seat and began to remove her gloves. The mate swung round and regarded her open-mouthed; the skipper, whose ideas were in a whirl, sat regarding her in silence. The mate was the first to move; he left the cabin rubbing his shin, and casting furious glances at the skipper.

"You didn't expect to see me?" said the girl, reddening again.

"No," was the reply.

The girl looked at the tablecloth. "I came to beg your pardon," she said, in a low voice.

"There's nothing to beg my pardon for," said the skipper, clearing his throat. "By rights I ought to beg yours. You did quite right to make fun of me. I can see it now."

"When you asked me whether I was Bert's sister I didn't like to say 'no,' continued the girl; "and at first I let you come out with me for the fun of the thing, and then Bert said it would be good for him, and then—then—"

"Yes," said the skipper, after a long pause.

The girl broke a biscuit into small pieces, and arranged them on the cloth. "Then I didn't mind your coming so much," she said, in a low voice.

The skipper caught his breath and tried to gaze at the averted face.

The girl swept the crumbs aside and met his gaze squarely. "Not quite so much," she explained.

"I've been a fool," said the skipper. "I've been a fool. I've made myself a laughing-stock all round, but if I could have it all over again I would."

"That can never be," said the girl, shaking her head. "Bert wouldn't come."

"No, of course not," asserted the other.

The girl bit her lip. The skipper thought that he had never seen her eyes so large and shining. There was a long silence.

"Good-by," said the girl at last, rising.

The skipper rose to follow. "Good-by," he said, slowly; "and I wish you both every happiness."

"Happiness?" echoed the girl, in a surprised voice. "Why?"

"When you are married."

"I am not going to be married," said the girl. "I told Bert so this afternoon. Good-by."

The skipper actually let her get nearly to the top of the ladder before he regained his presence of mind. Then, in obedience to a powerful tug at the hem of her skirt, she came down again, and accompanied him meekly back to the cabin.

HIS LORDSHIP

Farmer Rose sat in his porch smoking an evening pipe. By his side, in a comfortable Windsor chair, sat his friend the miller, also smoking, and gazing with half-closed eyes at the landscape as he listened for the thousandth time to his host's complaints about his daughter.

"The long and the short of it is, Cray," said the farmer, with an air of mournful pride, "she's far too good-looking."

Mr. Cray grunted.

"Truth is truth, though she's my daughter," continued Mr. Rose, vaguely. "She's too good-looking. Sometimes when I've taken her up to market I've seen the folks fair turn their backs on the cattle and stare at her instead."

Mr. Cray sniffed; louder, perhaps, than he had intended. "Beautiful that rose-bush smells," he remarked, as his friend turned and eyed him.

"What is the consequence?" demanded the farmer, relaxing his gaze. "She looks in the glass and sees herself, and then she gets miserable and uppish because there ain't nobody in these parts good enough for her to marry."

"It's a extraordinary thing to me where she gets them good looks from," said the miller, deliberately.

"Ah!" said Mr. Rose, and sat trying to think of a means of enlightening his friend without undue loss of modesty.

"She ain't a bit like her poor mother," mused Mr. Cray.

"No, she don't get her looks from her," assented the other.

"It's one o' them things you can't account for," said Mr. Cray, who was very tired of the subject; "it's just like seeing a beautiful flower blooming on an old cabbage-stump."

The farmer knocked his pipe out noisily and began to refill it. "People have said that she takes after me a trifle," he remarked, shortly.

"You weren't fool enough to believe that, I know," said the miller. "Why, she's no more like you than you're like a warming-pan—not so much."

Mr. Rose regarded his friend fixedly. "You ain't got a very nice way o' putting things, Cray," he said, mournfully.

"I'm no flatterer," said the miller; "never was. And you can't please everybody. If I said your daughter took after you I don't s'pose she'd ever speak to me again."

"The worst of it is," said the farmer, disregarding his remark, "she won't settle down. There's young Walter Lomas after her now, and she won't look at him. He's a decent young fellow is Walter, and she's been and named one o' the pigs after him, and the way she mixes them up together is disgraceful."

"If she was my girl she should marry young Walter," said the miller, firmly. "What's wrong with him?"

"She looks higher," replied the other, mysteriously; "she's always reading them romantic books full o' love tales, and she's never tired o' talking of a girl her mother used to know that went on the stage and married a baronet. She goes and sits in the best parlor every afternoon now, and calls it the drawing-room. She'll sit there till she's past the marrying age, and then she'll turn round and blame me."

"She wants a lesson," said Mr. Cray, firmly. "She wants to be taught her position in life, not to go about turning up her nose at young men and naming pigs after them."

Mr. Rose sighed.

"What she wants to understand is that the upper classes wouldn't look at her," pursued the miller.

"It would be easier to make her understand that if they didn't," said the farmer.

"I mean," said Mr. Cray, sternly, "with a view to marriage. What you ought to do is to get somebody staying down here with you pretending to be a lord or a nobleman, and ordering her about and not noticing her good looks at all. Then, while she's upset about that, in comes Walter Lomas to comfort her and be a contrast to the other."

Mr. Rose withdrew his pipe and regarded him open-mouthed.

"Yes; but how—" he began.

"And it seems to me," interrupted Mr. Cray, "that I know just the young fellow to do it—nephew of my wife's. He was coming to stay a fortnight with us, but you can have him with pleasure—me and him don't get on over and above well."

"Perhaps he wouldn't do it," objected the farmer.

"He'd do it like a shot," said Mr. Cray, positively. "It would be fun for us and it 'ud be a lesson for her. If you like, I'll tell him to write to you for lodgings, as he wants to come for a fortnight's fresh air after the fatiguing gayeties of town."

"Fatiguing gayeties of town," repeated the admiring farmer. "Fatiguing—"

He sat back in his chair and laughed, and Mr. Cray, delighted at the prospect of getting rid so easily of a tiresome guest, laughed too. Overhead at the open window a third person laughed, but in so quiet and well-bred a fashion that neither of them heard her.

The farmer received a letter a day or two afterwards, and negotiations between Jane Rose on the one side and Lord Fairmount on the other were soon in progress; the farmer's own composition being deemed somewhat crude for such a correspondence.

"I wish he didn't want it kept so secret," said Miss Rose, pondering over the final letter. "I should like to let the Grays and one or two more people know he is staying with us. However, I suppose he must have his own way."

"You must do as he wishes," said her father, using his handkerchief violently.

Jane sighed. "He'll be a little company for me, at any rate," she remarked. "What is the matter, father?"

"Bit of a cold," said the farmer, indistinctly, as he made for the door, still holding his handkerchief to his face. "Been coming on some time."

He put on his hat and went out, and Miss Rose, watching him from the window, was not without fears that the joke might prove too much for a man of his habit. She regarded him thoughtfully, and when he returned at one o'clock to dinner, and encountered instead a violent dust-storm which was raging in the house, she noted with pleasure that his sense of humor was more under control.

"Dinner?" she said, as he strove to squeeze past the furniture which was piled in the hall. "We've got no time to think of dinner, and if we had there's no place for you to eat it. You'd better go in the larder and cut yourself a crust of bread and cheese."

Her father hesitated and glared at the servant, who, with her head bound up in a duster, passed at the double with a broom. Then he walked slowly into the kitchen.

Miss Rose called out something after him.

"Eh?" said her father, coming back hopefully.

"How is your cold, dear?"

The farmer made no reply, and his daughter smiled contentedly as she heard him stamping about in the larder. He made but a poor meal, and then, refusing point-blank to assist Annie in moving the piano, went and smoked a very reflective pipe in the garden.

Lord Fairmount arrived the following day on foot from the station, and after acknowledging the farmer's salute with a distant nod requested him to send a cart for his luggage. He was a tall, good-looking young man, and as he stood in the hall languidly twisting his mustache Miss Rose deliberately decided upon his destruction.

"These your daughters?" he inquired, carelessly, as he followed his host into the parlor.

"One of 'em is, my lord; the other is my servant," replied the farmer.

"She's got your eyes," said his lordship, tapping the astonished Annie under the chin; "your nose too, I think."

"That's my servant," said the farmer, knitting his brows at him.

"Oh, indeed!" said his lordship, airily.

He turned round and regarded Jane, but, although she tried to meet him half-way by elevating her chin a little, his audacity failed him and the words died away on his tongue. A long silence followed, broken only by the ill-suppressed giggles of Annie, who had retired to the kitchen.

"I trust that we shall make your lordship comfortable," said Miss Rose.

"I hope so, my good girl," was the reply. "And now will you show me my room?"

Miss Rose led the way upstairs and threw open the door; Lord Fairmount, pausing on the threshold, gazed at it disparagingly.

"Is this the best room you have?" he inquired, stiffly.

"Oh, no," said Miss Rose, smiling; "father's room is much better than this. Look here."

She threw open another door and, ignoring a gesticulating figure which stood in the hall below, regarded him anxiously. "If you would prefer father's room he would be delighted for you to have it. Delighted."

"Yes, I will have this one," said Lord Fairmount, entering. "Bring me up some hot water, please, and clear these boots and leggings out."

Miss Rose tripped downstairs and, bestowing a witching smile upon her sire, waved away his request for an explanation and hastened into the kitchen, whence Annie shortly afterwards emerged with the water.

It was with something of a shock that the farmer discovered that he had to wait for his dinner while his lordship had luncheon. That meal, under his daughter's management, took a long time, and the joint when it reached him was more than half cold. It was, moreover, quite clear that the aristocracy had not even mastered the rudiments of carving, but preferred instead to box the compass for tit-bits.

He ate his meal in silence, and when it was over sought out his guest to administer a few much-needed stage-directions. Owing, however, to the ubiquity of Jane he wasted nearly the whole of the afternoon before he obtained an opportunity. Even then the interview was short, the farmer having to compress into ten seconds instructions for Lord Fairmount to express a desire to take his meals with the family, and his dinner at the respectable hour of 1 p.m. Instructions as to a change of bedroom were frustrated by the reappearance of Jane.

His lordship went for a walk after that, and coming back with a bored air stood on the hearthrug in the living-room and watched Miss Rose sewing.

"Very dull place," he said at last, in a dissatisfied voice.

"Yes, my lord," said Miss Rose, demurely.

"Fearfully dull," complained his lordship, stifling a yawn. "What I'm to do to amuse myself for a fortnight I'm sure I don't know."

Miss Rose raised her fine eyes and regarded him intently. Many a lesser man would have looked no farther for amusement.

"I'm afraid there is not much to do about here, my lord," she said quietly. "We are very plain folk in these parts."

"Yes," assented the other. An obvious compliment rose of itself to his lips, but he restrained himself, though with difficulty. Miss Rose bent her head over her work and stitched industriously. His lordship took up a book and, remembering his mission, read for a couple of hours without taking the slightest notice of her. Miss Rose glanced over in his direction once or twice, and then, with a somewhat vixenish expression on her delicate features, resumed her sewing.

"Wonderful eyes she's got," said the gentleman, as he sat on the edge of his bed that night and thought over the events of the day. "It's pretty to see them flash."

He saw them flash several times during the next few days, and Mr. Rose himself, was more than satisfied with the hauteur with which his guest treated the household.

"But I don't like the way you have with me," he complained.

"It's all in the part," urged his lordship.

"Well, you can leave that part out," rejoined Mr. Rose, with some acerbity. "I object to being spoke to as you speak to me before that girl Annie. Be as proud and unpleasant as you like to my daughter, but leave me alone. Mind that!"

His lordship promised, and in pursuance of his host's instructions strove manfully to subdue feelings towards Miss Rose by no means in accordance with them. The best of us are liable to absent-mindedness, and he sometimes so far forgot himself as to address her in tones as humble as any in her somewhat large experience.

"I hope that we are making you comfortable here, my lord?" she said, as they sat together one afternoon.

"I have never been more comfortable in my life," was the gracious reply.

Miss Rose shook her head. "Oh, my lord," she said, in protest, "think of your mansion."

His lordship thought of it. For two or three days he had been thinking of houses and furniture and other things of that nature.

"I have never seen an old country seat," continued Miss Rose, clasping her hands and gazing at him wistfully. "I should be so grateful if your lordship would describe yours to me."

His lordship shifted uneasily, and then, in face of the girl's persistence, stood for some time divided between the contending claims of Hampton Court Palace and the Tower of London. He finally decided upon the former, after first refurnishing it at Maple's.

"How happy you must be!" said the breathless Jane, when he had finished.

He shook his head gravely. "My possessions have never given me any happiness," he remarked. "I would much rather be in a humble rank of life. Live where I like, and—and marry whom I like."

There was no mistaking the meaning fall in his voice. Miss Rose sighed gently and lowered her eyes—her lashes had often excited comment. Then, in a soft voice, she asked him the sort of life he would prefer.

In reply, his lordship, with an eloquence which surprised himself, portrayed the joys of life in a seven-roomed house in town, with a greenhouse six feet by three, and a garden large enough to contain it. He really spoke well, and when he had finished his listener gazed at him with eyes suffused with timid admiration.

"Oh, my lord," she said, prettily, "now I know what you've been doing.

You've been slumming."

"Slumming?" gasped his lordship.

"You couldn't have described a place like that unless you had been," said Miss Rose nodding. "I hope you took the poor people some nice hot soup."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.