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HOMeward BOUND

William Wymark Jacobs

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W. W. Jacobs

Homeward Bound / Sailor's Knots, Part 2

HOMeward BOUND

Mr. Hatchard's conversation for nearly a week had been confined to fault-finding and grunts, a system of treatment designed to wean Mrs. Hatchard from her besetting sin of extravagance. On other occasions the treatment had, for short periods, proved successful, but it was quite evident that his wife's constitution was becoming inured to this physic and required a change of treatment. The evidence stared at him from the mantelpiece in the shape of a pair of huge pink vases, which had certainly not been there when he left in the morning. He looked at them and breathed heavily.

"Pretty, ain't they?" said his wife, nodding at them.

"Who gave 'em to you?" inquired Mr. Hatchard, sternly.

His wife shook her head. "You don't get vases like that given to you," she said, slowly. "Leastways, I don't."

"Do you mean to say you bought 'em?" demanded her husband.

Mrs. Hatchard nodded.

"After all I said to you about wasting my money?" persisted Mr. Hatchard, in amazed accents.

Mrs. Hatchard nodded, more brightly than before.

"There has got to be an end to this!" said her husband, desperately. "I won't have it! D'ye hear? I won't—have—it!"

"I bought 'em with my own money," said his wife, tossing her head.

"Your money?" said Mr. Hatchard. "To hear you talk anybody 'ud think you'd got three hundred a year, instead o' thirty. Your money ought to be spent in useful things, same as what mine is. Why should I spend my money keeping you, while you waste yours on pink vases and having friends in to tea?"

Mrs. Hatchard's still comely face took on a deeper tinge.

"Keeping me?" she said, sharply. "You'd better stop before you say anything you might be sorry for, Alfred."

"I should have to talk a long time before I said that," retorted the other.

"I'm not so sure," said his wife. "I'm beginning to be tired of it."

"I've reasoned with you," continued Mr. Hatchard, "I've argued with you, and I've pointed out the error of your ways to you, and it's all no good."

"Oh, be quiet, and don't talk nonsense," said his wife.

"Talking," continued Mr. Hatchard, "as I said before, is no good. Deeds, not words, is what is wanted."

He rose suddenly from his chair and, taking one of the vases from the mantelpiece, dashed it to pieces on the fender. Example is contagious, and two seconds later he was in his chair again, softly feeling a rapidly growing bump on his head, and gazing goggle-eyed at his wife.

"And I'd do it again," said that lady, breathlessly, "if there was another vase."

Mr. Hatchard opened his mouth, but speech failed him. He got up and left the room without a word, and, making his way to the scullery, turned on the tap and held his head beneath it. A sharp intake of the breath announced that a tributary stream was looking for the bump down the neck of his shirt.

He was away a long time—so long that the half-penitent Mrs. Hatchard was beginning to think of giving first aid to the wounded. Then she heard him coming slowly back along the passage. He entered the room, drying his wet hair on a hand-kerchief.

"I—I hope I didn't hurt you—much?" said his wife.

Mr. Hatchard drew himself up and regarded her with lofty indignation.

"You might have killed me," he said at last, in thrilling tones. "Then what would you have done?"

"Swept up the pieces, and said you came home injured and died in my arms," said Mrs. Hatchard, glibly. "I don't want to be unfeeling, but you'd try the temper of a saint. I'm sure I wonder I haven't done it before. Why I married a stingy man I don't know."

"Why I married at all I don't know," said her husband, in a deep voice.

"We were both fools," said Mrs. Hatchard, in a resigned voice; "that's what it was. However, it can't be helped now."

"Some men would go and leave you," said Mr. Hatchard.

"Well, go," said his wife, bridling. "I don't want you."

"Don't talk nonsense," said the other.

"It ain't nonsense," said Mrs. Hatchard. "If you want to go, go. I don't want to keep you."

"I only wish I could," said her husband, wistfully.

"There's the door," said Mrs. Hatchard, pointing. "What's to prevent you?"

"And have you going to the magistrate?" observed Mr. Hatchard.

"Not me," was the reply.

"Or coming up, full of complaints, to the ware-house?"

"Not me," said his wife again.

"It makes my mouth water to think of it," said Mr. Hatchard. "Four years ago I hadn't a care in the world."

"Me neither," said Mrs. Hatchard; "but then I never thought I should marry you. I remember the first time I saw you I had to stuff my handkerchief in my mouth."

"What for?" inquired Mr. Hatchard.

"Keep from laughing," was the reply.

"You took care not to let me see you laugh," said Mr. Hatchard, grimly. "You were polite enough in them days. I only wish I could have my time over again; that's all."

"You can go, as I said before," said his wife.

"I'd go this minute," said Mr. Hatchard, "but I know what it 'ud be: in three or four days you'd be coming and begging me to take you back again."

"You try me," said Mrs. Hatchard, with a hard laugh. "I can keep myself. You leave me the furniture—most of it is mine—and I sha'n't worry you again."

"Mind!" said Mr. Hatchard, raising his hand with great solemnity. "If I go, I never come back again."

"I'll take care of that," said his wife, equably. "You are far more likely to ask to come back than I am."

Mr. Hatchard stood for some time in deep thought, and then, spurred on by a short, contemptuous laugh from his wife, went to the small passage and, putting on his overcoat and hat, stood in the parlor doorway regarding her.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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