

# **WILLIAM WYMARK JACOBS**

ESTABLISHING RELATIONS

# **William Wymark Jacobs**

# **Establishing Relations**

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*Establishing Relations / Odd Craft, Part 7.:*

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## Establishing Relations / Odd Craft, Part 7

### ESTABLISHING RELATIONS

Mr. Richard Catesby, second officer of the ss. *Wizard*, emerged from the dock-gates in high good-humour to spend an evening ashore. The bustle of the day had departed, and the inhabitants of Wapping, in search of coolness and fresh air, were sitting at open doors and windows indulging in general conversation with any-body within earshot.

Mr. Catesby, turning into Bashford's Lane, lost in a moment all this life and colour. The hum of distant voices certainly reached there, but that was all, for Bashford's Lane, a retiring thoroughfare facing a blank dock wall, capped here and there by towering spars, set an example of gentility which neighbouring streets had long ago decided crossly was impossible for ordinary people to follow. Its neatly grained shutters, fastened back by the sides of the windows, gave a pleasing idea of uniformity, while its white steps and polished brass knockers were suggestive of almost a Dutch cleanliness.

Mr. Catesby, strolling comfortably along, stopped suddenly

for another look at a girl who was standing in the ground-floor window of No. 5. He went on a few paces and then walked back slowly, trying to look as though he had forgotten something. The girl was still there, and met his ardent glances unmoved: a fine girl, with large, dark eyes, and a complexion which was the subject of much scandalous discussion among neighbouring matrons.

"It must be something wrong with the glass, or else it's the bad light," said Mr. Catesby to himself; "no girl is so beautiful as that."

He went by again to make sure. The object of his solicitude was still there and apparently unconscious of his existence. He passed very slowly and sighed deeply.

"You've got it at last, Dick Catesby," he said, solemnly; "fair and square in the most dangerous part of the heart. It's serious this time."

He stood still on the narrow pavement, pondering, and then, in excuse of his flagrant misbehaviour, murmured, "It was meant to be," and went by again. This time he fancied that he detected a somewhat supercilious expression in the dark eyes—a faint raising of well-arched eyebrows.

His engagement to wait at Aldgate Station for the second-engineer and spend an evening together was dismissed as too slow to be considered. He stood for some time in uncertainty, and then turning slowly into the Beehive, which stood at the corner, went into the private bar and ordered a glass of beer.

He was the only person in the bar, and the land-lord, a stout man in his shirt-sleeves, was the soul of affability. Mr. Catesby, after various general remarks, made a few inquiries about an uncle aged five minutes, whom he thought was living in Bashford's Lane.

"I don't know 'im," said the landlord.

"I had an idea that he lived at No. 5," said Catesby.

The landlord shook his head. "That's Mrs. Truefitt's house," he said, slowly.

Mr. Catesby pondered. "Truefitt, Truefitt," he repeated; "what sort of a woman is she?"

"Widder-woman," said the landlord; "she lives there with 'er daughter Prudence."

Mr. Catesby said "Indeed!" and being a good listener learned that Mrs. Truefitt was the widow of a master-lighterman, and that her son, Fred Truefitt, after an absence of seven years in New Zealand, was now on his way home. He finished his glass slowly and, the landlord departing to attend to another customer, made his way into the street again.

He walked along slowly, picturing as he went the home-coming of the long-absent son. Things were oddly ordered in this world, and Fred Truefitt would probably think nothing of his brotherly privileges. He wondered whether he was like Prudence. He wondered—

"By Jove, I'll do it!" he said, recklessly, as he turned. "Now for a row."

He walked back rapidly to Bashford's Lane, and without giving his courage time to cool plied the knocker of No. 5 briskly.

The door was opened by an elderly woman, thin, and somewhat querulous in expression. Mr. Catesby had just time to notice this, and then he flung his arm round her waist, and hailing her as "Mother!" saluted her warmly.

The faint scream of the astounded Mrs. Truefitt brought her daughter hastily into the passage. Mr. Catesby's idea was ever to do a thing thoroughly, and, relinquishing Mrs. Truefitt, he kissed Prudence with all the ardour which a seven-years' absence might be supposed to engender in the heart of a devoted brother. In return he received a box on the ears which made his head ring.

"He's been drinking," gasped the dismayed Mrs. Truefitt.

"Don't you know me, mother?" inquired Mr. Richard Catesby, in grievous astonishment.

"He's mad," said her daughter.

"Am I so altered that you don't know me, Prudence?" inquired Mr. Catesby; with pathos. "Don't you know your Fred?"

"Go out," said Mrs. Truefitt, recovering; "go out at once."

Mr. Catesby looked from one to the other in consternation.

"I know I've altered," he said, at last, "but I'd no idea—"

"If you don't go out at once I'll send for the police," said the elder woman, sharply. "Prudence, scream!"

"I'm not going to scream," said Prudence, eyeing the intruder with great composure. "I'm not afraid of him."

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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