

# **WILLIAM WYMARK JACOBS**

THE THIRD STRING

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# **W. W. Jacobs**

## **The Third String / Odd Craft, Part 12**

### **THE THIRD STRING**

Love? said the night-watchman, as he watched in an abstracted fashion the efforts of a skipper to reach a brother skipper on a passing barge with a boathook. Don't talk to me about love, because I've suffered enough through it. There ought to be teetotalers for love the same as wot there is for drink, and they ought to wear a piece o' ribbon to show it, the same as the teetotalers do; but not an attractive piece o' ribbon, mind you. I've seen as much mischief caused by love as by drink, and the funny thing is, one often leads to the other. Love, arter it is over, often leads to drink, and drink often leads to love and to a man committing himself for life afore it is over.

Sailormen give way to it most; they see so little o' wimmen that they naturally 'ave a high opinion of 'em. Wait till they become night-watchmen and, having to be at 'ome all day, see the other side of 'em. If people on'y started life as night-watchmen there wouldn't be one 'arf the falling in love that there is now.

I remember one chap, as nice a fellow as you could wish to

meet, too. He always carried his sweet-heart's photograph about with 'im, and it was the on'y thing that cheered 'im up during the fourteen years he was cast away on a deserted island. He was picked up at last and taken 'ome, and there she was still single and waiting for 'im; and arter spending fourteen years on a deserted island he got another ten in quod for shooting 'er because she 'ad altered so much in 'er looks.

Then there was Ginger Dick, a red-'aired man I've spoken about before. He went and fell in love one time when he was lodging in Wapping 'ere with old Sam Small and Peter Russet, and a nice mess 'e made of it.

They was just back from a v'y'ge, and they 'adn't been ashore a week afore both of 'em noticed a change for the worse in Ginger. He turned quiet and peaceful and lost 'is taste for beer. He used to play with 'is food instead of eating it, and in place of going out of an evening with Sam and Peter took to going off by 'imself.

"It's love," ses Peter Russet, shaking his 'ead, "and he'll be worse afore he's better."

"Who's the gal?" ses old Sam.

Peter didn't know, but when they came 'ome that night 'e asked. Ginger, who was sitting up in bed with a far-off look in 'is eyes, cuddling 'is knees, went on staring but didn't answer.

"Who is it making a fool of you this time, Ginger?" ses old Sam.

"You mind your bisness and I'll mind mine," ses Ginger, suddenly waking up and looking very fierce.

"No offence, mate," ses Sam, winking at Peter. "I on'y asked in case I might be able to do you a good turn."

"Well, you can do that by not letting her know you're a pal o' mine," ses Ginger, very nasty.

Old Sam didn't understand at fust, and when Peter explained to 'im he wanted to hit 'im for trying to twist Ginger's words about.

"She don't like fat old men," ses Ginger.

"Ho!" ses old Sam, who couldn't think of anything else to say. "Ho! don't she? Ho! Ho! indeed!"

He undressed 'imself and got into the bed he shared with Peter, and kept 'im awake for hours by telling 'im in a loud voice about all the gals he'd made love to in his life, and partikler about one gal that always fainted dead away whenever she saw either a red-'aired man or a monkey.

Peter Russet found out all about it next day, and told Sam that it was a barmaid with black 'air and eyes at the Jolly Pilots, and that she wouldn't 'ave anything to say to Ginger.

He spoke to Ginger about it agin when they were going to bed that night, and to 'is surprise found that he was quite civil. When 'e said that he would do anything he could for 'im, Ginger was quite affected.

"I can't eat or drink," he ses, in a miserable voice; "I lay awake all last night thinking of her. She's so diff'rent to other gals; she's got—If I start on you, Sam Small, you'll know it. You go and make that choking noise to them as likes it."

"It's a bit o' egg-shell I got in my throat at break-fast this morning, Ginger," ses Sam. "I wonder whether she lays awake all night thinking of you?"

"I dare say she does," ses Peter Russet, giving 'im a little push.

"Keep your 'art up, Ginger," ses Sam; "I've known gals to 'ave the most ext'ordinary likings afore now."

"Don't take no notice of 'im," ses Peter, holding Ginger back. "'Ow are you getting on with her?"

Ginger groaned and sat down on 'is bed and looked at the floor, and Sam went and sat on his till it shook so that Ginger offered to step over and break 'is neck for 'im.

"I can't 'elp the bed shaking," ses Sam; "it ain't my fault. I didn't make it. If being in love is going to make you so disagreeable to your best friends, Ginger, you'd better go and live by yourself."

"I 'eard something about her to-day, Ginger," ses Peter Russet. "I met a chap I used to know at Bull's Wharf, and he told me that she used to keep company with a chap named Bill Lumm, a bit of a prize-fighter, and since she gave 'im up she won't look at anybody else."

"Was she very fond of 'im, then?" asks Ginger.

"I don't know," ses Peter; "but this chap told me that she won't walk out with anybody agin, unless it's another prize-fighter. Her pride won't let her, I s'pose."

"Well, that's all right, Ginger," ses Sam; "all you've got to do is to go and be a prize-fighter."

"If I 'ave any more o' your nonsense—" ses Ginger, starting up.

"That's right," ses Sam; "jump down anybody's throat when they're trying to do you a kindness. That's you all over, Ginger, that is. Wot's to prevent you telling 'er that you're a prize-fighter from Australia or somewhere? She won't know no better."

He got up off the bed and put his 'ands up as Ginger walked across the room to 'im, but Ginger on'y wanted to shake 'ands, and arter he 'ad done that 'e patted 'im on the back and smiled at 'im.



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