

# **WILLIAM WYMARK JACOBS**

DIALSTONE LANE, PART 2

**William Wymark Jacobs**  
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# Содержание

CHAPTER V

4

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

16

# W. W. Jacobs

## Dialstone Lane, Part 2

### CHAPTER V

Mr. Chalk's expedition to the Southern Seas became a standing joke with the captain, and he waylaid him on several occasions to inquire into the progress he was making, and to give him advice suitable for all known emergencies at sea, together with a few that are unknown. Even Mr. Chalk began to tire of his pleasantries, and, after listening to a surprising account of a Scotch vessel which always sailed backwards when the men whistled on Sundays, signified his displeasure by staying away from Dialstone Lane for some time.

Deprived of his society the captain consoled himself with that of Edward Tredgold, a young man for whom he was beginning to entertain a strong partiality, and whose observations of Binchester folk, flavoured with a touch of good-natured malice, were a source of never-failing interest.

"He is very wide-awake," he said to his niece. "There isn't much that escapes him."

Miss Drewitt, gazing idly out of window, said that she had not noticed it.

"Very clever at his business, I understand," said the captain.

His niece said that he had always appeared to her—when she had happened to give the matter a thought—as a picture of indolence.

"Ah! that's only his manner," replied the other, warmly. "He's a young man that's going to get on; he's going to make his mark. His father's got money, and he'll make more of it."

Something in the tone of his voice attracted his niece's attention, and she looked at him sharply as an almost incredible suspicion as to the motive of this conversation flashed on her.

"I don't like to see young men too fond of money," she observed, sedately.

"I didn't say that," said the captain, eagerly. "If anything, he is too open-handed. What I meant was that he isn't lazy."

"He seems to be very fond of coming to see you," said Prudence, by way of encouragement.

"Ah!" said the captain, "and—"

He stopped abruptly as the girl faced round. "And?" she prompted.

"And the crow's-nest," concluded the captain, somewhat lamely.

There was no longer room for doubt. Scarce two months ashore and he was trying his hand at matchmaking. Fresh from a world of obedient satellites, and ships responding to the lightest touch of the helm, he was venturing with all the confidence of ignorance upon the most delicate of human undertakings. Miss Drewitt, eyeing him with perfect comprehension and some little

severity, sat aghast at his hardihood.

"He's very fond of going up there," said Captain Bowers, somewhat discomfited.

"Yes, he and Joseph have much in common," remarked Miss Drewitt, casually. "They're some what alike, too, I always fancy."

"Alike!" exclaimed the astonished captain.

"Edward Tredgold like Joseph? Why, you must be dreaming."

"Perhaps it's only my fancy," conceded Miss Drewitt, "but I always think that I can see a likeness."

"There isn't the slightest resemblance in the world," said the captain. "There isn't a single feature alike. Besides, haven't you ever noticed what a stupid expression Joseph has got?"

"Yes," said Miss Drewitt.

The captain scratched his ear and regarded her closely, but Miss Drewitt's face was statuesque in its repose.

"There—there's nothing wrong with your eyes, my dear?" he ventured, anxiously—"short sight or anything of that sort?"

"I don't think so," said his niece, gravely.

Captain Bowers shifted in his chair and, convinced that such a superficial observer must have overlooked many things, pointed out several admirable qualities in Edward Tredgold which he felt sure must have escaped her notice. The surprise with which Miss Drewitt greeted them all confirmed him in this opinion, and he was glad to think that he had called her attention to them ere it was too late.

"He's very popular in Binchester," he said, impressively.

"Chalk told me that he is surprised he has not been married before now, seeing the way that he is run after."

"Dear me!" said his niece, with suppressed viciousness.

The captain smiled. He resolved to stand out for a long engagement when Mr. Tredgold came to him, and to stipulate also that they should not leave Binchester. An admirer in London to whom his niece had once or twice alluded—forgetting to mention that he was only ten—began to fade into what the captain considered proper obscurity.

Mr. Edward Tredgold reaped some of the benefits of this conversation when he called a day or two afterwards. The captain was out, but, encouraged by Mr. Tasker, who represented that his return might be looked for at any moment, he waited for over an hour, and was on the point of departure when Miss Drewitt entered.

"I should think that you must be tired of waiting?" she said, when he had explained.

"I was just going," said Mr. Tredgold, as he resumed his seat. "If you had been five minutes later you would have found an empty chair. I suppose Captain Bowers won't be long now?"

"He might be," said the girl.

"I'll give him a little while longer if I may," said Mr. Tredgold. "I'm very glad now that I waited—very glad indeed."

There was so much meaning in his voice that Miss Drewitt felt compelled to ask the reason.

"Because I was tired when I came in and the rest has done me

good," explained Mr. Tredgold, with much simplicity. "Do you know that I sometimes think I work too hard?"

Miss Drewitt raised her eyebrows slightly and said, "Indeed! —I am very glad that you are rested," she added, after a pause.

"Thank you," said Mr. Tredgold, gratefully. "I came to see the captain about a card-table I've discovered for him. It's a Queen Anne, I believe; one of the best things I've ever seen. It's poked away in the back room of a cottage, and I only discovered it by accident."

"It's very kind of you," said Miss Drewitt, coldly, "but I don't think that my uncle wants any more furniture; the room is pretty full now."

"I was thinking of it for your room," said Mr. Tredgold.

"Thank you, but my room is full," said the girl, sharply.

"It would go in that odd little recess by the fireplace," continued the unmoved Mr. Tredgold. "We tried to get a small table for it before you came, but we couldn't see anything we fancied. I promised the captain I'd keep my eyes open for something."

Miss Drewitt looked at him with growing indignation, and wondered whether Mr. Chalk had added her to his list of the victims of Mr. Tredgold's blandishments.

"Why not buy it for yourself?" she demanded.

"No money," said Mr. Tredgold, shaking his head. "You forget that I lost two pounds to Chalk the other day, owing to your efforts."

"Well, I don't wish for it," said Miss Drewitt, firmly. "Please don't say anything to my uncle about it."

Mr. Tredgold looked disappointed. "As you please, of course," he remarked.

"Old things always seem a little bit musty," said the girl, softening a little. "I, should think that I saw the ghosts of dead and gone players sitting round the table. I remember reading a story about that once."

"Well, what about the other things?" said Mr. Tredgold. "Look at those old chairs, full of ghosts sitting piled up in each other's laps—there's no reason why you should only see one sitter at a time. Think of that beautifully-carved four-poster."

"My uncle bought that," said Miss Drewitt, somewhat irrelevantly.

"Yes, but I got it for him," said Mr. Tredgold. "You can't pick up a thing like that at a moment's notice—I had my eye on it for years; all the time old Brown was bedridden, in fact. I used to go and see him and take him tobacco, and he promised me that I should have it when he had done with it."

"Done with it?" repeated the girl, in a startled voice. "Did—did he get another one, then?"

Mr. Tredgold, roused from the pleasurable reminiscences of a collector, remembered himself suddenly. "Oh, yes, he got another one," he said, soothingly.

"Is—is he bedridden now?" inquired the girl.

"I haven't seen him for some time," said Mr. Tredgold,

truthfully. "He gave up smoking and—and then I didn't go to see him, you know."

"He's dead," said Miss Drewitt, shivering. "He died in— Oh, you are horrible!"

"That carving—" began Mr. Tredgold.

"Don't talk about it, please," said the indignant Miss Drewitt. "I can't understand why my uncle should have listened to your advice at all; you must have forced it on him. I'm sure he didn't know how you got it."

"Yes, he did," said the other. "In fact, it was intended for his room at first. He was quite pleased with it."

"Why did he alter his mind, then?" inquired the girl.

Mr. Tredgold looked suddenly at the opposite wall, but his lips quivered and his eyes watered. Miss Drewitt, reading these signs aright, was justly incensed.

"I don't believe it," she cried.

"He said that you didn't know and he did," said Mr. Tredgold, apologetically. "I talk too much. I'd no business to let out about old Brown, but I forgot for the moment—sailors are always prone to childish superstitions."

"Are you talking about my uncle?" inquired Miss Drewitt, with ominous calm.

"They were his own words," said the other.

Miss Drewitt, feeling herself baffled, sat for some time wondering how to find fault politely with the young man before her. Her mind was full of subject-matter, but the politeness easily

eluded her. She threw out after a time the suggestion that his presence at the bedside of sick people was not likely to add to their comfort.

Captain Bowers entered before the aggrieved Mr. Tredgold could think of a fitting reply, and after a hasty greeting insisted upon his staying for a cup of tea. By a glance in the visitor's direction and a faint smile Miss Drewitt was understood to endorse the invitation.

The captain's satisfaction at finding them together was complete, but a little misunderstanding was caused all round, when Mr. Tasker came in with the tea, by the series of nods and blinks by which the captain strove to call his niece's attention to various facial and other differences between his servant and their visitor. Mr. Tredgold, after standing it for some time, created a little consternation by inquiring whether he had got a smut on his nose.

The captain was practically the only talker at tea, but the presence of two attentive listeners prevented him from discovering the fact. He described his afternoon's ramble at such length that it was getting late by the time they had finished.

"Stay and smoke a pipe," he said, as he sought his accustomed chair.

Mr. Tredgold assented in the usual manner by saying that he ought to be going, and instead of one pipe smoked three or four. The light failed and the lamp was lit, but he still stayed on until the sound of subdued but argumentative voices beyond the drawn

blind apprised them of other visitors. The thin tones of Mr. Chalk came through the open window, apparently engaged in argument with a bear. A faint sound of hustling and growling, followed by a gentle bumping against the door, seemed to indicate that he—or perhaps the bear—was having recourse to physical force.

"Come in," cried the captain.

The door opened and Mr. Chalk, somewhat flushed, entered, leading Mr. Stobell. The latter gentleman seemed in a surly and reluctant frame of mind, and having exchanged greetings subsided silently into a chair and sat eyeing Mr. Chalk, who, somewhat nervous as to his reception after so long an absence, plunged at once into conversation.

"I thought I should find you here," he said, pleasantly, to Edward Tredgold.

"Why?" demanded Mr. Tredgold, with what Mr. Chalk thought unnecessary abruptness.

"Well—well, because you generally are here, I suppose," he said, somewhat taken aback.

Mr. Tredgold favoured him with a scowl, and a somewhat uncomfortable silence ensued.

"Stobell wanted to see you again," said Mr. Chalk, turning to the captain. "He's done nothing but talk about you ever since he was here last."

Captain Bowers said he was glad to see him; Mr. Stobell returned the courtesy with an odd noise in his throat and a strange glare at Mr. Chalk.

"I met him to-night," continued that gentleman, "and nothing would do for him but to come on here."

It was evident from the laboured respiration of the ardent Mr. Stobell, coupled with a word or two which had filtered through the window, that the ingenious Mr. Chalk was using him as a stalking-horse. From the fact that Mr. Stobell made no denial it was none the less evident, despite the growing blackness of his appearance, that he was a party to the arrangement. The captain began to see the reason.

"It's all about that island," explained Mr. Chalk; "he can talk of nothing else."

The captain suppressed a groan, and Mr. Tredgold endeavoured, but without success, to exchange smiles with Miss Drewitt.

"Aye, aye," said the captain, desperately.

"He's as eager as a child that's going to its first pantomime," continued Mr. Chalk.

Mr. Stobell's appearance was so alarming that he broke off and eyed him with growing uneasiness.

"You were talking about a pantomime," said Mr. Tredgold, after a long pause.

Mr. Chalk cast an imploring glance at Mr. Stobell to remind him of their compact, and resumed.

"Talks of nothing else," he said, watching his friend, "and can't sleep for thinking of it."

"That's bad," said Mr. Tredgold, sympathetically. "Has he

tried shutting his eyes and counting sheep jumping over a stile?"

"No, he ain't," said Mr. Stobell, exploding suddenly, and turning a threatening glance on the speaker. "And what's more," he added, in more ordinary tones, "he ain't going to."

"We—we've been thinking of that trip again," interposed Mr. Chalk, hurriedly. "The more Stobell thinks of it the more he likes it. You know what you said the last time we were here?"

The captain wrinkled his brows and looked at him inquiringly. "Told us to go and find the island," Mr. Chalk reminded him. "You said, 'I've shown you a map of the island; now go and find it.'"

"Oh, aye," said the captain, with a laugh, "so I did."

"Stobell was wondering," continued Mr. Chalk, "whether you couldn't give us just a little bit more of a hint, without breaking your word, of course."

"I don't see how it could be done," replied the captain, pondering; "a promise is a promise."

Mr. Chalk's face fell. He moved his chair aside mechanically to make room for Mr. Tasker, who had entered with a tray and glasses, and sat staring at the floor. Then he raised his eyes and met a significant glance from Mr. Stobell.

"I suppose we may have another look at the map?" he said, softly; "just a glance to freshen our memories."

The captain, who had drawn his chair to the table to preside over the tray, looked up impatiently.

"No," he said, brusquely.

Mr. Chalk looked hurt. "I'm very sorry," he said, in surprise at the captain's tone. "You showed it to us the other day, and I didn't think—"

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