

# **WILLIAM WYMARK JACOBS**

SKILLED ASSISTANCE

# **William Wymark Jacobs**

## **Skilled Assistance**

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Skilled Assistance / Ship's Company, Part 9.:*

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## Skilled Assistance / Ship's Company, Part 9

### SKILLED ASSISTANCE

The night-watchman, who had left his seat on the jetty to answer the gate-bell, came back with disgust written on a countenance only too well designed to express it.

"If she's been up 'ere once in the last week to, know whether the *Silvia* is up she's been four or five times," he growled. "He's forty- seven if he's a day; 'is left leg is shorter than 'is right, and he talks with a stutter. When she's with 'im you'd think as butter wouldn't melt in 'er mouth; but the way she talked to me just now you'd think I was paid a-purpose to wait on her. I asked 'er at last wot she thought I was here for, and she said she didn't know, and nobody else neither. And afore she went off she told the potman from the 'Albion,' wot was listening, that I was known all over Wapping as the Sleeping Beauty.

"She ain't the fust I've 'ad words with, not by a lot. They're all the same; they all start in a nice, kind, soapy sort o' way, and, as soon as they don't get wot they want, fly into a temper and ask me who, I think I am. I told one woman once not to be silly, and

I shall never forget it as long as I live-never. For all I know, she's wearing a bit o' my 'air in a locket to this day, and very likely boasting that I gave it to her.

"Talking of her reminds me of another woman. There was a Cap'n Pinner, used to trade between 'ere and Hull on a schooner named the Snipe. Nice little craft she was, and 'e was a very nice feller. Many and many's the pint we've 'ad together, turn and turn-about, and the on'y time we ever 'ad a cross word was when somebody hid his clay pipe in my beer and 'e was foolish enough to think I'd done it.

"He 'ad a nice little cottage, 'e told me about, near Hull, and 'is wife's father, a man of pretty near seventy, lived with 'em. Well-off the old man was, and, as she was his only daughter, they looked to 'ave all his money when he'd gorn. Their only fear was that 'e might marry agin, and, judging from wot 'e used to tell me about the old man, I thought it more than likely.

"'If it wasn't for my missis he'd ha' been married over and over agin,' he ses one day. 'He's like a child playing with gunpowder.'

"'Ow would it be to let 'im burn hissself a bit?' I ses.

"'If you was to see some o' the gunpowder he wants to play with, you wouldn't talk like that,' ses the cap'n. 'You'd know better. The on'y thing is to keep 'em apart, and my pore missis is wore to a shadder a- doing of it.'

"It was just about a month arter that that he brought the old man up to London with 'im. They 'ad some stuff to put out at Smith's Wharf, t'other side of the river, afore they came to us,

and though they was on'y there four or five days, it was long enough for that old man to get into trouble.

"The skipper told me about it ten minutes arter they was made snug in the inner berth 'ere. He walked up and down like a man with a raging toothache, and arter follering 'im up and down the wharf till I was tired out, I discovered that 'is father-in-law 'ad got 'imself mixed up with a widder-woman ninety years old and weighing twenty stun. Arter he 'ad cooled down a bit, and I 'ad given 'im a few little pats on the shoulder, 'e made it forty-eight years old and fourteen stun.

"'He's getting ready to go and meet her now,' he ses, 'and wot my missis'll say to me, I don't know.'

"His father-in-law came up on deck as 'e spoke, and began to brush 'imself all over with a clothesbrush. Nice-looking little man 'e was, with blue eyes, and a little white beard, cut to a point, and dressed up in a serge suit with brass buttons, and a white yachting cap. His real name was Mr. Finch, but the skipper called 'im Uncle Dick, and he took such a fancy to me that in five minutes I was calling 'im Uncle Dick too.

"'Time I was moving,' he ses, by and by. 'I've got an app'intment.'

"'Oh! who with?' ses the skipper, pretending not to know.

"'Friend o' mine, in the army,' ses the old man, with a wink at me. 'So long.'

"He went off as spry as a boy, and as soon as he'd gorn the skipper started walking back'ards and for'ards agin, and raving.

"'Let's 'ope as he's on'y amusing 'imself,' I ses.

"'Wait till you see 'er,' ses the skipper; 'then you won't talk foolishness.'

"As it 'appened she came back with Uncle Dick that evening, to see 'im safe, and I see at once wot sort of a woman it was. She 'adn't been on the wharf five minutes afore you'd ha' thought it belonged to 'er, and when she went and sat on the schooner it seemed to be about 'arf its size. She called the skipper Tom, and sat there as cool as you please holding Uncle Dick's 'and, and patting it.

"I took the skipper round to the 'Bull's Head' arter she 'ad gorn, and I wouldn't let 'im say a word until he had 'ad two pints. He felt better then, and some o' the words 'e used surprised me.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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