

Good Intentions Ship's Company, Part 3.

W.W. Jacobs

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SHIP'S COMPANY

By W.W. Jacobs

GOOD INTENTIONS

"Jealousy; that's wot it is," said the night-watchman, trying to sneer-- "pure jealousy." He had left his broom for a hurried half-pint at the "Bull's Head"--left it leaning in a negligent attitude against the warehouse-wall; now, lashed to the top of the crane at the jetty end, it pointed its soiled bristles towards the evening sky and defied capture.

"And I know who it is, and why 'e's done it," he continued. "Fust and last, I don't suppose I was talking to the gal for more than ten minutes, and 'arf of that was about the weather.

"I don't suppose anybody 'as suffered more from jealousy than wot I 'ave:

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Other people's jealousy, I mean. Ever since I was married the missis has been setting traps for me, and asking people to keep an eye on me. I blacked one of the eyes once--like a fool--and the chap it belonged to made up a tale about me that I ain't lived down yet.

"Years ago, when I was out with the missis one evening, I saved a gal's life for her. She slipped as she was getting off a bus, and I caught 'er just in time. Fine strapping gal she was, and afore I could get my balance we 'ad danced round and round 'arfway acrost the road with our arms round each other's necks, and my missis watching us from the pavement. When we were safe, she said the gal 'adn't slipped at all; and, as soon as the gal 'ad got 'er breath, I'm blest if she didn't say so too.

"You can't argufy with jealous people, and you can't shame 'em. When I told my missis once that I should never dream of being jealous of her, instead of up and thanking me for it, she spoilt the best frying-pan we ever had. When the widder-woman next-door but two and me 'ad rheumatics at the same time, she went and asked the doctor whether it was catching.

"The worse trouble o' that kind I ever got into was all through trying to do somebody else a kindness. I went out o' my way to do it; I wasted the whole evening for the sake of other people, and got into such trouble over it that even now it gives me the cold shivers to think of.

"Cap'n Tarbell was the man I tried to do a good turn to; a man what used to be master of a ketch called the *Lizzie and Annie*, trading between 'ere and Shoremouth. 'Artful Jack' he used to be called, and if ever a man deserved the name, he did. A widder-man of about fifty, and as silly as a boy of fifteen. He 'ad been talking of getting married agin for over ten years, and, thinking it was only talk, I didn't give 'im any good advice. Then he told me one night that 'e was keeping company with a woman named Lamb, who lived at a place near Shoremouth. When I asked 'im what she looked like, he said that she had a good 'art, and, knowing wot that meant, I wasn't at all surprised when he told me some time arter that 'e had been a silly fool.

"Well, if she's got a good 'art,' I ses, 'p'r'aps she'll let you go.'

"Talk sense,' he ses. 'It ain't good enough for that. Why, she worships the ground I tread on. She thinks there is nobody like me in the whole wide world.'

"Let's 'ope she'll think so arter you're married,' I ses, trying to cheer him up.

"I'm not going to get married,' he ses. 'Leastways, not to 'er. But 'ow to get out of it without breaking her 'art and being had up for breach o' promise I can't think. And if the other one got to 'ear of it, I should lose her too.'

"Other one?' I ses, 'wot other one?'

"Cap'n Tarbell shook his 'ead and smiled like a silly gal.

"She fell in love with me on top of a bus in the Mile End Road,' he ses. 'Love at fust sight it was. She's a widder lady with a nice little 'ouse at Bow, and plenty to live on-her 'usband having been a builder. I don't know what to do. You see, if I married both of 'em it's sure to be found

out sooner or later.'

""You'll be found out as it is,' I ses, 'if you ain't careful. I'm surprised at you.'

""Yes,' he ses, getting up and walking backwards and forwards; 'especially as Mrs. Plimmer is always talking about coming down to see the ship. One thing is, the crew won't give me away; they've been with me too long for that. P'r'aps you could give me a little advice, Bill.'

"I did. I talked to that man for an hour and a'arf, and when I 'ad finished he said he didn't want that kind of advice at all. Wot 'e wanted was for me to tell 'im 'ow to get rid of Miss Lamb and marry Mrs. Plimmer without anybody being offended or having their feelings hurt.

"Mrs. Plimmer came down to the ship the very next evening. Fine-looking woman she was, and, wot with 'er watch and chain and di'mond rings and brooches and such-like, I should think she must 'ave 'ad five or six pounds' worth of jewell'ry on 'er. She gave me a very pleasant smile, and I gave 'er one back, and we stood chatting there like old friends till at last she tore 'erself away and went on board the ship.

"She came off by and by hanging on Cap'n Tarbell's arm. The cap'n was dressed up in 'is Sunday clothes, with one of the cleanest collars on I 'ave ever seen in my life, and smoking a cigar that smelt like an escape of gas. He came back alone at ha'past eleven that night, and 'e told me that if it wasn't for the other one down Shoremouth way he should be the 'appiest man on earth.

""Mrs. Plimmer's only got one fault,' he ses, shaking his 'cad, 'and that's jealousy. If she got to know of Laura Lamb, it would be all U.P. It makes me go cold all over when I think of it. The only thing is to get married as quick as I can; then she can't help 'erself.'

""It wouldn't prevent the other one making a fuss, though,' I ses.

""No,' he ses, very thoughtfully, 'it wouldn't. I shall 'ave to do something there, but wot, I don't know.'

"He climbed on board like a man with a load on his mind, and arter a look at the sky went below and forgot both 'is troubles in sleep.

"Mrs. Plimmer came down to the wharf every time the ship was up, arter that. Sometimes she'd spend the evening aboard, and sometimes they'd go off and spend it somewhere else. She 'ad a fancy for the cabin, I think, and the cap'n told me that she 'ad said when they were married she was going to sail with 'im sometimes.

""But it ain't for six months yet,' he ses, 'and a lot o' things might 'appen to the other one in that time, with luck.'

"It was just about a month arter that that 'e came to me one evening trembling all over. I 'ad just come on dooty, and afore I could ask 'im wot was the matter he 'ad got me in the 'Bull's Head' and stood me three 'arf-pints, one arter the other.

""I'm ruined,' he ses in a 'usky whisper; 'I'm done for. Why was wimmen made? Wot good are they? Fancy 'ow bright and 'appy we should all be without 'em.'

"I started to p'int out one or two things to 'im that he seemed to 'ave forgot, but 'e wouldn't listen. He was so excited that he didn't seem to know wot 'e was doing, and arter he 'ad got three more 'arf-pints waiting for me, all in a row on the counter, I 'ad to ask 'im whether he thought I was there to do conjuring tricks, or wot?"

"There was a letter waiting for me in the office,' he ses. 'From Miss Lamb--she's in London. She's coming to pay me a surprise visit this evening--I know who'll get the surprise. Mrs. Plimmer's coming too.'

"I gave 'im one of my 'arf-pints and made 'im drink it. He chucked the pot on the floor when he 'ad done, in a desprit sort o' way, and 'im and the landlord 'ad a little breeze then that did 'im more good than wot the beer 'ad. When we came outside 'e seemed more contented with 'imself, but he shook his 'ead and got miserable as soon as we got to the wharf agin.

"S'pose they both come along at the same time,' he ses. 'Wot's to be done?"

"I shut the gate with a bang and fastened the wicket. Then I turned to 'im with a smile.

"I'm watchman 'ere,' I ses, 'and I lets in who I thinks I will. This ain't a public 'ighway,' I ses; 'it's a wharf.'

"Bill,' he ses, 'you're a genius.'

"If Miss Lamb comes 'ere asking arter you,' I ses, 'I shall say you've gone out for the evening.'

"Wot about her letter?' he ses.

"You didn't 'ave it,' I ses, winking at 'im.

"And suppose she waits about outside for me, and Mrs. Plimmer wants me to take 'er out?' he ses, shivering. 'She's a fearful obstinate woman; and she'd wait a week for me.'

"He kept peeping up the road while we talked it over, and then we both see Mrs. Plimmer coming along. He backed on to the wharf and pulled out 'is purse.

"Bill,' he ses, gabbling as fast as 'e could gabble, 'here's five or six shillings. If the other one comes and won't go away tell 'er I've gone to the Pagoda Music-'all and you'll take 'er to me, keep 'er out all the evening some'ow, if you can, if she comes back too soon keep 'er in the office.'

"And wot about leaving the wharf and my dooty?' I ses, staring.

"I'll put Joe on to keep watch for you,' he ses, pressing the money in my 'and. 'I rely on you, Bill, and I'll never forget you. You won't lose by it, trust me.'

"He nipped off and tumbled aboard the ship afore I could say a word. I just stood there staring arter 'im and feeling the money, and afore I could make up my mind Mrs. Plimmer came up.

"I thought I should never ha' got rid of 'er. She stood there chatting and smiling, and seemed to forget all about the cap'n, and every moment I was afraid that the other one might come up. At last she went off, looking behind 'er, to the ship, and then I went outside and put my back up agin the gate and waited.

"I 'ad hardly been there ten minutes afore the other one came along. I saw 'er stop and speak to a policeman, and then she came straight over to me.

"I want to see Cap'n Tarbell,' she ses.

"Cap'n Tarbell?' I ses, very slow; 'Cap'n Tarbell 'as gone off for the evening.'

"Gone off!' she ses, staring. 'But he can't 'ave. Are you sure?'

"Sartain,' I ses. Then I 'ad a bright idea. 'And there's a letter come for 'im,' I ses.

"Oh, dear!' she ses. 'And I thought it would be in plenty of time. Well, I must go on the ship and wait for 'im, I suppose.'

"If I 'ad only let 'er go I should ha' saved myself a lot o' trouble, and the man wot deserved it would ha' got it. Instead o' that I told 'er about the music-'all, and arter carrying on like a silly gal o' seventeen and saying she couldn't think of it, she gave way and said she'd go with me to find 'im. I was all right so far as clothes went as it happened. Mrs. Plimmer said once that I got more and more dressy every time she saw me, and my missis 'ad said the same thing only in a different way. I just took a peep through the wicket and saw that Joe 'ad taken up my dooty, and then we set off.

"I said I wasn't quite sure which one he'd gone to, but we'd try the Pagoda Music-'all fust, and we went there on a bus from Aldgate. It was the fust evening out I 'ad 'ad for years, and I should 'ave enjoyed it if it 'adn't been for Miss Lamb. Wotever Cap'n Tarbell could ha' seen in 'er, I can't think.

"She was quiet, and stupid, and bad-tempered. When the bus-conductor came round for the fares she 'adn't got any change; and when we got to the hall she did such eggsterrordinary things trying to find 'er pocket that I tried to look as if she didn't belong to me. When she left off she smiled and said she was farther off than ever, and arter three or four wot was standing there 'ad begged 'er to have another try, I 'ad to pay for the two.

"The 'ouse was pretty full when we got in, but she didn't take no notice of that. Her idea was that she could walk about all over the place looking for Cap'n Tarbell, and it took three men in buttons and a policeman to persuade 'er different. We were pushed into a couple o' seats at last, and then she started finding fault with me.

"Where is Cap'n Tarbell?' she ses. 'Why don't you find him?'

"I'll go and look for 'im in the bar presently,' I ses. 'He's sure to be there, arter a turn or two.'

"I managed to keep 'er quiet for 'arf an hour--with the 'elp of the people wot sat near us--and then I 'ad to go. I 'ad a glass o' beer to pass the time away, and, while I was drinking it, who should come up but the cook and one of the hands from the <i>Lizzie and Annie</i>.

"We saw you,' ses the cook, winking; 'didn't we Bob?'

"Yes,' ses Bob, shaking his silly 'ead; 'but it wasn't no surprise to me. I've 'ad my eye on 'im for a long time past.'

"I thought 'e was married,' ses the cook.

"So he is,' ses Bob, 'and to the best wife in London. I know where she lives. Mine's a bottle o' Bass,' he ses, turning to me.

"So's mine,' ses the cook.

"I paid for two bottles for 'em, and arter that they said that they'd 'ave a whisky and soda apiece just to show as there was no ill-feeling.

"It's very good,' ses Bob, sipping his, 'but it wants a sixpenny cigar to go with it. It's been the dream o' my life to smoke a sixpenny cigar.'

"So it 'as mine,' ses the cook, 'but I don't suppose I ever shall.'

"They both coughed arter that, and like a goodnatured fool I stood 'em a sixpenny cigar apiece, and I 'ad just turned to go back to my seat when up come two more hands from the Lizzie and Annie.

"Halloa, watchman!' ses one of 'em. 'Why, I thought you was a-taking care of the wharf.'

"He's got something better than the wharf to take care of,' ses Bob, grinning.

"I know; we see 'im,' ses the other chap. 'We've been watching 'is goings-on for the last 'arf-hour; better than a play it was.'

"I stopped their mouths with a glass o' bitter each, and went back to my seat while they was drinking it. I told Miss Lamb in whispers that 'e wasn't there, but I'd 'ave another look for him by and by. If she'd ha' whispered back it would ha' been all right, but she wouldn't, and, arter a most unpleasant scene, she walked out with her 'ead in the air follered by me with two men in buttons and a policeman.

"O' course, nothing would do but she must go back to the wharf and wait for Cap'n Tarbell, and all the way there I was wondering wot would 'appen if she went on board and found 'im there with Mrs. Plimmer. However, when we got there I persuaded 'er to go into the office while I went aboard to see if I could find out where he was, and three minutes arterwards he was standing with me behind the galley, trembling all over and patting me on the back.

"Keep 'er in the office a little longer,' he ses, in a whisper. 'The other's going soon. Keep 'er there as long as you can.'

"And suppose she sees you and Mrs. Plimmer passing the window?' I ses.

"That'll be all right; I'm going to take 'er to the stairs in the ship's boat,' he ses. 'It's more romantic.'

"He gave me a little punch in the ribs, playfullike, and, arter telling me I was worth my weight in gold-dust, went back to the cabin agin.

"I told Miss Lamb that the cabin was locked up, but that Cap'n Tarbell was expected back in about 'arf-an-hour's time. Then I found 'er an old newspaper and a comfortable chair and sat down to wait. I couldn't go on the wharf for fear she'd want to come with me, and I sat there as patient as I could, till a little clicking noise made us both start up and look at each other.

"'Wot's that?' she ses, listening.

"'It sounded,' I ses 'it sounded like somebody locking the door.'

"I went to the door to try it just as somebody dashed past the window with their 'ead down. It was locked fast, and arter I had 'ad a try at it and Miss Lamb had 'ad a try at it, we stood and looked at each other in surprise.

"'Somebody's playing a joke on us,' I ses.

"'Joke!' ses Miss Lamb. 'Open that door at once. If you don't open it I'll call for the police.'

"She looked at the windows, but the iron bars wot was strong enough to keep the vans outside was strong enough to keep 'er in, and then she gave way to such a fit o' temper that I couldn't do nothing with 'er.

"'Cap'n Tarbell can't be long now,' I ses, as soon as I could get a word in. 'We shall get out as soon as e comes.'

"She flung 'erself down in the chair agin with 'er back to me, and for nearly three-quarters of an hour we sat there without a word. Then, to our joy, we 'eard footsteps turn in at the gate. Quick footsteps they was. Somebody turned the handle of the door, and then a face looked in at the window that made me nearly jump out of my boots in surprise. A face that was as white as chalk with temper, and a bonnet cocked over one eye with walking fast. She shook 'er fist at me, and then she shook it at Miss Lamb.

"'Who's that?' ses Miss Lamb.

"'My missis,' I ses, in a loud voice. 'Thank goodness she's come.'

"'Open the door!' ses my missis, with a screech.

"'OPEN THE DOOR!'

"'I can't,' I ses. 'Somebody's locked it. This is Cap'n Tarbell's young lady.'

"'I'll Cap'n Tarbell 'er when I get in!' ses my wife. 'You too. I'll music-'all you! I'll learn you to go gallivanting about! Open the door!'

"She walked up and down the alley-way in front of the window waiting for

me just like a lion walking up and down its cage waiting for its dinner, and I made up my mind then and there that I should 'ave to make a clean breast of it and let Cap'n Tarbell get out of it the best way he could. I wasn't going to suffer for him.

"Ow long my missis walked up and down there I don't know. It seemed ages to me; but at last I 'eard footsteps and voices, and Bob and the cook and the other two chaps wot we 'ad met at the music'all came along and stood grinning in at the window.

"Somebody's locked us in,' I ses. 'Go and fetch Cap'n Tarbell.'

"Cap'n Tarbell?' ses the cook. 'You don't want to see 'im. Why, he's the last man in the world you ought to want to see! You don't know 'ow jealous he is.'

"You go and fetch 'im, I ses. "Ow dare you talk like that afore my wife!

"I dursen't take the resposnibility,' ses the cook. 'It might mean bloodshed.'

"You go and fetch 'im,' ses my missis. 'Never mind about the bloodshed. I don't. Open the door!'

"She started banging on the door agin, and arter talking among themselves for a time they moved off to the ship. They came back in three or four minutes, and the cook 'eld up something in front of the window.

"The boy 'ad got it,' he ses. 'Now shall I open the door and let your missis in, or would you rather stay where you are in peace and quietness?'

"I saw my missis jump at the key, and Bob and the others, laughing fit to split their sides, 'olding her back. Then I heard a shout, and the next moment Cap'n Tarbell came up and asked 'em wot the trouble was about.

"They all started talking at once, and then the cap'n, arter one look in at the window, threw up his 'ands and staggered back as if 'e couldn't believe his eyesight. He stood dazed-like for a second or two, and then 'e took the key out of the cook's 'and, opened the door, and walked in. The four men was close be'ind 'im, and, do all she could, my missis couldn't get in front of 'em.

"Watchman!' he ses, in a stuck-up voice, 'wot does this mean? Laura Lamb! wot 'ave you got to say for yourself? Where 'ave you been all the evening?'

"She's been to a music-'all with Bill,' ses the cook. 'We saw 'em.'

"WOT?' ses the cap'n, falling back again. 'It can't be!'

"It was them,' ses my wife. 'A little boy brought me a note telling me. You let me go; it's my husband, and I want to talk to 'im.'

"It's all right,' I ses, waving my 'and at Miss Lamb, wot was going to speak, and smiling at my missis, wot was trying to get at me.

"We went to look for you,' ses Miss Lamb, very quick. 'He said you were

at the music-'all, and as you 'adn't got my letter I thought it was very likely.'

"'But I did get your letter,' ses the cap'n.

"'He said you didn't,' ses Miss Lamb.

"'Look 'ere,' I ses. 'Why don't you keep quiet and let me explain? I can explain everything.'

"'I'm glad o' that, for your sake, my man,' ses the cap'n, looking at me very hard. 'I 'ope you will be able to explain 'ow it was you came to leave the wharf for three hours.'

"I saw it all then. If I split about Mrs. Plimmer, he'd split to the guv'nor about my leaving my dooty, and I should get the sack. I thought I should ha' choked, and, judging by the way they banged me on the back, Bob and the cook thought so too. They 'elped me to a chair when I got better, and I sat there 'elpless while the cap'n went on talking.

"'I'm no mischief-maker,' he ses; 'and, besides, p'r'aps he's been punished enough. And as far as I'm concerned he can take this lady to a music-'all every night of the week if 'e likes. I've done with her.'

"There was an eggsterrordinary noise from where my missis was standing; like the gurgling water makes sometimes running down the kitchen sink at 'ome, only worse. Then they all started talking together, and 'arf-a-dozen times or more Miss Lamb called me to back 'er up in wot she was saying, but I only shook my 'ead, and at last, arter tossing her 'ead at Cap'n Tarbell and telling 'im she wouldn't 'ave 'im if he'd got fifty million a year, the five of 'em 'eld my missis while she went off.

"They gave 'er ten minutes' start, and then Cap'n Tarbell, arter looking at me and shaking his 'ead, said he was afraid they must be going.

"'And I 'ope this night'll be a lesson to you,' he ses. 'Don't neglect your dooty again. I shall keep my eye on you, and if you be'ave yourself I sha'n't say anything. Why, for all you know or could ha' done the wharf might ha' been burnt to the ground while you was away!'

"He nodded to his crew, and they all walked out laughing and left me alone--with the missis."

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