

# Light Freights

By W. W. JACOBS

## A Marked Man

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"Tattooing is a gift," said the night-watchman firmly. "It's to be a gift, as you can well see. A man's to know wot 'e is going to tattoo an' 'ow to do it; there's no rubbing out or altering. It's a gift, an' it can't be learnt. I knew a man once as used to tattoo cabin-boy all over every y'ge trying to learn. 'E was a slow, pains-taking sort o' man, and the langwidg those boys used to use while 'e was at work would 'ardly be believed, but 'e 'ad to give up trying arter about fifteen years and take to crochetwork instead."

"Some men won't be tattooed at all, being proud o' their skins or skin-like, and for a good many years Ginger Dick, a man I've spoke to you of before, was one o' that sort. Like many red-arsed men 'e 'ad a very white skin, which 'e was very proud of, but at last, owing to a unforntit idea o' masking 'is fortin, 'e let 'isself be done."

"It come about in this way: Him and old Sam Small and Peter Russet 'ad been paid off from their ship and was 'aving a very 'appy, pleasant time ashore. They was careful men in a way, and they 'ad taken a room down East India Road way, and paid up the rent for a month. It come cheaper than a lodg-ing-ouse, besides being a bit more private and respectable, a thing old Sam was always very pernickier about."

"They 'ad been ashore about three weeks when one day old Sam and Peter went off alone becos Ginger said 'e wasn't going with 'em."

"'Where've you been?' ses Ginger, when they returned."

"'Business,' ses Sam. "We must 'ave another man in it, Peter," he ses, "and, wot's more, 'e must 'ave ginger-colored 'air. That being so, it's only right and proper that our dear old pal Ginger should 'ave the 'ust offer."

"It wasn't often that Sam was so affected, and Ginger couldn't make it out at all. Every since 'e known 'im the old man 'ad been full o' plans o' making money without earning it, "We've been in a little pub down Bow way, me an' Peter," ses Sam, "and 'e'll tell you more about it if you promise to join us an' go shares. It's 'eep' by a widow woman whose on'y son—red-arsed son—went to sea 13.



"Wot?" screams Yinger. "Tattoo Me!"

Years ago, at the age o' 14, an' was never 'eard of afterwards. Seeing we was sailor-men, she told us all about it, an' 'ow she still 'opes for him to walk into 'er arms afore she dies."

"She dreamt a fortuit aga that 'e turned up safe and sound, with red whiskers," ses Peter.

"Ginger Dick sat up and looked at 'em without a word; then 'e got out, an' pushing old Sam out of the way began to dress, and at last 'e turned round and asked Sam whether he was drunk or only mad.

"'All right,' ses Sam; 'if you won't take it on we'll find somebody as will, that's all; there's no call to get huffy about it. You an't the on'y red-arsed man in the world.'

"Ginger coughed and looked thoughtful.

"It sounds all right, mates' ses at last, but I don't see 'ow we're to go to work. I don't want to get locked up for deceiving."

"You can't get locked up," ses Sam; "if you let 'er discover you and chain you, 'ow can you get locked up for it? We shall go in an' see her again, and larn all there is to larn, especially about the tattoo marks, and then—

"'Wot?' screams Ginger. "Spile my skin with a lot o' beastly blue marks! Not me, not if I know it. I'd like to see anybody try it, that's all."

"They started on 'im agin next day, but all Sam and Peter could say didn't move 'im, although Sam could see feelin' about the joy of a pure widder woman gettin' her son back agin after all these years that's nearly cried."

"They went down agin to the pub that evening, and Ginger, who said 'e was curious to see, wanted to go 'on' Sam, who still 'ad 'opes of 'im.

wouldn't 'ear of it, but at last it was arranged that 'e wasn't to go inside, but should take a peep through the door. They got on a tram at Aldgate, and Ginger didn't like it becos Sam and Peter talked it over between themselves in whispers and pointed out likely red-arsed men in the road.

"And 'e didn't like it when they got to the Blue Lion, and Sam and Peter went in and left 'em outside, peeping through the door. The landlady shook 'ands with them quite friendly, and the barmaid, a fine-looking girl, seemed to take a lot o' notice of Peter. Ginger waited about outside for nearly a couple of hours, and at last they came out, talking and larfing, with Peter wearing a white rose wot 'e had given 'im.

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