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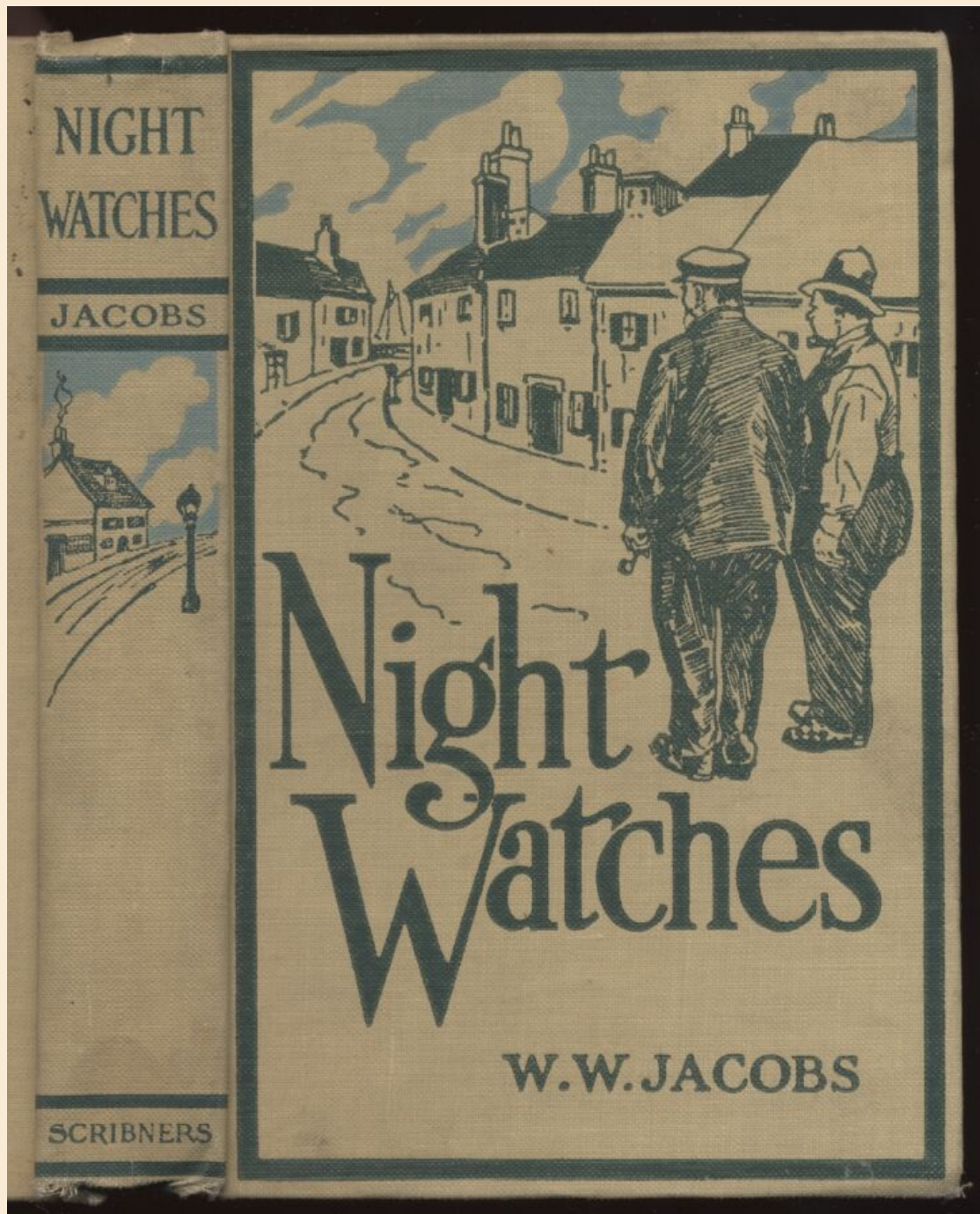
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK EASY MONEY ***



NIGHT WATCHES

BY
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ILLUSTRATED BY STANLEY DAVIS

EASY MONEY

A lad of about twenty stepped ashore from the schooner Jane, and joining a girl, who had been avoiding for some ten minutes the ardent gaze of the night-watchman, set off arm-in-arm. The watchman rolled his eyes and shook his head slowly.

Nearly all his money on 'is back, he said, and what little bit 'e's got over he'll spend on 'er. And three months arter they're married he'll wonder wot 'e ever saw in her. If a man marries he wishes he 'adn't, and if he doesn't marry he wishes he 'ad. That's life.

Looking at them two young fools reminds me of a nevy of Sam Small's; a man I think I've spoke to you of afore. As a rule Sam didn't talk much about 'is relations, but there was a sister of 'is in the country wot 'e was rather fond of because 'e 'adn't seen 'er for twenty years. She 'ad got a boy wot 'ad just got a job in London, and when 'e wrote and told 'er he was keeping company with the handsomest and loveliest and best 'arted gal in the whole wide world, she wrote to Sam about it and asked 'im to give 'is nevy some good advice.

Sam 'ad just got back from China and was living with Peter Russet and Ginger Dick as usual, and arter reading the letter about seven times and asking Ginger how 'e spelt "minx," 'e read the letter out loud to them and asked 'em what they thought about it.

Ginger shook his 'ead, and, arter thinking a bit, Peter shook his too.

"She's caught 'im rather young," ses Ginger.

"They get it bad at that age too," ses Peter. "When I was twenty, there was a gal as I was fond of, and a regiment couldn't ha' parted us."

"Wot did part you then?" ses Sam.

"Another gal," ses Peter; "a gal I took a fancy to, that's wot did it."

"I was nearly married when I was twenty," ses Ginger, with a far-away look in his eyes. "She was the most beautiful gal I ever saw in my life; she 'ad one 'undred pounds a year of 'er own and she couldn't bear me out of her sight. If a thump acrost the chest would do that cough of yours any good, Sam—"

"Don't take no notice of 'im, Ginger," ses Peter. "Why didn't you marry 'er?"

"'Cos I was afraid she might think I was arter 'er money," ses Ginger, getting a little bit closer to Sam.

Peter 'ad another turn then, and him and Ginger kept on talking about gals whose 'arts they 'ad broke till Sam didn't know what to do with 'imself.

"I'll just step round and see my nevy, while you and Peter are amusing each other," he ses at last. "I'll ask 'im to come round to-morrow and then you can give 'im good advice."

The nevy came round next evening. Bright, cheerful young chap 'e was, and he agreed with everything they said. When Peter said as 'ow all gals was deceivers, he said he'd known it for years, but they was born that way and couldn't 'elp it; and when Ginger said that no man ought to marry afore he was fifty, he corrected 'im and made it fifty-five.

"I'm glad to 'ear you talk like that," ses Ginger.

"So am I," ses Peter.

"He's got his 'ead screwed on right," ses Sam, wot thought his sister 'ad made a mistake.

"I'm surprised when I look round at the wimmen men 'ave married," ses the nevy; "wot they could 'ave seen in them I can't think. Me and my young lady often laugh about it."

"Your wot?" ses Sam, pretending to be very surprised.

"My young lady," ses the nevy.

Sam gives a cough. "I didn't know you'd got a young lady," he ses.

"Well, I 'ave," ses his nevy, "and we're going to be married at Christmas."

"But—but you ain't fifty-five," ses Ginger.

"I'm twenty-one," ses the nevy, "but my case is different. There isn't another young lady like mine in the world. She's different to all the others, and it ain't likely I'm going to let 'er be snapped up by somebody else. Fifty-five! Why, 'ow I'm to wait till Christmas I don't know. She's the prettiest and handsomest gal in the world; and she's the cleverest one I ever met. You ought to hear 'er laugh. Like music it is. You'd never forget it."

"Twenty-one is young," ses Ginger, shaking his 'ead. "'Ave you known 'er long?"

"Three months," ses the nevy. "She lives in the same street as I do. 'Ow it is she ain't been snapped up before, I can't think, but she told me that she didn't care for men till she saw me."

"They all say that," ses Ginger.

"If I've 'ad it said to me once, I've 'ad it said twenty times," ses Peter, nodding.

"They do it to flatter," ses old Sam, looking as if 'e knew all about it. "You wait till you are my age, Joe; then you'll know; why I should ha' been married dozens o' times if I 'adn't been careful."

"P'r'aps it was a bit on both sides," ses Joe, looking at 'is uncle. "P'r'aps they was careful too. If you only saw my young lady, you wouldn't talk like that. She's got the truthfulest eyes in the world. Large grey eyes like a child's, leastways sometimes they are grey and sometimes they are blue. It seems to depend on the light

somehow; I 'ave seen them when they was a brown-brownish-gold. And she smiles with 'er eyes."

"Hasn't she got a mouth?" ses Ginger, wot was getting a bit tired of it.

"You've been crossed in love," ses the nevy, staring at 'im. "That's wot's the matter with you. And looking at you, I don't wonder at it."

Ginger 'arf got up, but Sam gave him a look and 'e sat down agin, and then they all sat quiet while the nevy went on telling them about 'is gal.

"I should like to see 'er," ses his uncle at last.

"Call round for me at seven to-morrow night," ses the young 'un, "and I'll introduce you."

"We might look in on our way," ses Sam, arter Ginger and Peter 'ad both made eyes at 'im. "We're going out to spend the evening."

"The more the merrier," ses his nevy. "Well, so long; I expect she's waiting for me."

He got up and said good-bye, and arter he 'ad gorn, Sam and the other two shook their leads together and said what a pity it was to be twenty-one. Ginger said it made 'im sad to think of it, and Peter said 'ow any gal could look at a man under thirty, 'e couldn't think.

They all went round to the nevy's the next evening. They was a little bit early owing to Ginger's watch 'aving been set right by guess-work, and they 'ad to sit in a row on the nevy's bed waiting while 'e cleaned 'imself, and changed his clothes. Although it was only Wednesday 'e changed his collar, and he was so long making up 'is mind about his necktie that 'is uncle tried to make it up for him. By the time he 'ad finished Sam said it made 'im think it was Sunday.

Miss Gill was at 'ome when they got there, and all three of 'em was very much surprised that such a good-looking gal should take up with Sam's nevy. Ginger nearly said so, but Peter gave 'im a dig in the back just in time and 'e called him something under 'is breath instead.

"Why shouldn't we all make an evening of it?" ses Ginger, arter they 'ad been talking for about ten minutes, and the nevy 'ad looked at the clock three or four times.

"Because two's company," ses Mrs. Gill. "Why you was young yourself once. Can't you remember?"

"He's young now, mother," ses the gal, giving Ginger a nice smile.

"I tell you wot we might do," ses Mrs. Gill, putting 'er finger to her forehead and considering. "You and Joe go out and 'ave your evening, and me and these gentlemen'll go off together somewhere. I shall enjoy an outing; I ain't 'ad one for a long time."

Ginger said it would be very nice if she thought it wouldn't make 'er too tired, and afore Sam or Peter could think of anything to say, she was upstairs putting 'er bonnet on. They thought o' plenty to say while they was sitting alone with Ginger waiting for 'er.

"My idea was for the gal and your nevy to come too," ses pore Ginger. "Then I thought we might lose 'im and I would 'ave a little chat with the gal, and show 'er 'ow foolish she was."

"Well, you've done it now," ses Sam. "Spoilt our evening."

"P'r'aps good will come out of it," ses Ginger. "If the old lady takes a fancy to us we shall be able to come agin, and then to please you, Sam, I'll have a go to cut your nevy out."

Sam stared at 'im, and Peter stared too, and then they looked at each other and began to laugh till Ginger forgot where 'e was and offered to put Sam through the winder. They was still quarrelling under their breath and saying wot they'd like to do to each other when Mrs. Gill came downstairs. Dressed up to the nines she was, and they walked down the street with a feeling that everybody was looking at em.

One thing that 'elped to spoil the evening was that Mrs. Gill wouldn't go into public'ouses, but to make up for it she went into sweet-stuff shops three times and 'ad ices while they stood and watched 'er and wondered 'ow she could do it. And arter that she stopped at a place Poplar way, where there was a few swings and roundabouts and things. She was as skittish as a school-gal, and arter taking pore Sam on the roundabout till 'e didn't know whether he was on his 'eels or his 'ead, she got 'im into a boat-swing and swung 'im till he felt like a boy on 'is fust v'y'ge. Arter that she took 'im to the rifle gallery, and afore he had 'ad three shots the man

took the gun away from 'im and threatened to send for the police.

It was an expensive evening for all of them, but as Ginger said when they got 'ome they 'ad broken the ice, and he bet Peter Russet 'arf a dollar that afore two days 'ad passed he'd take the nevy's gal for a walk. He stepped round by 'imself the next arternoon and made 'imself agreeable to Mrs. Gill, and the day arter they was both so nice and kind that 'e plucked up 'is courage and offered to take Miss Gill to the Zoo.

She said "No" at fust, of course, but arter Ginger 'ad pointed out that Joe was at work all day and couldn't take 'er 'imself, and that 'e was Joe's uncle's best pal, she began to think better of it.

"Why not?" ses her mother. "Joe wouldn't mind. He wouldn't be so silly as to be jealous o' Mr. Ginger Dick."

"Of course not," ses the gal. "There's nothing to be jealous of."

She let 'er mother and Ginger persuade 'er arter a time, and then she went upstairs to clean herself, and put on a little silver brooch that Ginger said he 'ad picked up coming along.

She took about three-quarters of an hour to get ready, but when she came down, Ginger felt that it was quite worth it. He couldn't take 'is eyes off 'er, as the saying goes, and 'e sat by 'er side on the top of the omnibus like a man in a dream.

"This is better than being at sea," he ses at last.

"Don't you like the sea?" ses the gal. "I should like to go to sea myself."

"I shouldn't mind the sea if you was there," ses Ginger.

Miss Gill turned her 'ead away. "You mustn't talk to me like that," she ses in a soft voice. "Still—"

"Still wot?" ses Ginger, arter waiting a long time.

"I mean, if I did go to sea, it would be nice to have a friend on board," she ses. "I suppose you ain't afraid of storms, are you?"

"I like 'em," ses Ginger.

"You look as if you would," ses the gal, giving 'im a little look under 'er eyelashes. "It must be nice to be a man and be brave. I wish I was a man."

"I don't," ses Ginger.

"Why not?" ses the gal, turning her 'ead away agin.

Ginger didn't answer, he gave 'er elbow a little squeeze instead. She took it away at once, and Ginger was just wishing he 'adn't been so foolish, when it came back agin, and they sat for a long time without speaking a word.

"The sea is all right for some things," ses Ginger at last, "but suppose a man married!"

The gal shook her 'ead. "It would be hard on 'is wife," she ses, with another little look at 'im, "but—but—"

Ginger pinched 'er elbow agin.

"But p'r'aps he could get a job ashore," she ses, "and then he could take his wife out for a bus-ride every day."

They 'ad to change buses arter a time, and they got on a wrong bus and went miles out o' their way, but neither of 'em seemed to mind. Ginger said he was thinking of something else, and the gal said she was too. They got to the Zoological Gardens at last, and Ginger said he 'ad never enjoyed himself so much. When the lions roared she squeezed his arm, and when they 'ad an elephant ride she was holding on to 'im with both 'ands.

"I am enjoying myself," she ses, as Ginger 'elped her down and said "whoa" to the elephant. "I know it's wicked, but I can't 'elp it, and wot's more, I'm afraid I don't want to 'elp it."

She let Ginger take 'er arm when she nearly tripped up over a peppermint ball some kid 'ad dropped; and, arter a little persuasion, she 'ad a bottle of lemonade and six bath-buns at a refreshment stall for dinner.

She was as nice as she could be to him, but by the time they started for 'ome, she 'ad turned so quiet that Ginger began to think 'e must 'ave offended 'er in some way.

"Are you tired?" he ses.

"No," ses the gal, shaking her 'ead, "I've enjoyed myself very much."

"I thought you seemed a bit tired," ses Ginger, arter waiting a long time.

"I'm not tired," ses the gal, giving 'im a sad sort o' little smile, "but I'm a little bit worried, that's all."

"Worried?" ses Ginger, very tender. "Wot's worrying you?"

"Oh, I can't tell you," ses Miss Gill. "It doesn't matter; I'll try and cheer up. Wot a lovely day it is, isn't it? I shall remember it all my life."

"Wot is it worrying you?" ses Ginger, in a determined voice. "Can't you tell me?"

"No," ses the gal, shaking her 'ead, "I can't tell you because you might want to 'elp me, and I couldn't allow that."

"Why shouldn't I 'elp you?" ses Ginger. "It's wot we was put 'ere for: to 'elp one another."

"I couldn't tell you," ses the gal, just dabbing at'er eyes—with a lace pocket-anckercher about one and a 'arf times the size of 'er nose.

"Not if I ask you to?" ses Ginger.

Miss Gill shook 'er 'ead, and then she tried her 'ardest to turn the conversation. She talked about the weather, and the monkey-'ouse, and a gal in 'er street whose 'air changed from red to black in a single night; but it was all no good, Ginger wouldn't be put off, and at last she ses—

"Well," she ses, "if you must know, I'm in a difficulty; I 'ave got to get three pounds, and where to get it I don't know any more than the man in the moon. Now let's talk about something else."

"Do you owe it?" ses Ginger.

"I can't tell you any more," ses Miss Gill, "and I wouldn't 'ave told you that only you asked me, and somehow I feel as though I 'ave to tell you things, when you want me to."

"Three pounds ain't much," ses pore Ginger, wot 'ad just been paid off arter a long v'y'ge. "I can let you 'ave it and welcome."

Miss Gill started away from 'im as though she 'ad been stung, and it took 'im all his time to talk 'er round agin. When he 'ad she begged 'is pardon and said he was the most generous man she 'ad ever met, but it couldn't be.

"I don't know when I could pay it back," she ses, "but I thank you all the same for offering it."

"Pay it back when you like," ses Ginger, "and if you never pay it back, it don't matter."

He offered 'er the money four or five times, but she wouldn't take it, but at last just as they got near her 'ouse he forced it in her 'and, and put his own 'ands in his pockets when she tried to make 'im take it back.

"You are good to me," she ses arter they 'ad gone inside and 'er mother 'ad gone upstairs arter giving Ginger a bottle o' beer to amuse 'imself with; "I shall never forget you. Never."

"I 'ope not," ses Ginger, starting. "Are you coming out agin to-morrow?"

"I'm afraid I can't," ses Miss Gill, shaking her 'ead and looking sorrowful.

"Not with me?" ses Ginger, sitting down beside her on the sofa and putting 'is arm so that she could lean against it if she wanted to.

"I don't think I can," ses the gal, leaning back very gentle.

"Think agin," ses Ginger, squeezing 'er waist a little.

Miss Gill shook her 'ead, and then turned and looked at 'im. Her face was so close to his, that, thinking that she 'ad put it there a-purpose, he kissed it, and the next moment 'e got a clout that made his 'ead ring.

"Ow dare you!" she ses, jumping up with a scream. "'Ow dare you! 'Ow dare——"

"Wot's the matter?" ses her mother, coming downstairs like a runaway barrel of treacle.

"He—he's insulted me," ses Miss Gill, taking out her little 'ankercher and sobbing. "He—k-kissed me!"

"WOT!" ses Mrs. Gill. "Well, I'd never 'ave believed it! Never! Why 'e ought to be

taken up. Wot d'ye mean by it?" she ses, turning on pore Ginger.

Ginger tried to explain, but it was all no good, and two minutes arterwards 'e was walking back to 'is lodgings like a dog with its tail between its legs. His 'ead was going round and round with astonishment, and 'e was in such a temper that 'e barged into a man twice as big as himself and then offered to knock his 'ead off when 'e objected. And when Sam and Peter asked him 'ow he 'ad got on, he was in such a state of mind it was all 'e could do to answer 'em.

"And I'll trouble you for my 'arf dollar, Peter," he ses; "I've been out with 'er all day, and I've won my bet."

Peter paid it over like a lamb, and then 'e sat thinking 'ard for a bit.

"Are you going out with 'er agin to-morrow, Ginger?" he ses, arter a time.

"I don't know," ses Ginger, careless-like, "I ain't made up my mind yet."

Peter looked at 'im and then 'e looked at Sam and winked. "Let me 'ave a try," he ses; "I'll bet you another 'arf dollar that I take 'er out. P'r'aps I shall come 'ome in a better temper than wot you 'ave."

Old Sam said it wasn't right to play with a gal's 'art in that way, but arter a lot o' talking and telling Sam to shut up, Ginger took the bet. He was quite certain in his own mind that Miss Gill would slam the door in Peter's face, and arter he 'ad started off next morning, Ginger and Sam waited in to 'ave the pleasure of laughing in 'is face.

They got tired of waiting at last, and went out to enjoy themselves, and breathe the fresh air in a pub down Poplar way. They got back at seven o'clock, and ten minutes arterwards Peter came in and sat down on his bed and began to smoke without a word.

"Had a good time?" ses Ginger.

"Rippin'," ses Peter, holding 'is pipe tight between 'is teeth. "You owe me 'arf a dollar, Ginger."

"Where'd you go?" ses Ginger, passing it over.

"Crystal Pallis," ses Peter.

"Are you going to take 'er out to-morrow?" ses Sam.

"I don't think so," ses Peter, taking 'is pipe out of 'is mouth and yawning. "She's rather too young for me; I like talking to gals wot's a bit older. I won't stand in Ginger's way."

"I found 'er a bit young too," ses Ginger. "P'r'aps we'd better let Sam's nevy 'ave 'er. Arter all it's a bit rough on 'im when you come to think of it."

"You're quite right," ses Peter, jumping up. "It's Sam's business, and why we should go out of our way and inconvenience ourselves to do 'im a good turn, I don't know."

"It's Sam all over," ses Ginger; "he's always been like that, and the more you try to oblige 'im, the more you may."

They went on abusing Sam till he got sick and tired of it, and arter telling 'em wot he thought of 'em he slammed the door and went out and spent the evening by 'imself. He would 'ardly speak to them next day, but arter tea he brightened up a bit and they went off together as if nothing 'ad happened, and the fust thing they saw as they turned out of their street was Sam's nevy coming along smiling till it made their faces ache to look at him.

"I was just coming to see you," he ses.

"We're just off on business," ses Ginger.

"I wasn't going to stop," ses the nevy; "my young lady just told me to step along and show uncle wot she has bought me. A silver watch and chain and a gold ring. Look at it!"

He held his 'and under Ginger's nose, and Ginger stood there looking at it and opening and shutting 'is mouth like a dying fish. Then he took Peter by the arm and led 'im away while the nevy was opening 'is new watch and showing Sam the works.

"'Ow much did she get out of you, Peter?" ses Ginger, looking at 'im very hard. "I don't want any lies."

"Three quid," ses Peter, staring at 'im.

"Same 'ere," ses Ginger, grinding his teeth. "Did she give you a smack on the side of your face?"

"Wot—are—you—talking about, Ginger?" ses Peter.

"Did she smack your face too?" ses Ginger.

"Yes," ses Peter.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK EASY MONEY ***

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