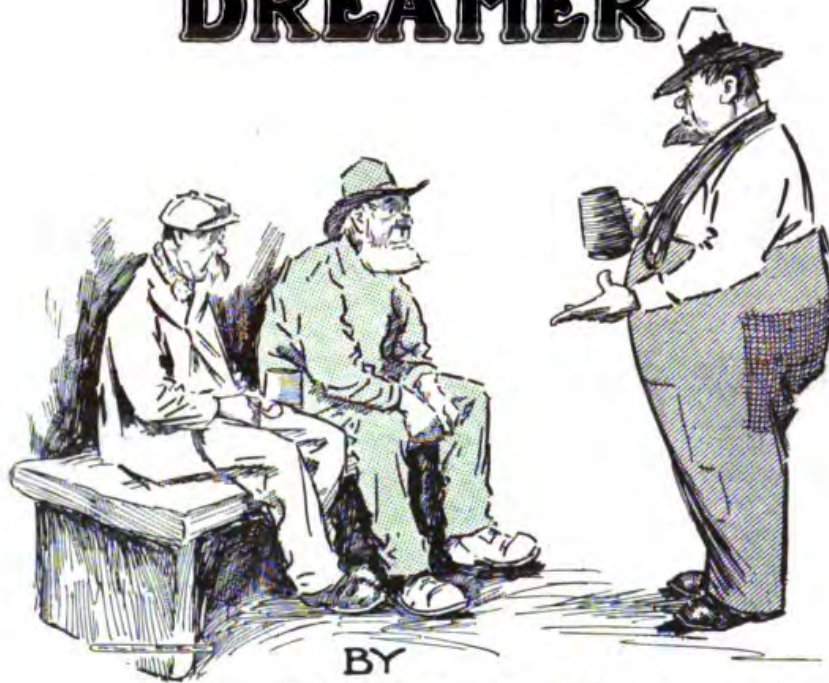


# THE DREAMER



BY  
**W. W. JACOBS**

**D**REAMS and warnings are things I don't believe in, said the night watchman. The only dream I ever 'ad that come anything like true was once when I dreamt I came in for a fortune, and next morning I found half a crown in the street, which I sold to a man for fourpence. And once, two days arter my missis 'ad dreamt she 'ad spilt a cup of tea down the front of 'er Sunday dress, she spoilt a pot o' paint of mine by sitting in it.

The only other dream I know of that come true happened to the cook of a barque I was aboard of once, called the *Southern Belle*. He was a silly, pasty-faced sort o' chap, always giving hisself airs about eddication to sailormen who didn't believe in it, and one night, when we was homeward-bound from Sydney, he suddenly sat up in 'is bunk and laughed so loud that he woke us all up.

"Wot's wrong, cookie?" ses one o' the chaps.

"I was dreaming," ses the cook, "such a funny dream. I dreamt old Bill Foster fell out o' the foretop and broke 'is leg."

"Well, wot is there to laugh at in that?" ses old Bill, very sharp.

"It was funny in my dream," ses the cook. "You looked so comic with your leg doubled up under you, you can't think. It would ha' made a cat laugh."

Bill Foster said he'd make 'im laugh the other side of his face if he wasn't careful, and then we went off to sleep agin and forgot all about it.

If you'll believe me, on'y three days arterwards pore Bill did fall out o' the foretop and break his leg. He was surprised, but I never see a man so surprised as the cook was. His eyes was nearly starting out of 'is head, but by the time the other chaps 'ad picked Bill up and asked 'im whether he was hurt, cook 'ad pulled 'imself together agin and was giving himself such airs it was perfectly sickening.

"My dreams always come true," he ses. "It's a kind o' second sight with me. It's a gift, and, being tender-'arted, it worries me terrible sometimes."

He was going on like that, taking credit for a pure accident, when the second officer came up and told 'em to carry Bill below. He was in agony, of course, but he kept 'is presence of mind, and as they passed the cook he gave 'im such a clip on the side of the 'ead as nearly broke it.

"That's for dreaming about me," he ses.

The skipper and the fust officer and most of the hands set 'is leg between them, and arter the skipper 'ad made him wot he called comfortable, but wot Bill called something that I won't soil my ears by repeating, the officers went off and the cook came and sat

down by the side o' Bill and talked about his gift.

"I don't talk about it as a rule," he ses, "'cos it frightens people."

"It's a wonderful gift, cookie," ses Charlie Epps.

All of 'em thought the same, not knowing wot a fust-class liar the cook was, and he sat there and lied to 'em till he couldn't 'ardly speak, he was so 'oarse.

"My grandmother was a gipsy," he ses, "and it's in the family. Things that are going to 'appen to people I know come to me in dreams, same as pore Bill's did. It's curious to me sometimes when I look round at you chaps, seeing you going about 'appy and comfortable, and knowing all the time

"Give us a hint," ses Charlie.

"Well, I'll tell you this much," ses the cook, arter sitting with his 'ead in his 'ands, thinking; "one of 'em is nearly the ugliest man in the fo'c's'le and the other ain't."

O' course, that didn't 'elp 'em much, but it caused a lot of argufying, and the ugliest man aboard, instead o' being grateful, behaved more like a wild beast than a Christian when it was pointed out to him that he was safe.

Arter that dream about Bill, there was no keeping the cook in his place. He 'ad dreams pretty near every night, and talked little bits of 'em in his sleep. Little bits that you couldn't make head nor tail of, and when we asked 'im next morning he'd always shake his 'ead and say, "Never mind." Sometimes he'd mention a chap's name in 'is sleep and make 'im nervous for days.

It was an unlucky v'y'ge that, for some of 'em. About a week arter pore Bill's accident Ted Jones started playing catch-ball with another chap and a empty beer-bottle, and about the fifth chuck Ted caught it with his face. We thought 'e was killed at fust—he made such a noise; but they got 'im down below, and, arter they 'ad picked out as much broken



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'orrible things that is going to 'appen to you. Sometimes it gives me the fair shivers."

"Horrible things to us, slushy?" ses Charlie, staring.

"Yes," ses the cook, nodding. "I never was on a ship afore with such a lot of unfortunit men aboard. Never. There's two pore fellers wot'll be dead corpses inside o' six months, sitting 'ere laughing and talking as if they was going to live to ninety. Thank your stars you don't 'ave such dreams."

"Who—who are the two, cookie?" ses Charlie, arter a bit.

"Never mind, Charlie," ses the cook, in a sad voice; "it would do no good if I was to tell you. Nothing can alter it."

glass as Ted would let 'em, the second officer did 'im up in sticking-plaster and told 'im to keep quiet for an hour or two.

Ted was very proud of 'is looks, and the way he went on was alarming. Fust of all he found fault with the chap 'e was playing with, and then he turned on the cook.

"It's a pity you didn't see *that* in a dream," he ses, tryin' to sneer, on'y the sticking-plaster was too strong for 'im.

"But I did see it," ses the cook, drawin' 'imself up.

"Wot?" ses Ted, starting.

"I dreamt it night afore last, just exactly as it 'appened," ses the cook, in a off-hand way.

"Why didn't you tell me, then?" ses Ted, choking.

"It 'ud ha' been no good," ses the cook, smiling and shaking his 'ead. "Wot I see must 'appen. I on'y see the future, and that must be."

"But you stood there watching me chucking the bottle about," ses Ted, getting out of 'is bunk. "Why didn't you stop me?"

"You don't understand," ses the cook. "If you'd 'ad more eddication——"



"'WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME, THEN?' SES TED."

He didn't 'ave time to say any more afore Ted was on him, and cookie, being no fighter, 'ad to cook with one eye for the next two or three days. He kept quiet about 'is dreams for some time arter that, but it was no good, because George Hall, wot was a firm believer, gave 'im a licking for not warning 'im of a sprained ankle he got skylarking, and Bob Law took it out of 'im for not telling 'im that he was going to lose 'is suit of best togs at cards.

The only chap that seemed to show any good feeling for the cook was a young feller named Joseph Meek, a steady young chap wot was goin' to be married to old Bill Foster's niece as soon as we got 'ome. Nobody else knew it, but he told the cook all about it on the quiet. He said she was

too good for 'im. But so all he could, he couldn't get her to see it.

"My feelings 'ave changed," he ses.

"P'raps they'll change agin," ses the cook, trying to comfort 'im.

Joseph shook his 'ead. "No, I've made up my mind," he ses, very slow. "I'm young yet, and, besides, I can't afford it; but 'ow to get out of it I don't know. Couldn't you 'ave a dream agin it for me?"

"Wot d'ye mean?" ses the cook, firing up. "Do you think I make my dreams up?"

"No, no; cert'inly not," ses Joseph, patting 'im on the shoulder: "but couldn't you do it just for once? 'Ave a dream that me and Emily are killed a few days arter the wedding. Don't say in wot way, 'cos she might think we could avoid it; just dream we are killed. Bill's always been a superstitious man, and since you dreamt about his leg he'd believe anything; and he's that fond of Emily I believe he'd 'ave the wedding put off, at any rate—if I put him up to it."

It took 'im three days and a silver watch-chain to persuade the cook, but he did at last; and

one arfternoon, when old Bill, who was getting on fust-class, was resting 'is leg in 'is bunk, the cook went below and turned in for a quiet sleep.

For ten minutes he was as peaceful as a lamb, and old Bill, who 'ad been laying in 'is bunk with an eye open watching 'im, was just dropping off 'imself, when the cook began to talk in 'is sleep, and the very fust words made Bill sit up as though something 'ad bit 'im.

"There they go," ses the cook, "Emily Foster and Joseph Meek—and there's old Bill, good old Bill, going to give the bride away. How 'appy they all look, especially Joseph!"

Old Bill put his hand to his ear and leaned out of his bunk.

"There they go," ses the cook agin; "but wot is that 'orrible black thing with claws that's 'anging over Bill?"

Pore-Bill nearly fell out of 'is bunk, but he saved 'imself at the last moment and lay there as pale as death, listening.

"It must be meant for Bill," ses the cook. "Well, pore Bill; he won't know of it, that's one thing. Let's 'ope it'll be sudden."

He lay quiet for some time and then he began again.

"No," he ses, "it isn't Bill; it's Joseph and Emily, stark and stiff, and they've on'y been married a week. 'Ow awful they look! Pore things. Oh! oh! o-oh!"

He woke up with a shiver and began to groan, and then 'e sat up in his bunk and saw old Bill leaning out and staring at 'im.

"You've been dreaming, cook," ses Bill, in a trembling voice.

"'Ave I?" ses the cook. "How do you know?"

"About me and my niece," ses Bill; "you was talking in your sleep."

"You oughtn't to 'ave listened," ses the cook, getting out of 'is bunk and going over to 'im. "I 'ope you didn't 'ear all I dreamt. 'Ow much did you hear?"

Bill told 'im, and the cook sat there, shaking his 'ead. "Thank goodness, you didn't 'ear the worst of it," he ses.

"Worst!" ses Bill. "Wot, was there any more of it?"

"Lots more," ses the cook. "But promise me you won't tell Joseph, Bill. Let 'im be happy while he can; it would on'y make 'im miserable, and it wouldn't do any good."

"I don't know so much about that," ses Bill, thinking about the arguments some of them had 'ad with Ted about the bottle. "Was it arter they was married, cookie, that it 'appened? Are you sure?"

"Certain sure. It was a week arter," ses the cook.

"Very well, then," ses Bill, slapping 'is bad leg in mistake; "if they didn't marry, it couldn't 'appen, could it?"

"Don't talk foolish," ses the cook; "they must marry. I saw it in my dream."

"Well, we'll see," ses Bill. "I'm going to 'ave a quiet talk with Joseph about it, and see wot he ses. I ain't a-going to 'ave my pore gal murdered just to please you and make your dreams come true."

He 'ad a quiet talk with Joseph, but Joseph wouldn't 'ear of it at fust. He said it was all the cook's nonsense, though 'e owned up that it was funny that the cook should know

about the wedding and Emily's name, and at last he said that they would put it afore Emily and let her decide.

That was about the last dream the cook had that v'y'ge, although he told old Bill one day that he had 'ad the same dream about Joseph and Emily agin, so that he was quite certain they 'ad got to be married and killed. He wouldn't tell Bill 'ow they was to be killed, because 'e said it would make 'im an old man afore his time; but, of course, he 'ad to say that *if* they wasn't married the other part couldn't come true. He said that as he 'ad never told 'is dreams afore—except in the case of Bill's leg—he couldn't say for certain that they couldn't be prevented by taking care, but p'raps they could; and Bill pointed out to 'im wot a useful man he would be if he could dream and warn people in time.

By the time we got into the London river old Bill's leg was getting on fust-rate, and he got along splendid on a pair of crutches the carpenter 'ad made for him. Him and Joseph and the cook had 'ad a good many talks about the dream, and the old man 'ad invited the cook to come along 'ome with 'em, to be referred to when he told the tale.

"I shall take my opportunity," he ses, "and break it to 'er gentle like. When I speak to you, you chip in, and not afore. D'ye understand?"

We went into the East India Docks that v'y'ge, and got there early on a lovely summer's evening. Everybody was 'arf crazy at the idea o' going ashore agin, and working as cheerful and as willing as if they liked it. There was a few people standing on the pier-head as we went in, and among 'em several very nice-looking young wimmen.

"My eye, Joseph," ses the cook, who 'ad been staring hard at one of 'em, "there's a fine gal—lively, too. Look 'ere!"

He kissed 'is dirty paw—which is more than I should 'ave liked to 'ave done if it 'ad been mine—and waved it, and the gal turned round and shook her 'ead at 'im.

"Here, that'll do," ses Joseph, very cross. "That's my gal; that's my Emily."

"Eh?" says the cook. "Well, 'ow was I to know? Besides, you're a-giving of her up."

Joseph didn't answer 'im. He was staring at Emily, and the more he stared the better-looking she seemed to grow. She really was an uncommon nice-looking gal, and more than the cook was struck with her.



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"Who's that chap standing alongside of her?" ses the cook.

"It's one o' Bill's sister's lodgers," ses Joseph, who was looking very bad-tempered. "I should like to know wot right he 'as to come 'ere to welcome me 'ome. I don't want 'im."

"P'raps he's fond of 'er," ses the cook. "I could be, very easy."

"I'll chuck 'im in the dock if he ain't careful," ses Joseph, turning red in the face.

He waved his 'and to Emily, who didn't 'appen to be looking at the moment, but the lodger waved back in a careless sort of way and then spoke to Emily, and they both waved to old Bill, who was standing on his crutches further aft.

By the time the ship was berthed and everything snug it was quite dark, and old Bill didn't know whether to take the cook 'ome with 'im and break the news that night, or wait a bit. He made up his mind at last to get it over and done with, and arter waiting till the cook 'ad cleaned 'imself they got a cab and drove off.

Bert Simmons, the lodger, 'ad to ride on the box, and Bill took up so much room with

'is bad leg that Emily found it more comfortable to sit on Joseph's knee; and by the time they got to the 'ouse he began to see wot a silly mistake he was making.

"Keep that dream o' yours to yourself till I make up my mind," he ses to the cook, while Bill and the cabman was calling each other names.

"Bill's going to speak fust," whispers the cook.

The lodger and Emily 'ad gone inside, and Joseph stood there, fidgeting, while the cabman asked Bill, as a friend, why he 'adn't paid twopence more for his face, and Bill was wasting his time trying to think of something to say to 'urt the cabman's feelings. Then he took Bill by the arm as the cab drove off and told 'im not to say nothing about the dream, because he was going to risk it.

"Stuff and nonsense," ses Bill. "I'm going to tell Emily. It's my dooty. Wot's the good o' being

married if you're going to be killed?"

He stumped in on his crutches afore Joseph could say any more, and, arter letting his sister kiss 'im, went into the front room and set down. There was cold beef and pickles on the table and two jugs o' beer, and arter just telling his sister 'ow he fell and broke 'is leg, they all sat down to supper.

Bert Simmons sat on one side of Emily and Joseph the other, and the cook couldn't 'elp feeling sorry for 'er, seeing as he did that sometimes she was 'aving both hands squeezed at once under the table and could 'ardly get a bite in edgeways.

Old Bill lit his pipe arter supper, and then, taking another glass o' beer, he told 'em about the cook dreaming of his accident three days afore it happened. They couldn't 'ardly believe it at fust, but when he went on to tell 'em the other things the cook 'ad dreamt, and that everything 'ad 'appened just as he dreamt it, they all edged away from the cook and sat staring at him with their mouths open.

"And that ain't the worst of it," ses Bill.

"That's enough for one night, Bill," ses Joseph, who was staring at Bert Simmons as

though he could eat him. "Besides, I believe it was on'y chance. When cook told you 'is dream it made you nervous, and that's why you fell."

"Nervous be blowed!" ses Bill; and then he told 'em about the dream he 'ad heard while he was laying in 'is bunk.

Bill's sister gave a scream when he 'ad finished, and Emily, wot was sitting next to Joseph, got up with a shiver and went and sat next to Bert Simmons and squeezed his coat-sleeve.

"It's all nonsense!" ses Joseph, starting up. "And if it wasn't, true love would run the risk. I ain't afraid!"

"It's too much to ask a gal," ses Bert Simmons, shaking his 'ead.

"I couldn't dream of it," ses Emily. "Wot's the use of being married for a week? Look at uncle's leg—that's enough for me!"

They all talked at once then, and Joseph tried all he could to persuade Emily to prove to the cook that 'is dreams didn't always come true; but it was no good. Emily said she wouldn't marry 'im if he 'ad a million a year, and her aunt and uncle backed her up in it—to say nothing of Bert Simmons.

"I'll go up and get your presents, Joseph," she ses; and she ran upstairs afore anybody could stop her.

Joseph sat there as if he was dazed, while everybody gave 'im good advice, and said 'ow thankful he ought to be that the cook 'ad saved him by 'is dreaming. And by and by Emily came downstairs agin with the presents he 'ad given 'er and put them on the table in front of 'im.

"There's everything there but that little silver brooch you gave me, Joseph," she ses, "and I lost that the other evening when I was out with — for a walk."

Joseph tried to speak, but couldn't.

"It was six-and-six, 'cos I was with you when you bought it," ses Emily; "and as

I've lost it, it's on'y fair I should pay for it."

She put down 'arf a sovereign with the presents, and Joseph sat staring at it as if he 'ad never seen one afore.

"And you needn't mind about the change, Joseph," ses Emily; "that'll 'elp to make up for your disappointment."

Old Bill tried to turn things off with a bit of a laugh. "Why, you're made o' money, Emily," he ses.

"Ah! I haven't told you yet," ses Emily, smiling at him; "that's a little surprise I was keeping for you. Aunt Emma—pore Aunt Emma, I should say—died while you was away and left me all 'er furniture and two hundred pounds."

Joseph made a choking noise in his throat and then 'e got up, leaving the presents and the 'arf-sovereign on the table, and stood by the door, staring at them.

"Good-night all," he ses. Then he went to the front door and opened it, and arter standing there a moment came back as though he 'ad forgotten something.



"Are you coming along now?" he ses to the cook.

"Not just yet," ses the cook, very quick.

"I'll wait outside for you, then," ses Joseph, grinding his teeth.