

A DAY AT THE OFFICE

By
WESTON
MARTYR

ILLUSTRATED BY
ANTON OTTO FISCHER

THE head office of the Green Funnel Line was a Cotswold stone-and-marble palace in Leadenhall Street. It contained a collection of ultra-modern office furnishings, some eighty male and female robots, and old Sir James Gale.

Sir James was no robot; he was a hard-boiled human who used his brains and his will to full capacity all the time. His office robots regarded him as a terror, and he looked the part. He began his climb up the ladder as boy in the engineers' mess of a Cardiff-owned tramp steamer, which means that he started right at the bottom rung. Now the Green Funnel Line was his; he had made it. He was chairman of the board and managing director, and he owned 51 per cent of the shares.

Shipping men will appreciate the greatness of Sir James' achievement; other men may ponder the significance of the fact that during the big slump, when famous lines whose names are household words went bankrupt, the Green Funnel Line declared a series of dividends of 15, 7½, 5, 10 and 15 per cent.

On the day we are concerned with him, Sir James was feeling his age. He was seventy-eight; the wind was in the east; pain stabbed him in the back if he moved suddenly; and he had discovered some sand in the bearings of his office machinery. He picked up his telephone and roared, "Send Lippetts here!"

Mr. Lippetts was the manager of the outward-freight department. The Green Funnel Line lived on, for and by freight alone, and Mr. Lippetts had a wonderful nose for freight. He was, therefore, a person of importance. It is true he was a robot, but he had been placed by Sir James in a key position in Sir James' machine, so it may be taken for granted that Lippetts was a super-robot, jeweled in all holes. He knew his value and, when he received the summons to the Presence, he was conscious of virtue. He had secured for the line, against intense competition, a contract for the freighting of twenty thousand tons of steel rails, and he was proud of it. Yet, when he faced Sir James, he trembled at the knees.

Said Sir James, "What's this trouble about those rails for Port Swettenham?"

"There's no trouble, I'm glad to say, sir," Lippetts answered. "The business has gone through. We've got the lot, Sir James. I had a deal of trouble getting them, of course, sir, but that's over. The contract was signed this morning, Sir James."

"And you think that's the end of it." Sir James' tone made Lippetts shiver. "You talk round the

shippers and write down figures in a book and sign a contract, and think that's the end of it. I'm beginning to think I made a mistake in giving your job to a man of ink like you. Those rails won't swim to Port Swettenham; they've got to be stowed and manhandled. And I think if you'd put in a few years stowing cargo down a ship's hold before you started signing freight contracts, it would have been better—for me. No trouble, you say, but what's Evans got to say about it?"

"Captain Evans rang me up from the dock this morning, Sir James," replied Lippetts. "He intimated that he might find some difficulty in loading the rails. I told him, sir, that loading rails was the marine superintendent's business and not the outward-freight department's. I said, if he only knew all the difficulties I'd had to surmount before I got the rails, he wouldn't bother me with his troubles."

"I see," said Sir James. "Someone's made a mess of it, in fact. The office blames the dock and the dock blames the office. And I've got to clean up the mess, as usual. But I'm getting tired of it. It's time you people learned how to clean up your own messes. I think I'll have to rub your noses in it. Phone Evans. Tell him I want to see him at once."

Lippetts said, "Yes, Sir James. At once, sir," and vanished. He said to himself, "Evans is for it, but I wonder how the deuce the Old Man found out."

Sir James eyed Lippetts' retreating back. "The worm," thought he. "If he only knew how I despised servility. Good office fodder, though. First-class stuff for a man like me to fatten on. But he'd be no help in trouble, and he's typical of the rest. I picked 'em all, deliberately. I didn't want men who'd think; I wanted men who would obey my orders. Well, I've got 'em; and it's worked—so far. But the line's growing bigger and bigger and I'm growing older and older. I wonder if I've made a mistake."

The dock office of the Green Funnel Line was a corrugated-iron shed. The iron was hidden by green paint, which is the best that can be said about its exterior. The main interior features were a large stove, a desk, a telephone and the Green Funnel Line's marine superintendent. Captain Evans was clutching the telephone in a hand like a piece of hairy beef, and from his expression, it was clear that he had little use for the person at the other end of the line.



"Your Men Took Me for a Sec-
ond Mate Trying to Touch
You for a Job, But You Saw at
Once I Was Paying Business"

He said, "I haven't got any more time to argue with you head-office squirts. You make arrangements, but I'm the man who's got to get them done. You write down figures in a book and think that's the end of it. This twenty thousand tons of rails may look mighty pretty in your freight-engagement lists, but you try stowing 'em in a steamer's hold and see what you think of it. Anyhow, my last word is, it can't be done. You've made a mess of things, and now, because I can't clean things up for you, you're trying to shove the blame onto me. But you don't get away with that game, Lippetts, and — What? . . . Sir James wants to see me about it at once? Well, he can't, unless he gets a television set. The Harmatton's docking at Tilbury, now, and I've got an appointment aboard her with Lloyd's surveyor. It's the boiler seatings. If I can't head the man off, he'll order the whole lot renewed, and that'll mean a five-thousand-pound job. If it's merely a matter of explaining to the Old Man what a mess you've made of those rails, I'll send one of my lads up. . . . What? . . . Oh, go to hell!"

Captain Evans smashed the receiver down, looked at his watch and said, "Damn." He hurried onto the wharf, alongside of which a steamer was discharging cargo. It was a general cargo from the Far East; eleven gangs of stevedores were whipping it out of the ship with all her derricks and five shore cranes as well, and the wharf seethed like a plowed-up ants' nest. A crane swung a sling of tin ingots at Captain Evans' head, and he dodged it mechanically. He shouted, "Page!"

James Page was down the Typhoon's No. 2 lower hold, showing a foreman stevedore how to sling cases of fish oil without crushing them. He heard his name called, because Captain Evans had a voice like a

diaphone, which can make itself felt through steel plates. James said, "Hullo. There's his nibs. I can't waste time teaching you your job, Rafferty; so all I'll say is, if I see another crushed case coming up out of this hatch, you're fired."

James then ran up forty feet of greasy and perpendicular steel ladder, leaned over the steamer's rail and bawled, "Hullo!"

Captain Evans crooked one finger at him and strode back to the office. When James appeared the captain said, "Humph. Get a shave. And a new hat. I want you to go up to the office. See Sir James. I ought to tackle this myself, but I've that survey on the Harmatton, so you'll have to handle this. It's those rails for Port Swettenham. You know all about 'em. Or, at any rate, you know as well as I do why we can't stow them. Any fool ought to know that, but those asses at the office don't, apparently. So I want you to go up and tell 'em. You've got to show the poor fools it can't be done. Now I'm late, and I've got to go. Have you got it?"

James said, "Yes. See the Old Man himself, and show him we can't put two quarts in a pint pot with holes in it. I'll take the file along and get a grip of the figures, and then I'll rub Sir James Gale's nose on the stowage plans and go on doing it until he sees reason. But why have I got to get a new hat?"

"Because the one you've got on looks as if you'd been bailing out bilges with it," said the captain. "And I don't intend to let those warts at the office get a cheap laugh out of my staff. Buy a bowler; if you bring this job off, I'll pay for it—up to five and six. Now come on. I've got a taxi waiting, and I'll give you a lift and drop you at the station."

Inside the cab, James said, "I thought you told me the Old Man knew his business. The line will lose a couple of thousand, at least, over this."

"Don't tell me," growled the captain. "It means restowing cargo at every port out East. And when the bills come in I'll get the blame. That's why I'm sending you up to the office to put in our protest. Here's the station. Get out and get on with it."

James went peacefully to sleep between the West India Docks and Fenchurch Street Station, because it was part of his job to board the line's incoming steamers at dockhead, and the Typhoon had docked at three o'clock that morning. James slept soundly, because he was tired and it was a habit of his to do most things thoroughly.

The lady who boarded James' carriage at Stepney saw a large male form stretched along the length of a seat and lapping over one end of it. She appraised James with a glance, being an expert. She noted two muddy and enormous boots, a blue-serge suit, shiny at the seams and embellished with splashes of fish oil, two knobby fists resting on a flat stomach, and a shapeless felt hat tilted over a face, which made her change her mind about exploring its owner's pockets. She said, "Coo! Not 'im; I don't think!" She retired to another carriage.

James had to ask his way several times before he found the Green Funnel Line's head office. When he did find that palatial building, he said, "Gosh! I never knew I worked for such a tony outfit!" He had a little trouble getting into the place, because the commissionaire at the door took him for a second mate looking for a job. He had more trouble getting into Sir James' room, because the lady behind the Inquiry window and Sir James'

secretary's secretary and Sir James' secretary all sincerely believed that a tough-looking, unshaven man in soiled clothes and a bad hat was not a fit and proper person to admit to the presence of a baronet.

There was an inner door in the secretary's room, marked Private, and James, getting tired of the secretary, brushed past him and knocked at the door. He did not wait for Sir James to call "Come in." He was taking no chances. He opened the door and went in, shutting it behind him and keeping his back against it.

He expected to be confronted with an angry and surprised old gentleman, but the face which James found himself staring at was neither angry nor surprised. It seemed sardonically amused, and James liked the look of it. He looked Sir James in the eye and smiled.

"Don't you know this is my private room?" Sir James remarked. "I said, private."

"Yes," answered James, "but —"

Sir James did not wait for him. "But, be damned!" said he. "Don't you come butting in here, my man. Do you know who I am? Don't you know you ought to be scared to death at where you find yourself? Hey? Then, what the devil d'you mean, standing there grinning at me?"

"I thought you'd kick up a row and have me thrown out," James answered. "But you haven't. You're only amusing yourself by trying to scare me. But I've got to see you, so —"

"I keep three secretaries to vet people who think they've got to see me," interrupted Sir James. "They find one man in fifty has any good excuse for wasting my time. And they don't seem to think you've got a good excuse at all, judging by the way you've had to break in here."

"I've been vetted by your secretaries, and found wanting," said James. "They tried to chuck me out. I don't know what your time's worth, but if I hadn't insisted on taking up some of it, in spite of your secretaries, it would have cost you about two thousand pounds. You ought to tell those vets of yours not to judge a man's business by the clothes he's wearing."

You say only one caller in fifty gets through to you. Well, I'll say, judging by my experience here, that a lot of good customers get turned away from the door of your shop."

"Oh, you would, would you?" said Sir James. "You might begin to make me think there was something in what you say, if your experience of the working of my shop wasn't confined to the one case of a dirty, unshaven ruffian walking in and talking big about two thousand pounds while looking like an out-of-work stevedore. What?"

"That won't do," James answered. "Your men looked at my old hat and took me for a second mate trying to touch you for a job, but you saw at once I was paying business."

"Oh, did I? What makes you think that?"

"Because," said James, "you haven't chucked me out. I'm still here, talking, although you don't know what my business is. It's time I told you. Your freight department is on the point of signing a contract for twenty thousand

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"If I See Another Crushed Case Coming Up Out of This Hatch, You're Fired." James Then Ran Up Forty Feet of Greasy and Perpendicular Steel Ladder

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but as a player, I am sincerely delighted that my old friends, Tilden and Cochet, are making money from sport. They have done a vast amount for the game and it is time tennis did something for them.

"The youngsters? You have more good players than any nation. Frank Shields and the youngsters I played against are youngsters no longer, but in Donald Budge you have one of the best—in fact, he is a first-class player now. Besides Destremau, we have several promising boys in France, especially Pelizza and Petra. They are not quite ready yet, but they will be soon. Jack Crawford is not a youngster, but Australia has a number of first-class coming men—McGrath, who

hits his two-handed backhand so hard it knocks the racket from my hand; Quist, who has made such progress this year; Bromwich, and others. One of our most likely players is a girl from the Basque country, Suzanne Iribarne. When she learns to volley, she will be another Lenglen. All these players will be heard from before long, and I have a conviction that some day the present group of boys in France will capture the Davis Cup again."

Now, the story of Jean Borotra isn't just the story of an amateur in a sport not always notable for its amateurs—so much of an amateur is he that the year he defeated Vines, when the total receipts were 900,000 francs, he bought 7000 francs' worth of seats for friends—but rather the story of the

rise of the modern game, the game of attack à l'outrance, the game by which Wilmer Allison beat Fred Perry, of England, and became champion of the United States last fall. This is the game which will eventually bring back the Davis Cup to the land where it started, the land where volleying is in our blood and attack our tradition. Borotra is by no means the first of all volleyers, but he is the first great European volleyer; as such, he is modern tennis, our link between Tilden and Norman Brookes and the past, and Perry and Von Cramm and the giants of the future. This amazing businessman athlete is the sole war veteran in sport today, still a figure to be reckoned with, and likely to be for some years more. I remember him

best that Monday after the hectic matches of the challenge round when, alone, he saved the cup for France. The Americans were still asleep at their hotel when, promptly at 8:30, his car rolled into the courtyard of his office and he jumped out to go to work.

At his desk, surrounded by secretaries, files, bundles of letters and telegrams of congratulations, he was found. Could he be interviewed? No, he could not. He was far too busy. The tennis—that was all over for the year. Nothing to say. Sorry. Good-by.

Hold on there! Wait a minute. Just one thing:

"I only ask that I be chosen for the French Davis Cup team of 1952." I think he probably will be too. Borotra has shown that it can be done.

A DAY AT THE OFFICE

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tons of rails for Port Swettenham, with shipment at Middlesboro over the next three months. You've got five steamers sailing in those three months. That means four thousand tons per ship. Well, we can't do it without playing hell with the stowage."

Sir James said, "I see. Would you mind explaining to this inexperienced old shipowner exactly what's going to happen to the stowage?"

"You know as well as I do," answered James. "But if you want the details, this is it. Take our next sailing, the Typhoon. You want us to load her with four thousand tons of rails at Middlesboro for Port Swettenham, and then six thousand odd tons of general cargo here for Singapore, Shanghai, Kobe and Yokohama. The bulk of the rails will have to go in the bottom of the lower holds, because they'll be loaded first, and you can't stow all that dead weight in the 'tween decks. And, anyhow, you can't stow rails on top of general cargo. Then the ship comes here to load her general, and the only place to stow it is on top of the rails. Swettenham's the first port of discharge. When the ship gets there, they'll have to shift the general to get at the rails, and when they've got the rails out they'll have to restow the general. Shifting charges can't come to less than four hundred pounds per ship, or two thousand pounds in all. And, on top of that, I'm not trying to estimate what the claims for damaged general cargo will come to, but if you have to shift and restow like that, the cargo's going to get badly knocked about and you can't help it."

Sir James grinned. "I shouldn't wonder if you were right," he said. "But supposing I told you the freight on those rails was so high that it paid us to carry 'em, in spite of the costs of restowing."

"Then I'd say," answered James, "that I'd be mighty surprised, because it's certain you've had to fight for the rails in competition with every steamship company running from the Continent to the East."

Sir James' grin had gone. His eyes narrowed, and it seemed to James that sparks shot out of them. The old man said, and his voice had changed, "If I told you my ships were going to carry those rails, whether they lost money or not, just because it suited my policy—hey? Supposing I told you to mind your own business!"

"In that case," James said, "I'd apologize and clear out. And start

looking for another job. But is it the case?"

"Well, you mind your own business and sit down there. Who are you?"

"I'm Captain Evans' assistant," said James. "He sent me up here to see you about this, because he can't come himself."

"Have you seen Lippetts?"

"No. I was told to see you. And if I do see Lippetts, I'm sure to have a row with him. It'll be my fault, but when I have dealings with a man who isn't up to his job, I've got to tell him so. It isn't wise, but I can't help it."

Sir James' smile had come back. "Nor can I," said he. "Never could. We seem to suffer from the same failing. But I hope, when I was your age, I wasn't such an impudent young cock as you seem to be. Do you never say 'sir' to your elders and betters?"

"Don't think I do, now you mention it," said James, thoughtfully. "Seems a flunkyish sort of thing to do, somehow. What's the sense of reminding an old man of his age? And as for my betters, I've noticed the better a man is the less he likes being buttered up and flattered. You'd bate it."

Sir James chuckled. "You flatter me," said he. "And you're quite wrong about the no-sirring business. I took the same line about it as you do, when I was young and ignorant, and I suffered for it. I held to it, though. Respect's one thing, but servility's another. How old are you?"

"Thirty-seven."

"What do they call you?"

"Page. James Page."

"Hum." Sir James appeared to be musing. "Well, it's a very common name. How long have you been employed by the company?"

James laughed. "Twenty-two years," he said. "I started as boy in the Mistral when I was fifteen, and I've been with the line ever since. Five years ago I was mate of the Simoon, when Captain Evans yanked me out of her to work ashore under him."

"Five years," said Sir James. "Then you ought to know your job by now, if you're any good. When's the Cyclone due for her next survey?"

"End of next voyage," James answered. "And if she gets through it this time under ten thousand pounds, you're



going to be lucky. She needs new auxiliaries in the engine room and her condensers ought to have been condemned last trip, but— Well, I'm paid to do the dirty work, so I guess you don't want to hear about it."

"I do not. But I may know." Sir James frowned. "Don't forget that. What's the matter with that man—what's his name—in command of the Pampero?"

"Gaine? There's nothing the matter with him. He's the best shipmaster you've got in your employ. You ought to know it. But I guess you do—or Gaine wouldn't be in command of your newest ship."

"Humph! Gaine is a good shipmaster, but would he make a good marine superintendent? When Evans retires, could Gaine take his place?"

"I don't know why you're asking me that," James answered. "But if you want my opinion, I'll tell you no one could take Captain Evans' place. But he says he's feeling his age and he wants to chuck it. He tells me he's been training me to carry on. But that won't do. I know the job, of course. If you've worked for a man like him for five years, you can't help knowing your job. But I'm too junior and it would mean jealousy and friction. Sand in the bearings. There's nothing worse. So, if you're wise, you'll appoint Gaine and let me work under him—just to make sure the shore gang doesn't put across any of their dirty games."

"So that's the way to make sure, is it?" No one seeing Sir James' face would have known he was laughing. "Leave it all to you, eh? Well, how would you make sure we don't lose money over this rail contract you're making such a song about? We've got to carry the rails, whether you happen to approve or not, because I signed the contract this morning. Now you tell me what we're going to do about it."

"If that contract's still in the office, send for it at once, and burn it."

"Can't be done. I promised Harrington I'd take the rails."

"Who's Harrington?"

"He's a man who controls the shipment of so much freight that the Green Funnel Line can't afford to fall foul of him."

"Oh!" said James. "In that case, there's only one thing to do. The maximum tonnage of rails we can ship in our next five sailings, without mucking up the stowage and losing money, is two thousand tons per ship. That takes care of ten thousand tons. To carry the balance, you'll have to charter. And if I were you I'd wait a month before chartering."

"Why?" Sir James snapped at the word like a pike at a minnow.

"Because," replied James, "the freight market's weakening, and I think it's safe to gamble on a fall."

"I asked you how to make sure, and all you can do is to suggest having a gamble on the freight market." The old man glared at James. Then he surprised him. He said, "But you're right. I'll do it. We'll charter. Now clear out—and come back at 1:30. I'm going to lunch, then, and you're coming with me."

James had forty-five minutes to fill. He filled them by doing some hard thinking, getting himself shaved, having his boots cleaned and buying a new hat.

At 1:20 he went back and found Sir James waiting for him. Sir James said, "Never keep anyone waiting—especially me. What are you grinning at?" "Your secretaries," said James. "They let me through like a shot, this time. I hope we go out through their room and not by your private door."

"Why?"

"Joke," said James. "I want to score off a few people in this office. They pretty well spat at me when I was trying to get in, and I'd like 'em to see me going out to lunch with you."

"Pity to spoil a joke," said Sir James. "Out this way then. Who's your first victim?"

"Your secretary. He practically told me I was drunk."

Sir James' grin vanished as he opened his secretary's door. He said, "I'm going to lunch with Mr. Page here. If anyone of importance needs me, I shall be at the Savoy Restaurant. I pay you to distinguish between persons of importance and no importance. You have failed to do so once today. Remember, I never give anyone the opportunity of making the same mistake—three times."

Outside in the passage, Sir James winked at James and said, "Next victim?"

James said, "If that's your idea of a joke, I shan't play any more. I owed

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A GRATER WOULD HAVE COME IN MIGHTY HANDY TO GET THE ROUGH, CRUDELY TWISTED TOBACCO OF THOSE DAYS IN PRIME SMOKING CONDITION



— YOU'D LIKELY HAVE HAD PIPE - STOPPERS TOO FOR TAMPING DOWN THE GRATED TOBACCO



AND TINDER BOXES TO LIGHT UP. MEN HAVE ALWAYS FIGURED A MILD, COOL, EVEN-BURNING SMOKE WAS WORTH TAKING SOME TROUBLE FOR



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YEP THOSE TWO WORDS JUST ABOUT COVER THE WHOLE STORY OF MILD, TASTY, SWEET-SMOKING TOBACCO

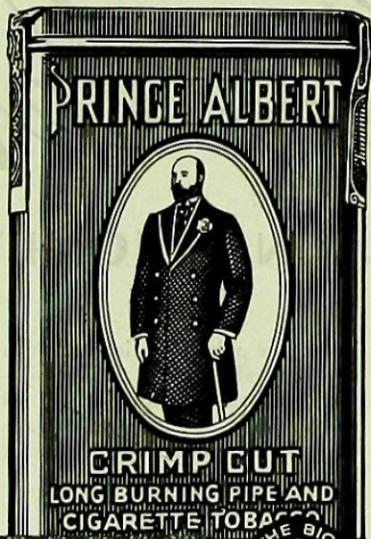


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that man one, but I didn't want him to get scared to death."

"Discipline must be maintained. I don't encourage my staff to joke with me—much. Bear that in mind." The old man's face set hard and stern, and the eyes which, a moment before, had smiled at James became fierce and stony.

James met those eyes. He almost flinched. But not quite. He realized in time the significance of that sudden change of face and that chilling drop in temperature. James, in fact, recognized the trick Sir James was perpetrating upon him. It was a trick which James thought, up to that moment, he had invented himself. In the course of his daily work, it was necessary for James to dominate his subordinates, and he did it without much trouble. But sometimes he ran into a man with spirit enough and strength of character enough to resist his domination. When this happened, James rejoiced, because good men are rare and he cherished all such he could find. But, if you wish to remain boss of the show, it is necessary to show a good man, however good he may be, that you are a better man than he is.

James' favorite method of producing this effect was to lead the good man on to a plane of easy familiarity and then, when his guard was down, to jump on him suddenly and thoroughly. James, therefore, understood Sir James' maneuvers exactly. He grinned, but he kept his guard up.

During the taxi drive to the Strand, he kept his mouth shut and his mind open. He watched his adversary. He knew he was being tested. Managing directors do not take lowly subordinates out to lunch for the sake of their company. James knew he had arrived at a climax in his career. He understood that something about him had impressed this hard old man. But one thing worried him. Why should Sir James go out of his way and waste a lot of his time by taking him, all shabby and work-stained, to lunch in a fashionable restaurant? The thing seemed too fantastic, but James guessed there was reason in it, and he spent his time during the drive puzzling that reason out.

If you are in a hurry to find out what a stranger is made of, it is a good plan to dump him into the middle of unfamiliar and embarrassing surroundings. The Savoy Restaurant was totally unfamiliar to James, but Sir James noted that it did not seem to embarrass him.

James stood in the middle of the ornate foyer and took a good look at everybody and everything in it. He said, "By Jove! I like the way they handle their lights here. Hide the lamps and get all the light they need without glare. Indirect lighting, I suppose you call that. I've heard of it, but never seen it. It's good."

On the way to the cloakroom, he remarked, "This makes me think. There were more expensive-looking people in that hall than I've seen in my whole life before."

Sir James chuckled and led the way into the restaurant. "We'll sit here," said he.

"Good," said James. "I'll be glad to get my legs under the tablecloth. I thought I didn't give a hoot what strangers thought of my looks, but that was before I'd walked all down this room, with every woman in it staring at these oil stains on my trousers. Only a little more and I'd have blushed."

"Are you hungry?" asked Sir James.

"I am. I had breakfast about eight hours ago," James answered. "I'm so hungry I could eat a cold boiled mule."

"They can do better than that here." Sir James handed James the restaurant's gigantic menu. "Order what you like. . . . Waiter, bring me some caviar and sherry. Red Sakhalin salmon caviar on some well-buttered bread, with a squeeze of lime. Lime, mark you! No lemon. And I want a light Sanlúcar sherry with it. Manzanilla. And then a young grouse. I said, young. Plain roasted. No sauce, mind! Just its own gravy. And a bottle of Chateau Ausone with that."

Sir James sat back and looked at his guest. He wanted to impress him, and he saw that he had done so. He also wished to see how James would handle himself in what must be, to him, a trying and embarrassing situation. Sir James caused the situation to be more embarrassing still by remarking, "You order what you fancy. Don't follow my choice. They ought to have everything here. And you said you were hungry."

"Then bring me," said James, "some bread and cheese and beer. Still draft beer, mind! A pint. In a tankard; a pewter one. And I won't have one of those fancy things with a lid and a glass bottom. And Derby cheese, and be sure it's a good, crumbly one. And I'm particular about my bread. Rolls won't do. Bring a loaf. A whole loaf. A double decker. What I call a cottage loaf, with lots of well-baked crust on it. I'll have butter that's slightly salt. I said, slightly. Oh! And some pickled onions, but not those small, white, round things out of a jar. I want the large brown kind. Onions that smell like onions and taste like onions. That's all."

The waiter went away, looking worried. Sir James laughed aloud. He brought his hand down on the table and he said, "Well done! You beat me hollow. And I think you've defeated the restaurant too. They may stock most of my order, except the limes. But they'll have to send out for your onions, for a certainty, and probably for the cottage loaf too."

"Do 'em good," said James. "That flunky was looking down his nose at me, as if I smelled. I probably do. It's that fish oil. But I thought I'd take him down a peg. And I knew you were trying to get a rise out of me too. So I played up. I'd much rather eat caviar and grouse, really."

"Oh, you would, would you?" Sir James concentrated his gaze on the pupil of James' right eye. "You're a crafty young ruffian, but you're frank and straightforward at least. And no one can say you're servile. You've got brains, too, and I think you'd be loyal. It's a pity I've got to sack you."

"Ah! So the yarns I've heard are right," exclaimed James. "They say, down on the docks, you always sack anyone who's man enough to stand up to you. Well, if you weren't standing me my lunch, I'd say, be damned to you."

"So that's what they say about me down the docks," said Sir James. "Well, it's true, apparently. And I was wondering, only this morning, if, perhaps, I hadn't made a mistake. Out of the mouths of babes, sucklings, second mates and stevedores — Yes. I'll tell Evans he'll have to dispense with your services from today. I've got another job for you. We'll give you a desk in my room and I'll teach you myself. I'm nearly eighty, my son; so you'll have to learn your new job in the devil of a hurry."

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