

**WILLIAM
WYMARK
JACOBS**

LAWYER QUINCE

William Wymark Jacobs
Lawyer Quince

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LAWYER QUINCE

Lawyer Quince, so called by his neighbours in Little Haven from his readiness at all times to place at their disposal the legal lore he had acquired from a few old books while following his useful occupation of making boots, sat in a kind of wooden hutch at the side of his cottage plying his trade. The London coach had gone by in a cloud of dust some three hours before, and since then the wide village street had slumbered almost undisturbed in the sunshine.

Hearing footsteps and the sound of voices raised in dispute caused him to look up from his work. Mr. Rose, of Holly Farm, Hogg, the miller, and one or two neighbours of lesser degree appeared to be in earnest debate over some point of unusual difficulty.

Lawyer Quince took a pinch of snuff and bent to his work again. Mr. Rose was one of the very few who openly questioned his legal knowledge, and his gibes concerning it were only too frequent. Moreover, he had a taste for practical joking, which to

a grave man was sometimes offensive.

"Well, here he be," said Mr. Hogg to the farmer, as the group halted in front of the hutch. "Now ask Lawyer Quince and see whether I ain't told you true. I'm willing to abide by what he says."

Mr. Quince put down his hammer and, brushing a little snuff from his coat, leaned back in his chair and eyed them with grave confidence.

"It's like this," said the farmer. "Young Pascoe has been hanging round after my girl Celia, though I told her she wasn't to have nothing to do with him. Half an hour ago I was going to put my pony in its stable when I see a young man sitting there waiting."

"Well?" said Mr. Quince, after a pause.

"He's there yet," said the farmer. "I locked him in, and Hogg here says that I've got the right to keep him locked up there as long as I like. I say it's agin the law, but Hogg he says no. I say his folks would come and try to break open my stable, but Hogg says if they do I can have the law of 'em for damaging my property."

"So you can," interposed Mr. Hogg, firmly. "You see whether Lawyer Quince don't say I'm right."

Mr. Quince frowned, and in order to think more deeply closed his eyes. Taking advantage of this three of his auditors, with remarkable unanimity, each closed one.

"It's your stable," said Mr. Quince, opening his eyes and speaking with great deliberation, "and you have a right to lock

it up when you like."

"There you are," said Mr. Hogg; "what did I tell you?"

"If anybody's there that's got no business there, that's his look-out," continued Mr. Quince. "You didn't induce him to go in?"

"Certainly not," replied the farmer.

"I told him he can keep him there as long as he likes," said the jubilant Mr. Hogg, "and pass him in bread and water through the winder; it's got bars to it."

"Yes," said Mr. Quince, nodding, "he can do that. As for his folks knocking the place about, if you like to tie up one or two of them nasty, savage dogs of yours to the stable, well, it's your stable, and you can fasten your dogs to it if you like. And you've generally got a man about the yard."

Mr. Hogg smacked his thigh in ecstasy.

"But—" began the farmer.

"That's the law," said the autocratic Mr. Quince, sharply. "Of course, if you think you know more about it than I do, I've nothing more to say."

"I don't want to do nothing I could get into trouble for," murmured Mr. Rose.

"You can't get into trouble by doing as I tell you," said the shoemaker, impatiently. "However, to be quite on the safe side, if I was in your place I should lose the key."

"Lose the key?" said the farmer, blankly.

"Lose the key," repeated the shoemaker, his eyes watering with intense appreciation of his own resourcefulness. "You can

find it any time you want to, you know. Keep him there till he promises to give up your daughter, and tell him that as soon as he does you'll have a hunt for the key."

Mr. Rose regarded him with what the shoemaker easily understood to be speechless admiration.

"I—I'm glad I came to you," said the farmer, at last.

"You're welcome," said the shoemaker, loftily. "I'm always ready to give advice to them as require it."

"And good advice it is," said the smiling Mr. Hogg. "Why don't you behave yourself, Joe Garnham?" he demanded, turning fiercely on a listener.

Mr. Garnham, whose eyes were watering with emotion, attempted to explain, but, becoming hysterical, thrust a huge red handkerchief to his mouth and was led away by a friend. Mr. Quince regarded his departure with mild disdain.

"Little things please little minds," he remarked.

"So they do," said Mr. Hogg. "I never thought—What's the matter with you, George Askew?"

Mr. Askew, turning his back on him, threw up his hands with a helpless gesture and followed in the wake of Mr. Garnham. Mr. Hogg appeared to be about to apologise, and then suddenly altering his mind made a hasty and unceremonious exit, accompanied by the farmer.

Mr. Quince raised his eyebrows and then, after a long and meditative pinch of snuff, resumed his work. The sun went down and the light faded slowly; distant voices sounded close on the

still evening air, snatches of hoarse laughter jarred upon his ears. It was clear that the story of the imprisoned swain was giving pleasure to Little Haven.

He rose at last from his chair and, stretching his long, gaunt frame, removed his leather apron, and after a wash at the pump went into the house. Supper was laid, and he gazed with approval on the home-made sausage rolls, the piece of cold pork, and the cheese which awaited his onslaught.

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