

**WILLIAM
WYMARK
JACOBS**

FINE FEATHERS

William Wymark Jacobs

Fine Feathers

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W. W. Jacobs

Fine Feathers / Ship's Company, Part 1

FINE FEATHERS

Mr. Jobson awoke with a Sundayish feeling, probably due to the fact that it was Bank Holiday. He had been aware, in a dim fashion, of the rising of Mrs. Jobson some time before, and in a semi-conscious condition had taken over a large slice of unoccupied territory. He stretched himself and yawned, and then, by an effort of will, threw off the clothes and springing out of bed reached for his trousers.

He was an orderly man, and had hung them every night for over twenty years on the brass knob on his side of the bed. He had hung them there the night before, and now they had absconded with a pair of red braces just entering their teens. Instead, on a chair at the foot of the bed was a collection of garments that made him shudder. With trembling fingers he turned over a black tailcoat, a white waistcoat, and a pair of light check trousers. A white shirt, a collar, and tie kept them company, and, greatest outrage of all, a tall silk hat stood on its own band-box beside the chair. Mr. Jobson, fingering his bristly chin, stood: regarding the collection with a wan smile.

"So that's their little game, is it?" he muttered. "Want to make a toff of me. Where's my clothes got to, I wonder?"

A hasty search satisfied him that they were not in the room, and, pausing only to drape himself in the counterpane, he made his way into the next. He passed on to the others, and then, with a growing sense of alarm, stole softly downstairs and making his way to the shop continued the search. With the shutters up the place was almost in darkness, and in spite of his utmost care apples and potatoes rolled on to the floor and travelled across it in a succession of bumps. Then a sudden turn brought the scales clattering down.

"Good gracious, Alf!" said a voice. "Whatever are you a-doing of?"

Mr. Jobson turned and eyed his wife, who was standing at the door.

"I'm looking for my clothes, mother," he replied, briefly.

"Clothes!" said Mrs. Jobson, with an obvious attempt at unconcerned speech. "Clothes! Why, they're on the chair."

"I mean clothes fit for a Christian to wear—fit for a greengrocer to wear," said Mr. Jobson, raising his voice.

"It was a little surprise for you, dear," said his wife. "Me and Bert and Gladys and Dorothy 'ave all been saving up for it for ever so long."

"It's very kind of you all," said Mr. Jobson, feebly—"very, but—"

"They've all been doing without things themselves to do it," interjected his wife. "As for Gladys, I'm sure nobody knows what she's given up."

"Well, if nobody knows, it don't matter," said Mr. Jobson. "As I was saying, it's very kind of you all, but I can't wear 'em. Where's my others?"

Mrs. Jobson hesitated.

"Where's my others?" repeated her husband.

"They're being took care of," replied his wife, with spirit. "Aunt Emma's minding 'em for you—and you know what she is. H'sh! Alf! Alf! I'm surprised at you!"

Mr. Jobson coughed. "It's the collar, mother," he said at last. "I ain't wore a collar for over twenty years; not since we was walking out together. And then I didn't like it."

"More shame for you," said his wife. "I'm sure there's no other respectable tradesman goes about with a handkerchief knotted round his neck."

"P'r'aps their skins ain't as tender as what mine is," urged Mr. Jobson; "and besides, fancy me in a top-'at! Why, I shall be the laughing-stock of the place."

"Nonsense!" said his wife. "It's only the lower classes what would laugh, and nobody minds what they think."

Mr. Jobson sighed. "Well, I shall 'ave to go back to bed again, then," he said, ruefully. "So long, mother. Hope you have a pleasant time at the Palace."

He took a reef in the counterpane and with a fair amount of dignity, considering his appearance, stalked upstairs again and stood gloomily considering affairs in his bedroom. Ever since Gladys and Dorothy had been big enough to be objects of interest to the young men of the neighbourhood the clothes nuisance had been rampant. He peeped through the window-blind at the bright sunshine outside, and then looked back at the tumbled bed. A murmur of voices downstairs apprised him that the conspirators were awaiting the result.

He dressed at last and stood like a lamb—a redfaced, bull-necked lamb— while Mrs. Jobson fastened his collar for him.

"Bert wanted to get a taller one," she remarked, "but I said this would do to begin with."

"Wanted it to come over my mouth, I s'pose," said the unfortunate Mr. Jobson. "Well, 'ave it your own way. Don't mind about me. What with the trousers and the collar, I couldn't pick up a sovereign if I saw one in front of me."

"If you see one I'll pick it up for you," said his wife, taking up the hat and moving towards the door. "Come along!"

Mr. Jobson, with his arms standing out stiffly from his sides and his head painfully erect, followed her downstairs, and a sudden hush as he entered the kitchen testified to the effect produced by his appearance. It was followed by a hum of admiration that sent the blood flying to his head.

"Why he couldn't have done it before I don't know," said the dutiful Gladys. "Why, there ain't a man in the street looks a quarter as smart."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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