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[Jul. 21, 1931]

LAWING AND JAWING

Neale
by ZORA HURSTON
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43 W. 66th St
New York City

TIME: Present

PLACE: Way cross Georgia

SCENE: Judge Dunfummy's Court.

PERSONS: Judge Dunfummy, Officer Simpson and another, Jemima Flapcakes, Cliff Mullins, John Barnes, two lawyers, a clerk, a pretty girl and her escort.

SETTING: Usual court-room arrangement, except that there is a large red arrow pointing off-stage left, marked "To Jail."

ACTION: At rise everybody is in place except the Judge. Suddenly the CLERK looks off-stage right and motions for everybody to rise. Enter the JUDGE. He wears a black cap and gown and has his gavel in his hand. The two POLICEMEN walk behind him holding up his gown. He mounts the bench and glares all about him before he seats himself. There is a PRETTY GIRL in the front row left, and he takes a good look at her, smiles, frowns at her escort. He motions the police to leave him and take their places with the spectators and he then raps vigorously with his gavel for order.

JUDGE

Hear! Hear! Court is set! My honor is on de bench. You moufy folks set up!

(He glares at the boy with the pretty girl)

All right, Mr. Whistle-britches, just keep up dat jawing now and see how much time I'll give you!

BOY

I wasn't talking, your honor.

JUDGE

Well, quit looking so moufy.

(to CLERK)

Call de first case. And I warn each and all dat my honor is in bad humor dis mawnin'. I'd give a canary bird twenty yēars for peckin' at a elephant.

(to CLERK)

Bring 'em on.

CLERK

(Reading)

Cliff Mullins, charged with assault upon his wife with a weapon and disturbing the peace.

(As CLIFF is led to the bar by the officer, the JUDGE glares ferociously at the prisoner. His wife, all bandages, limps up to the bar at the same time.)

JUDGE

So youse one of dese hard-boiled wife-beaters, huh? Just a mean old woman-Jessie! If I don't lay a hearing on you, God's a gopher! Now what made you cut such a caper?

CLIFF

Judge, I didn't go to hunt her. Saturday night I was down on Dearborn Street in a nasty ditch - *buffet flat*

JUDGE

~~A nasty ditch?~~

CLIFF

Aw, at Emma Hayles' house.

JUDGE

Oh, yes. Go on.

CLIFF

Well,

(Points thumb at wife)

she come down dere and claim I took her money and she claimed I wuz spending it on Emma.

CLIFF'S WIFE

And dat's just whut he was doing, too, Judge.

CLIFF

AW, she's tellin' a great big ole Georgia lie, Judge. I wasn't spendin' no money of her'n.

WOMAN

Yes he was, Judge. There wasn't no money for him to git but mine. He ain't hit a lick of work since God been to Macon. Know whut he 'lowed when I worry him 'bout workin'? Says he wouldn't take a job wid de Careless Love Lumber Company, puttin' out whut make you do me lak you do, do, do.

JUDGE

So, you goes for a sweet-back, do you?

CLIFF

Naw suh, Judge. I'd be glad to work if I could find a job.

JUDGE

How long you been outa work?

CLIFF

Seventeen years -

JUDGE

Seventeen years?

(to woman)

You been takin' keer of dis man for seventeen years?

WOMAN

Naw, but he been so mean to me, it seems lak seventeen years.

JUDGE

Now you tell me just where he hurt you.

WOMAN

Judge, tell you de truth, I'm hurt all over.

(Rubs her buttocks)

Fact is I'm cut.

JUDGE

Bid you git cut in de fracas?

WOMAN

(Feeling the back of her left thigh below her buttocks)

Not in de fracas, Judge - just below it.

(She starts to show the JUDGE where she has been cut. He motions to stop her.)

JUDGE

Stop!

(to Officer Simpson)

Grab him. Put him in de shade.

CLIFF

Judge, I'm unguilty! I ain't laid de weight of my hand on her in malice. You got me 'cused of murder and I ain't harmed a child.

JUDGE

Lemme ast you something. Didn't you know dat all de women in dis town belongs to me? Beat my women and I'll stuff you in jail. 90 years. Take 'im away.

(CLIFF is led off to jail. JUDGE looks angrily at the boy who is holding hands with the pretty girl).

You runs me hot and I'm just dyin' to sit on yo' case. Whut you in here for?

BOY

Nothin'.

JUDGE

Well, whut you doin' in my court, you gater-faced rascal?

BOY

My girl wanted to see whut was goin' on, so I brought her in.

JUDGE

Oh yeah!

(Smiles at GIRL)

She was usin' good sense to come see whut I'm doin', but how come you come in here? You gointer have a hard time gittin' out.

BOY

I ain't done a thing. I ain't never done nothin'. I'm just as clean as a fish, and he been in bathin' all his life.

JUDGE

You ain't done nothin', hunh? Well den youse guilty of vacancy. Grab 'im, Simpson, and search 'im - and if he got any concealed weapons, I'm gointer give 'im life-time and eight years mo'.

(The OFFICER seizes the boy and frisks him.

All he finds is a new deck of cards. The JUDGE looks at them in triumph.)

Uhh hunh! I knowed it, one of dese skin game jelly-beans. Robbin' hard workin' men out they money.

BOY

Judge, I ain't used 'em at all. See, dey's brand new.

JUDGE

Well, den youse charged wid totin' concealed cards and attempt to gamble. Ten years at hard labor. Put him in de dark, Simpson, and throw de key away.

(He looks at the girl and beams.)

Don't you worry bout how you gointer git home. You gointer be took home right, 'cause I'm gointer take you myself. Bring on de next one, Clerk.

CLERK

Jemima Flap-Cakes, charged with illegal possession and sale of alcoholic liquors.

JUDGE

(She is a fat, black, belligerent looking woman.

JUDGE looks coldly at her.)

Well, you heard whut he said. Is you guilty or unguilty? And I'm tellin' you right now dat when you come up befo' me it's just like youse in church. You better have a strong determination, and you better tell a good experience.

JEMIMA

Yes, I sold it and I'll sell it again. (Arms akimbo)
 How does ole booze-selling mama talk? (snaps fingers and shakes hips)

JUDGE

Yes, five thousand dollars and ten years in jail. (Snaps fingers and shakes hips)
 How does ole heavy fining papa talk?

(She is led away, shouting and weeping)

CLERK

De Otis Blunt, charged wid stealin' a mule.

(LAWYER arises and comes forward with the prisoner)

LAWYER

You can't covict this man. I'm here to represent him.

JUDGE

Yo' mouf might spout lak a coffee pot but I got a lawyer (Looks at other lawyer)
 dat kin beat yours segastuatin'. (Looks admiring at girl)
 How am I chewin' my dictionary and minglin' my alphabets?

LAWYER

Well, I kin try, can't I?

JUDGE

Oh yeah, you kin try, but I kin see right now where he's gointer git all de time dat God ever made dat ain't been used already. From now on.

(To LAWYER)

Go 'head, and spread yo' lungs al l over Georgy, but he's goin' to jail! Mules must be respected.

LAWYER

Your Honor, (Striking a pose at the bar)
 Ladies and Gentlemen - (Looks at the pretty girl)

JUDGE

Never mind 'bout dat lady. You talk yo' chat to me.

LAWYER

This is a clear case of syllogism! Again I say syllogism. My client is innocent because it was a dark night when they say he stole the mule and that's against all laws of syllogism.

(JUDGE looks impressed and laughs)

JUDGE

Dat ole fool do know somethin' 'bout law.

LAWYER

When George Washington was pleading de case of Marbury vs. Madison, what did he say? What did he say? Scintillate, scintillate, Globule orific. Fain would I fathom thy nature's specific. Loftily poised in ether capacious, strongly resembling a gem carbonaceous. What did Abraham Lincoln say about mule-stealing? When torrid Phoebus refuses his presence and ceases to lamp with fierce incandescence, then you illumine the regions supernal, scintillate, scintillate, semper nocturnal. Syllogism, again I say syllogism.

(He takes his seat
amid applause)

JUDGE

Man, youse a pleadin' fool. You knows yo' rules and by-laws.

OTHER LAWYER

Let me show my glory. Let me spread my habeas corpus.

JUDGE

'Tain't no use. Dis lawyer done convinced me.

OTHER LAWYER

But, lemme parade my material -

JUDGE

Parade yo' material anywhere you wants to exceptin' befo' me. Dis lil girl wants to go home and I'm goin' with her and enjoy de consequences. Court's adjourned.

C U R T A I N