



THE FIRING OF THE RUBBER BABY.

A FIFTH OF NOVEMBER STORY.

THE ascent of the rubber baby took place in my back yard the afternoon of the day before the fifth of November. It was an occasion of great interest, or so thought my young people, and perhaps the GRAPHIC children would like to hear about it.

We were all in the yard, mamma, papa, Tubby, Toots, Pops, Bunny, Bay and Mr Bagabave. (This boy has another name, but he prefers Mr Bagabave because he made it himself.)

There was also the best cousin, who is nine feet tall, more or less, and a kind gentleman who was a friend of the best cousin, and came to see that he did not hurt himself with the firecrackers.

Well, there we all were, and we fired crackers and torpedoes the whole afternoon without stopping. The best cousin and the kind gentleman did it to amuse the children, and the rest of us did it to amuse ourselves.

We had cannon-crackers a foot long; we had double-headers which papa threw up in the air, oh, ever so far, so that they exploded long before they reached the ground. Then there were dear little crackers, very small and slender, just made for Bay, though it is quite strange that the Chinese people should have known about her, when she is so very young.

Now we fired off single crackers, great and small, with a bang and a bang and a bang-bang; then we put a whole bunch under a barrel, and they went snap, crack, crackety, crackety. Yes, it was delightful.

But papa, who has lived long and fired many crackers, began to pine for something new, and he said, 'Let us have an ascension.'

Then we took counsel, and Mr Bagabave said, 'We will send up the rubber baby.' Now the rubber baby belonged to Bay, and she loved him; but when Bunny and Mr Bagabave told her what a fine thing it was to get up in the world, and how many people would like to go up farther than the rubber baby would, Bay consented, and went and brought the rubber baby, who smiled and thought little of the matter.

Then papa brought the biggest cannon-cracker of all, and made a long fuse for it, and set it up in the ground; and over it he put a tomato can, and on the tomato can he set the rubber baby.

Now all was ready, and we all stood waiting for the final moment. I do not know what were the thoughts of the rubber baby at this moment, but we were all in a state of great excitement.

'Get out of the way, children!' cried papa. 'Run away, Bay. Get behind the apple tree, Mr Bagabave. She's going. Now then. One, two, three, and away!' and papa touched off the fuse.

A moment of great suspense, a tremendous report, a dense cloud of smoke. Up soared the rubber baby, higher than the top of the big apple tree, almost to the very clouds (or so Bay thought).

We watched in silent rapture; then as the intrepid air-traveller came down still smiling, a loud cheer broke from the whole crowd.

No, not from the whole crowd; there was one exception. The kind gentleman who came to keep the best cousin from hurting himself gave a howl so loud and clear that we all started, and ran to see what was the matter.

The poor gentleman had been holding a cannon-cracker, which he was going to fire just when papa gave the signal for sending off the rubber baby. In the excitement of the moment he forgot the cannon-cracker, and it went off in his hand, and burnt him quite badly.

We were all very sorry, not only for the poor gentleman's own sake, but now there was no one to see that the best cousin did not hurt himself.

A pretty young lady came and tied up the poor gentleman's hand so nicely with her soft handkerchief that he was glad the cracker had gone off in it.

The rubber baby said nothing, but sat still in the middle of the gravel walk. Perhaps it was waiting to see if some lovely young lady would come to cheer and comfort it; but no one came till little Bay took it up, wiped off the dust and powder, kissed it, and put it to bed.

WHY SHE THOUGHT SO.

A VERY pretty young woman entered the editor's room with a delicate flush on her face.

'I suppose you don't care for poetry here, do you?' she inquired.

'No,' said the editor, diplomatically, 'I can't say we do.' 'I guessed as much from the verse you published,' she rejoined. And she went out.

'CAN dogs find their way home from a distance?' is a question frequently asked. It's according to the dog. If it's one you want to get rid of, he can find his way back from Africa. If it's a good one, he's apt to get lost if he goes round the corner.

THE LAST OF THE GNOMES.

A FAIRY STORY.

IN a certain field, on a clear, bright night, all the imps and gnomes were collected together—to discuss some matter of importance was evident from their looks and gestures. One in particular seemed very excited, for he occasionally raised his voice and stamped his foot with rage.

'I ask you all to take heed to what I say, you of the Silver Lake especially, for if the mortal boy discovers our secrets, we shall be destroyed for ever.'

'What is that you say, my lord?' asked a new-comer. 'Have you not heard, your Majesty, that a sinful boy has been listening to a conversation between my lords of Hard Oak and Silver Lake? We are afraid he may have overheard some valuable information.'

'Well, the only thing to do is to capture him as soon as possible, and imprison him in the Audience Hall beneath the oak,' replied his Majesty.

'It shall be done to-morrow night, your Majesty. No doubt he will come to see us.'

'Very well. Now we have finished our discussion, we had better sup and dance,' the King remarked.

On the following night the gnomes were assembled in the meadow early, waiting for the boy to arrive.

'My Lord Tempest, is that the boy over yonder you referred to?' asked his Majesty.

'Yes, your Highness. See, he is advancing towards us,' responded the tempestuous lord. 'What are your wishes as regards him?' he added.

'Seize and blindfold him at once, and convey him to the ball. Then we will detain him until he swears never to reveal aught of what he has seen or heard.'

When the boy found himself suddenly seized and blindfolded, he was very much surprised, not to say frightened, as he had not seen anything, but had come out in hope of seeing the fairies, while his sister was giving a party.

In another minute the child found himself being hurried along over styles and dykes, and down some steps. When the bandage was removed from his eyes he saw a spacious room with a lot of queer little people sitting round a sort of throne on mushrooms covered with fawn-colored velvet, or stuff that looked like it. On the throne was seated a gnome, rather taller than the rest, with dark curls on his shoulders, and a golden crown on his head; he wore a sea-green doublet, and hose of plush, with scarlet satin shoes finished with gold buckles.

'Bring the boy forward, my Lord Tempest,' said the King. 'By what name are you called, child,' the King then demanded.

'My name is Ralph Yorke, your Majesty,' the boy replied.

'Ralph Yorke, how came you to be listening to a conversation between my Lords of Silver Lake and Hard Oak?' asked the King, sternly.

'I have read of you in my books, so I came out last night when the others were asleep, to see if you really did appear and dance at night. It was quite by accident I overheard the lords talking,' responded Ralph, appearing very brave, but inwardly shaking with fright.

'What did you hear, Ralph Yorke,' questioned his Majesty.

'I decline to say,' Ralph replied.

'Will you promise never to repeat what you heard; if so, you shall be taken back the same way as you came, unharmed; if not, you remain with us until you give your word.'

Ralph was silent. He had not made up his mind. It would be hard to go home and not tell anyone about the adventure; on the other hand, it would be awkward to stay there quietly while his people were searching the house and grounds for him. Anyway, something might turn up, so he would wait.

'Well, boy, will you promise?' the King asked.

'No, your Majesty, I will not,' Ralph replied.

'Then you will stay with us until you do.' So saying the King rose, and remarked to the gnomes, 'We will now repair to the ring. Blindfold the boy again, good people, and bring him with us.'

The gnomes caught up Ralph, and carried him up the steps and across the fields as before, set him down and untied the bandage. Then the musicians struck up; they were playing one of his sister's pieces, 'The Imps' Revels.'

The gnomes whirled round with Ralph so fast that he was flung violently down, and as he lay on the ground, half-dazed, he saw a slip of white paper, so, snatching it hastily and thrusting it into his pocket, he remembered no more until he found himself in the ball again alone. He immediately pulled the paper from his pocket, and read as follows:—

'Ralph Yorke, pass your hands over the right side of the ball hung with green plush till you feel a button, press it, and a panel will swing back, leaving an aperture large enough for you to crawl through. Do not forget to shut it after you, and do not attempt to go out by the entrance, for Black-phiz guards the doorway, and if he hears a sound he will call the others at once, so that all chance of destroying the dark gnomes will be lost for ever. When you get outside, go as quickly as you can to the Silver Lake; overhanging it you will see a willow. Climb up and put your hands down the hollow trunk, and you will find a bag which, if in possession of the Naiad of the Lake (the same which you heard the two lords speak of), contains a charm to extinguish the race of the wicked gnomes. Go at once,

for the gnomes may return at any minute. I know you will not read this till you are back in the hall.

'MAB, Queen of Fairyland.'

Acting upon the instructions, Ralph pulled aside the hangings, found the button, pressed it, and the panel opened. He crept through, and when he had shut it, nothing could be seen but the bark of the tree, so he started in the direction of the lake. When he arrived at the willow overhanging the water, he mounted the tree and put his hand down the trunk. At first he could not feel anything, but after fumbling in the leaves for some minutes, he drew out a metal bag of peculiar workmanship. Ralph went to the edge of the water and called out, 'Naiad of the Lake, accept this bag, which will put an end to the gnomes,' at the same time throwing the bag into the water. He waited a minute and saw the eddies made by the bag form into some sentences—'The gnomes will not be seen on earth again. Never try to discover the oak you were imprisoned in, for your effects will be fruitless—Naiad of the Lake.'

Ralph rubbed his eyes and looked again, but the water was perfectly smooth. 'Well,' the boy thought, 'it's no good staying here, I may as well go home. I'll go across the fields, I think.' At first the boy thought of going back to see if he could find the oak; but, on second consideration, he found it would be utterly impossible, as there was nothing to distinguish the tree from its fellows, and as he climbed the gate leading into the house grounds, Ralph resolved to have as little to do with hollow oaks as possible, although he had seen the last of the gnomes.

Z. E. S. ROSS.

THE BEAST THAT LAUGHS.

ONE of the most despised of wild animals is that unprepossessing beast with a cheerful name, the laughing hyena. One would think from his name that he would be a jolly-looking fellow, with a good-natured disposition and a wholesome manner that would secure his election to the Board of Aldermen in the forest ward in which he lived. On the contrary, he is one of the most repulsive of animals, and his best friend (if he had any friends) could hardly say a good word for him. There has lately come to the menagerie in Central Park, New York, however, a little fellow of this species who has been named by his keeper 'Tummy,' and who seems to have some redeeming traits of character. A correspondent who lately interviewed Master Tummy, says:—

'He is now five months old, and a stout hearty young fellow, who has come through the dangers of the winter unharmed. His twin-brother was eaten by his mother at a very tender age. Tummy is now an animal of mark in the menagerie, as he possesses the most remarkable voice of any inmate of the carnivora house, notwithstanding the fact that the roaring line is among his neighbours. Everybody has heard of the laughing hyena, but how many have heard him laugh? It is safe to say that few persons have had the experience until Tummy acquired this pleasing accomplishment. His parents and the other members of his race in the menagerie are not much given to laughing, owing, perhaps, to the saddening effects of a life of captivity. But Tummy has never known what it is to be free. The elder animals, however, are in the habit, it is said, of laughing among themselves at night, when they believe no human being is about to listen to them.

'The hyena's laugh is a combination of a shout and a chuckle. It is louder than the ordinary human chuckle, and not so boisterous as a laugh. You will be most certain of hearing Tummy laugh if you approach him at dinner-time. When a piece of meat is held in front of the bars, he will laugh continuously until it is given to him. Under these circumstances it is doubtful if his laugh means exactly the same thing as an outburst of human mirth. It may, however, be an expression of pleasurable anticipation. It is such a loud and startling sound that those who hear it for the first time jump as if an explosion had occurred in their neighbourhood.

'A few words should be said in praise of Tummy's character. He is a peculiarly amiable hyena, and promises to grow up with fewer moral defects than his father or mother. He not only laughs more than they do, but shows a genuine desire to please his keeper. He bails his approach with various signs of joy, and rubs noses with him whenever he gets an opportunity. Tummy is now more than half-grown.'

NEEDED COURAGE.

A CERTAIN York judge has a habit which sometimes annoys members of the bar who appear before him—particularly young men of talking. He associates on the bench, while the lawyers are delivering their speeches; but however exasperated they may be, the lawyers have not, as a rule, the boldness to complain, for they recognise the power of the court.

An eminent lawyer of York, however, set them an example. He was about to make the closing speech in a highly important case. Forty minutes had been allotted him for the purpose.

He had scarcely uttered a dozen words when the judge wheeled round in his chair and began a discussion with his associate on the bench. The lawyer ceased speaking immediately, folded his arms, and gazed steadily at the judges. A hush fell upon the court-room. The offending judge noticing the stillness, turned around and looked enquiringly at the silent advocates.

'Your Honor,' said the lawyer, 'I have just forty minutes in which to make my final argument. I shall not only need every second of that time to do it justice, but I shall also need your undivided attention.'

'And you shall have it,' promptly responded the judge, at the same time acknowledging the justice of the remark by a faint flush on his cheeks. It was an exhibition of genuine courage, but one that was more fully appreciated by members of the profession than by the others who witnessed it.

A FIRST-RATE REASON.

'My parrot's wonderful than yours,' said Bert.

'Good reason why?' retorted Bob.

'What's your reason why?' sneered Bert.

'I haven't got any parrot,' said Bob.

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