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Author: W. W. Denslow

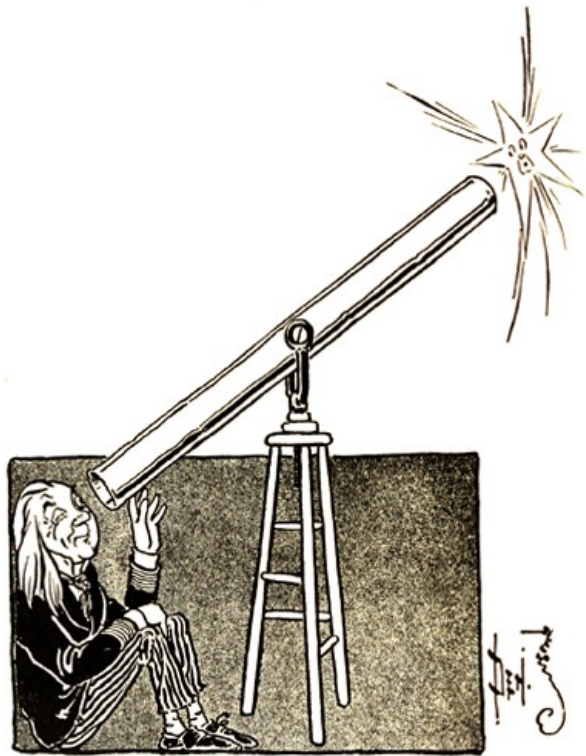
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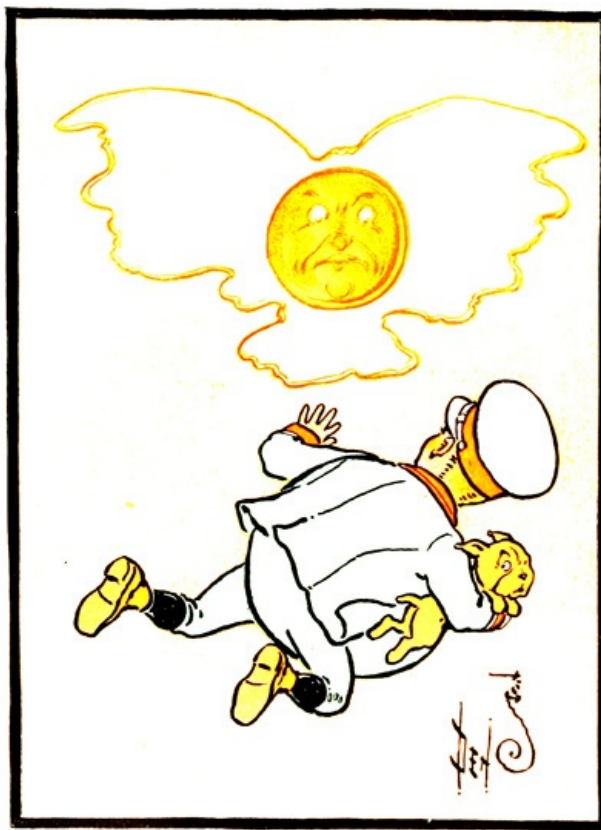
*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BILLY BOUNCE ***

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The Near Astronomer.



"Why it is, a large fried egg," said Billy, excitedly.—Page 47. Frontispiece.

BILLY BOUNCE
BY
W. W . DENSLOW
AND
DUDLEY A. BRAGDON
PICTURES BY
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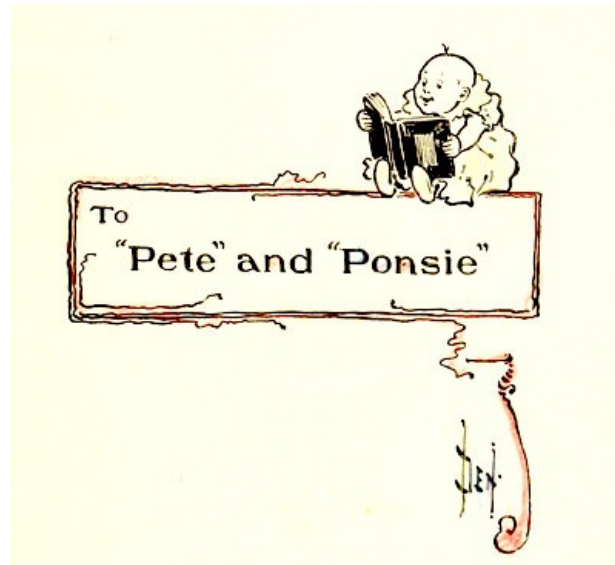


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To
"Pete" and "Ponsie"



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Barker.

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Col. Solemncholly.

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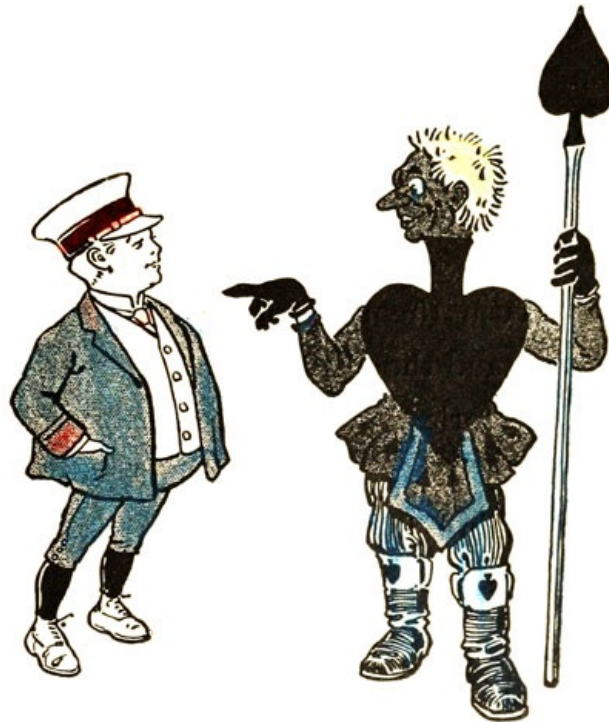
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Preface

[8]



Drone.

OUR PURPOSE.—Fun for the "children between the ages of one and one hundred."

AND INCIDENTALLY—the elimination of deceit and gore in the telling: two elements that enter, we think, too vitally into the construction of most fairy tales.

AS TO THE MORAL.—That is not obtrusive. But if we can suggest to the children that fear alone can harm them through life's journey; and to silly nurses and thoughtless parents that the serious use of ghost stories, Bogie Men and Bugbears of all kinds for the sheer purpose of frightening or making a child mind is positively wicked; we will admit that the tale has a moral.

CHAPTER I.

[9]

DARK PLOT OF NICKEL PLATE, THE POLISHED VILLAIN.

Nickel Plate, the polished Villain, sat in his office in the North South corner of the first straight turning to the left of the Castle in Plotville.

"Gadzooks," exclaimed he with a heavy frown, "likewise Pish Tush! Methinks I grow rusty—it is indeed a sad world when a real villain is reduced to chewing his moustache and biting his lips instead of feasting on the fat of the land."

So saying he rose from his chair, smote himself heavily on the chest, carefully twirled his long black moustache and paced dejectedly up and down and across the room.

"I wonder," he began, when ting-a-ling-a-ling the telephone rang.

"Hello," said he. "Yes, this is Nickel Plate— Oh! good morning, Mr. Bogie Man—Sh-h-h—Don't speak so loudly. Some one may see you.—No—Bumbus has not returned with Honey Girl—I'm sorry, sir, but I expect him every minute. I'll let you know as soon as I can. Oh! yes, he is to substitute Glucose for Honey Girl and return here for further villainous orders. Oh! a—excuse me, but can you help me with a little loan of—hello—hello—pshaw he's rung off. Central—ting-a-ling-a-ling—Central, won't you give me Bogie Man again, please—what! he's left orders not to connect us again—*well!*—good-bye." [10]

"Now then what am I to do? I have just one nickel to my name and I can't spend that. If Bumbus has failed I don't know what we shall do. A fine state of affairs for a man with an ossified conscience and a good digestion—ha-a-a, what is that?"

"Buzz-z-z," came a sound through the open window.

"Is that Bumbus?" called Nickel Plate in a loud whisper.

"I be," answered Bumbus, climbing over the sill and darting to a chair.

"Why didn't you come in by the door?—you know how paneful a window is to me." [11]

"When *is* a cow?" said Bumbus, perching himself on the back of his chair and fanning himself with his foot.

"Sometimes, I think—" began Nickel Plate, angrily.

"Wrong answer; besides it's not strictly true," said Bumbus, turning his large eyes here and there as he viewed his master.

"A truce to foolishness," said Nickel Plate, "what news—but wait—" and taking two wads of cotton out of his pocket he stuffed them in two cracks in the wall—"walls have ears—we will stop them up—proceed."

"Honey Girl has disappeared," whispered Bumbus.

"Gone! and her golden comb?"

"She has taken it with her."

"Gone," growled Nickel Plate—"but wait, I am not angry enough for a real villain"; lighting a match he quickly swallowed it. "Ha, ha! now I am indeed a fire eater. Gadzooks, varlet! and how did she escape us?"

Bumbus hung his head. "Alas, sir, with much care did I carry Glucose to the Palace of the Queen Bee to substitute her for Honey Girl—dressed to look exactly like her, even to a gold-plated comb. I had bribed Drone, the sentry, to admit us in the dead of night. Creeping softly through the corridors of the Castle, with Glucose in my arms, I came to the door of Honey Girl. I opened the door and crept quietly into the room; all was still. I reached the dainty couch and found—" [12]

"Yes," said Nickel Plate excitedly.

"I found it empty; Honey Girl had fled."

"Sweet Honey Girl! alas, have we lost you? also which is more important, the reward for the abduction—but revenge, revenge!" hissed Nickel Plate.

"What did you do with Glucose?"

"Glucose has gone back to her work in the factory," said Bumbus, "but will come back to us whenever we wish."

"Enough," said Nickel Plate, "Bogie Man must know of this at once. I will telephone him—but no, he has stopped the connection. Will you take the message?"

"Sir, you forget."

"Too true, I need you here: a messenger." So saying Nickel Plate rang the messenger call and sat down to write the note of explanation to Bogie Man. [13]

"Rat-a-tat-tat" came a knock on the door.

"Come in," said Nickel Plate in a deep bass voice, the one he kept for strangers.

The door popped open and in ran—yes, he really ran—a messenger boy. And such a messenger boy, such bright, quick eyes, such a clean face and hands, not even a high water line on his neck and wrists, such twinkling feet and such a well brushed uniform! Why you would hardly believe he was a messenger boy if you saw him, he was such an active little fellow.

"Did you ring, sir?" said Billy Bounce.

"Sh-h-h, not so loud," whispered Nickel Plate mysteriously—the whisper he kept for strangers. "Yes, I rang."

"Very well, sir, I am here."

"Ah-h," hummed Bumbus. "Are you here, are you there, do you really truly know it? Have a care, have a care."

"Excuse me, sir," said Billy bewildered, "I don't think I understand you."

"Neither do I," said Bumbus. "Nobody does. I'm a mystery."

[14]

"Mr. who?" said Billy.

"Mr. Bumbus of course."

"Oh! I thought you said Mr. E."

"Don't be silly, boy," interrupted Nickel Plate.

"Bumbus, be quiet."

"I be," said Bumbus.

"Can you read?" whispered Nickel Plate.

"Yes, sir."

"That's good. Then perhaps you know where Bogie Man lives."

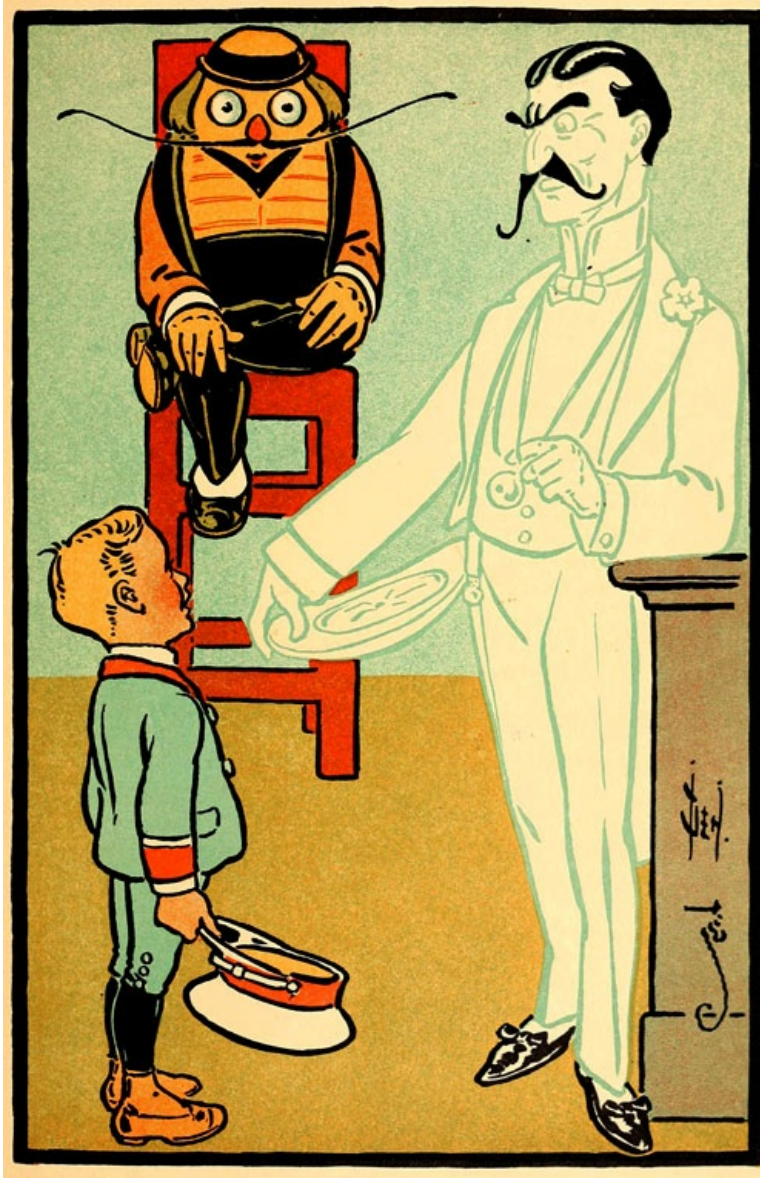
"No, sir, but if you'll tell me I can find his house," said Billy, hoping it wasn't the real Bogie Man he meant.

"That would be telling," said Nickel Plate.

"But, sir, I don't know where to find him."

"Did you ever see such a lazy boy?" hummed Bumbus. "Lazy bones, lazy bones, climb up a tree and shake down some doughnuts and peanuts to me."

"But really," said Nickel Plate frowning, "really you know *I* can't tell you where Bogie Man lives; it's against the rules."



"I can't tell you where Bogie Man lives, it's against the rules."—Page 14.

"Then, sir," said Billy, his head in a whirl, "I don't see how I can deliver your message." [15]

"That's your lookout. You're a messenger boy, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And your duty is to carry messages wherever they are sent?"

"Yes, sir, but—"

"There, I can't argue with you any more. You will have to take the message—good day," said Nickel Plate handing Billy the note.

"But, sir—"

Bumbus jumped off his chair and slowly revolved around Billy, humming—

"Little boy, Billy boy, do as you're told.
Refusal is rudeness: I surely shall scold.
Here's your hat, there's the door,
Run while you may,
I have the great pleasure to
Wish you good-day."

As he sang this, Bumbus circled closer and closer to Billy until finally he touched him, digging him in the ribs and giving him gentle pushes toward the door. Suddenly Billy found himself outside of the room with the door slammed in his face. [16]

"Well," said Billy staring at the note in his hand, "I'm glad I'm out of that room anyway." Then looking up at the door he read painted in bold, black letters on the glass "Nickel Plate, Polished Villain. Short and long orders in all kinds of villainy promptly executed. Abductions a specialty." And lower down in smaller letters, "I. B. Bumbus, Assistant Villain, office hours between 3 o'clock."

"What am I to do with this note? It is addressed to Bogie Man, In-The-Dark, Never Was. If I don't deliver the message I'll be discharged, and if I do deliver it—but how can I—oh pshaw! I know, I'm asleep—ouch!" for he had given himself a sharp nip in the calf of his leg to wake himself.

But there was the note still in his hand, and there in front of him stood the building he had just left.

"I'm awake, that's certain, and—I beg your pardon, sir—" for he had bumped into a little old gentleman who was hurrying in the opposite direction. [17]



"Now," said Mr. Gas, "be careful not to sit on the ceiling."—Page 17.

"It's Mr. Gas, the balloon maker," cried Billy, joyfully; "perhaps you can help me; it's a good thing I ran into you."

"Humph!" said Mr. Gas, with his hands on his stomach, "it's not a very good thing for me that you ran into me, but I'm glad to see you."

"I am sorry, Mr. Gas, but I'm really in very serious trouble," said Billy, with a sigh.

Mr. Gas smiled. "I might have known you didn't know the way to Bogie Man's house."

"Why," said Billy, in surprise, "how did you know—"

"Gift horses can't be choosers, which means, don't ask any questions," said Mr. Gas, pinching Billy's ear; "but come along to my house, and I'll help you."

"Now," said Mr. Gas, when they had entered the shop where he made all the toy balloons for all the little boys and girls in all the world, "be careful not to sit on the ceiling, because if you do you'll burst some of my balloons."

Billy laughed. "Sit on the ceiling; why, how could I?"

"Wait and see," said Mr. Gas; "nothing is impossible to your Fairy Godfather."

"Are you my Fairy Godfather?" asked Billy, opening his eyes very, very wide.

"On Sundays and week days I am; the rest of the time I'm not."

"But what other days are there?" said Billy.

"Strong days of course. I thought you knew Geography," said Mr. Gas huffily.

"Yes, sir, I suppose so," said Billy afraid to ask any more questions.

"Now then, put on this suit," said the balloon maker, producing what looked like a big rubber bag.

"Yes, sir, but—"

"Of course it's wrong side out. How can I get the right side inside unless the wrong side is outside of the inside of the outside of the inside of your outside clothes. Anybody who can count his chickens before they are hatched ought to know that."

Billy gasped and proceeded to pull the suit on over his messenger boy's uniform.

"Stand on your head."

Billy knew how to do this. He had practiced it often enough against fences when he should have been delivering messages. [19]

Taking one of Billy's trouser legs in each hand, Mr. Gas gave a quick jerk and Billy found himself standing on his feet with the rubber suit inside of his uniform.

"There," said Mr. Gas, "that's done—the next thing is to blow you up."

"Oh! Mr. Gas, please don't do that," said Billy, thinking of gunpowder and things.

"With a hot air pump—stand quiet," chug-chug-ff-chug-ff-squee-e went the pump and there stood Billy like a great round butter ball. His uniform fitted as close and snug on the rubber suit as the skin on an onion. For that was a peculiar property of the rubber suit; any clothes, loose, tight or otherwise were bound to fit over it.

"Thank you sir," said Billy looking down and trying to see his foot, "but—"

"Here's the hot air pump; put it in your pocket.—Now—be careful, don't jump or you'll bump your head. You're ready now to hunt Bogie Man."

"How am I to get there?" [20]

"Jump there of course," replied Mr. Gas. "When you get outside the door all you have to do is to jump into the air; that will carry you out of town. Then keep on jumping till you get there. That's simple, isn't it?"

"But can't you tell me in which direction to jump?" asked Billy.

"Jump up, of course; if you jump down you'll dent the sidewalk."

"But shall I jump North or East or South or West, sir?"

"Exactly; just follow those directions and you will be sure to arrive; but wait, before you start I'll give you Barker, my little dog."

"What kind of a dog is he?" asked Billy.

"A full-blooded, yellow cur. He won the Booby prize at the last dog show."

"Thank you, sir; but won't you keep him for me until I get back?"

"Don't jump to conclusions, Billy, it strains the suit; Barker will help you when you want shade or shelter by night or day."

"Isn't he rather a small dog for me to get under?" asked Billy, looking at the tiny animal Mr. Gas held out to him. [21]

Mr. Gas stamped his foot. "More questions—listen: when night or rain comes on, drop to the ground, dig a little hole, hold Barker's nose over it and pinch his tail to make him bark. Shovel in the dirt, and of course you will have planted his bark. Well, you know what is planted must grow, so up will come the bark and the boughs, and you can shelter yourself all night beneath the singing tree."

Billy took the dog and started out of the door. "Thank you; is that all, sir?"

"Of course not," said Mr. Gas.

"Yes, sir."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye?" asked Billy, in surprise, "I thought you said—"

"Yes, that's it; we had to say good-bye before it could be all."

"Oh! good-bye," said Billy, and going outside took a great big jump up into the air.

A JUMP TO SHAMVILLE.

Up, up, up, went Billy when he took his leap into the air.

Way above the house tops, past the city, over green fields, hills and valleys, crossing brooks and rivers that looked like little threads of silver so far below were they, until he thought he never would alight.

Finally things began to get larger and larger and larger on the earth, and he knew he was floating gently down, down, down. It was just like going down from the twenty-first story in a very slow, very comfortable elevator.

Plump, and Billy was on the ground. Before him stood a city. This seemed strange, for he knew he hadn't seen it until his feet touched Mother Earth.

"Excuse me, sir," said Billy, to a tall, thin, rusty coated man who was looking intently at the heavens through a long hollow tube open at both ends. [23]

"Oh! you're here, are you?" said the man, lowering the tube and looking at Billy. "I've been waiting for you to come down."

"Yes, sir," said Billy; "excuse me, but what city is this?"

"Shamville. So you are a meteor."

"No, sir, I'm a messenger," said Billy.

"Pardon me, but you *are* a meteor, by right of discovery, and I ought to know, for I'm a near Astronomer."

"A near what?"

"Not a near what, but a near Astronomer; with my near telescope I have nearly discovered hundreds of nearly new stars," said the man, looking very, very wise.

"Oh! I see," said Billy, smiling. "Well sir, you may be a near astronomer, but in this case you are not near right."

"Well, you're a near meteor and that will do well enough in Shamville."

By this time they had entered the city.

"Who is that long haired, greasy gentleman writing on his cuff?" asked Billy. [24]

"You must meet him. He is our village near poet," answered the star-gazer, impressively. "Allow me, Mr. Never Print, to introduce my latest discovery, Billy Bounce, a near meteor."

Mr. Never Print stopped writing, and after rolling his eyes and carefully disarranging his hair, said: "How beautiful a thing is a fried oyster! Have you read my latest near book?"

"No, sir," said Billy.

"Ah! such is near fame," said the poet, untying his cravat. "Art is long, but a toothless dog does not bite."

"Sir," said Billy, "I didn't quite catch your meaning?"



The Near Poet.

"The near meaning, you mean; like all great near poets, my meaning is hidden. Perhaps you will understand this better: The little flower, like a beefsteak, reminds us that a gentle answer comes home to roost." [25]

Billy was so bewildered by this that he leaned against a wall, or rather, he leaned on what looked like a wall. As the near astronomer helped him to his feet he said:

"Be careful of the near walls. They're just painted canvas, you know, and are not meant to lean against."

"Thank you," said Billy; "is there anything here that is not an imitation?"

"Oh, no!" answered the astronomer, "this is Shamville; but I assure you we're all just as good as the original."

"Well, I must be off," said Billy, "I must deliver this note to Bogie Man."

"To whom?"

"To Bogie Man. Can you tell me how to get there?"

"Oh, my goodness! Oh, my gracious! What have I done, what have I done?" cried the astronomer, beating himself over the head with his near telescope.

"I don't know sir, I'm sure," said Billy; "from what I've seen I shouldn't think you had ever done anything."

"Hear him! hear him!" screamed the astronomer, then calling to the people on the streets: "Come near-artist, come near-actor, come near everybody, we have in our midst one who would expose us to the people who really do things." [26]

With fearful cries the entire population made one dash for Billy, who, forgetting that all he had to do was to jump, tried to run. In his big suit he found this almost impossible and soon he was surrounded by an excited mob.

"Roast him at the steak," cried the butcher, still holding in his hands the papier mache chicken he had been selling when the call came.

"Splendid," said, the near poet.

"Boil him in oil," suggested the near artist.

"What is it, forgery?" asked the blacksmith.

"Put him in a cell," said the merchant.

Billy saw that he was in a tight place and must act quickly. No one had as yet taken hold of him, they were all too excited to think of that; but he knew a near policeman was even then trying to edge through the crowd and something must be done. Just then the near astronomer put out a hand to seize Billy's collar—quick as a wink Billy reached up and pushed the star gazer's plug hat right down over his eyes.

[27]

"You can't see stars this time at any rate," said Billy, and then was surprised to find himself rising, rising, rising off of the ground.

In hitting he had jumped up to reach the star gazer's hat and of course up he went.

"Good-bye," called Billy, to the astonished crowd, "I had forgotten that you couldn't do any more than *nearly* catch me or I should not have been frightened."

And the last Billy ever saw of Shamville was a great sea of big round eyes and wide open mouths.

"I wonder whether this is the beginning or the end of my adventures," said Billy to himself. "I hope it is the last because I really want to deliver this note to Bogie Man as soon as I can. They will think it strange at the office if I'm gone longer than a week delivering one message."

"My goodness, can that be a cyclone?" For just ahead of him Billy saw a great cloud from which came a hum-m-m—Buzz-z-z-z. "Why, it's a swarm of bees and they are carrying something. I do hope they won't sting me."

[28]

By this time Billy had met them and of course, as he couldn't steer himself in the air, the bees had to get out of the way.

"Hum-m," said a big old fat bee, clearing his throat, "what sort of a beetle are you?"

"I'm—I'm a boy," said Billy, very, very politely, because he saw that the soldier bees had fixed sting bayonets.

"I've never heard of a beetle boy—stop a minute, I want to look at you."

"I'm sorry, sir," said Billy, "but I can't."

"We'll soon fix that," shouted the old bee general. "Ho! guard, seize him."

And in a twinkling Billy found himself in the grasp of the bees. Now of course as soon as Billy stopped moving forward he had to drop to earth, so down, down, down he went, with the excited bee soldiers clinging to him and flapping their wings in a vain endeavor to keep him and themselves up in the air. And almost on top of them dropped the fussy old Bee General.

[29]

"Now see what you've done, Beetle Boy," said he. "What do you mean by interfering with the Queen's Own Yellow Jackets on the public fly-ways?"

Before Billy could answer a sweet girlish voice said:

"What is the matter, General Merchandise?"

"We've caught a fly-wayman or something equally wicked, Princess Honey Girl," said the General, gravely saluting.

"Indeed Miss," said Billy, kneeling (as well as he could in his suit) before the beautiful, golden haired maiden, who had stepped out of



General Merchandise.

her Palanquin and stood looking at him, "indeed Miss, I'm not any of the things this bee gentleman calls me—I'm just a messenger boy."

"There now, what did I tell you?" shouted the General. "Just a minute ago he said he was a Beetle Boy. Ho, guard—oh! that's so, you've already ho—d."

[30]

"I beg your pardon, sir, but you were the one that said I was a Beetle Boy."

"Don't contradict," said General Merchandise. "Why didn't you tell me you weren't, then?"

"That would be contradicting, sir," said Billy, laughing in spite of his fears.

"General," said the Princess, "let me speak."

"If you will promise not to talk," said the General, bowing.

"First then, soldiers, take your hands off Mr. Messenger Boy."

"Billy Bounce is my name, Princess," murmured Billy.

"Ha," growled the General, half to himself, "another name, eh!"

"Silence, General; I can't forget that my Aunt Queen Bee—"

"She's not an ant, she's a bee," said the General, sulkily.

"Silence, sir; you forget yourself. I say that I cannot forget that my Aunt Queen Bee, whose heir I am, bestowed the title of General Merchandise upon you, because she set such store by you, but I cannot stand these interruptions." [31]

"Pardon, your highness," said the General, humbly.

"Granted. Now, Billy Bounce, what have you to say for yourself?"

"Nothing, Princess," answered Billy, "except that I am carrying a message from Nickel Plate to Bogie Man and—"

"My bitter enemy," cried the Princess.

"Hum-m-m-m-m, I told you so," shouted the General. "Ho, guards, seize him!"

Billy found himself again seized, and very roughly this time; indeed, had it not been for the toughness of his rubber suit he would have surely been stung. But, nothing daunted, he said:

"Your enemies, Princess Honey Girl; then they are mine."

"What do you mean?" asked she, blushing.

"I mean," said Billy, earnestly, "that if I were not a messenger boy, who has to do his duty under any circumstances, and had I known that these were your enemies, I should not have carried their message."

"Then why do you?" said the General. "Give me the message and you shall be free." [32]

"No," said Billy, "I cannot do that; I have undertaken to carry it, and my honor demands that I do so while I live."

"You are right," said the General; "then the best way out of the difficulty is to kill you."

"No," said the Princess, "that shall not be done."

"Thank you, Princess," whispered Billy, "you shall not regret it. Let me do my duty—let me carry the message. Then, when it is delivered, I shall be free to fight for you; indeed, when I am once in Bogie Man's Castle I shall be in the very best position to help you."

"Good," said the Princess.

"Good," said the General.

"Good," said all the soldiers.

"But why are Nickel Plate, Bumbus and Bogie Man your enemies?" asked Billy.

"Because they want to carry me far away from the Bee Palace and make me work in the factory," answered the Princess, sadly, "putting the wicked Glucose, who looks almost exactly like me, in my place in the castle."

"But why?" said Billy. [33]

"I am Crown Princess, and if they can do away with me and substitute Glucose for me they will be in control of the Castle and the Bee Government and can make a corner in honey."

"Villains!" cried Billy, "but between us we will foil them."

"You *will* help me?" said the Princess, looking earnestly at him.

"I will, I promise you. But now I must be on my way."

"Good-bye, Billy Bounce; don't forget me," said the Princess.

"I will see you soon. Good-bye, Honey Girl," and, with a farewell wave to the Princess, the General, and all the soldier bees, Billy jumped up and away in further search of Bogie Man.

CHAPTER III.

BILLY IS CAPTURED BY TOMATO.

Billy had floated a long, long time through the sweet, soft air: indeed he was gently settling down to earth again, when he discovered that the jolly old red faced sun was rolling off to his bed in the far west.

"Well," said he to himself, "if Father Sun is going to turn in for the night, and I see him putting on his white cloud night cap, I expect it's about time for me to do the same."

"Bow-wow," came a faint bark from under his coat.

"Why, it's Barker," said Billy, reaching in and patting a warm little head. "I'd almost forgotten you, old doggie, and I thank you for reminding me of the Singing Tree."

In a twinkling Billy was on the ground and digging a hole in the soft earth.

"I hate to pinch your tail, old fellow," said Billy, "but it's really necessary you know," and holding Barker's nose over the hole he gave his tail a gentle tweak. [35]

"Bow-wow-wow."

Quickly Billy shovelled in the earth, and lo and behold, quicker than I can tell you about it, there stood the Singing Tree, bowing and smiling.

Just as Billy was going to wish the tree a polite good evening, he saw Barker scampering after a little beam of sunlight that had crept in through the branches of the tree. "Barker, come here," called Billy, but he was too late.

"Snap—gulp," and Barker had swallowed the sunlight.

"I hope it won't make you sick, doggie," said Billy, looking at him anxiously.

But Barker wrinkled his nose at him in such a happy dog smile and wagged his stubby little tail so contentedly that Billy decided he was used to the diet and turned to the Singing Tree.

"Good evening," said Billy, "I hope you are well."

"Mi?-so-so," sang the tree, "pause and rest at my bass." [36]

"Excuse me, sir, but what is your name?" said Billy; "you see I'd like to know how to address you."

"C. Octavious Minor," sang the tree. "But it's time you slept. I'll look sharp for accidental intruders and pitch into them with my staff if they bother us; good night."

Then he began to sing softly:

"When the clucking cows have gone to roost
And the milk hens all are fed,
When the sheep have sung their young to wake
And the bats have gone to bed,
When the sun has risen in the west
And the golden moon has sunk,
When the gentle watch dog's wound and set
And the day owl's in his bunk,
It's time for wakeful boys to sleep
Despite the hooting lark,
For yesterday will soon be here
And work begins with dark."

And when the tree got to this point in his song he stopped. For Billy was sound asleep with Barker snuggled up in his arms, while from his half-opened lips came a contented snore.

Billy was awakened in the morning by the singing tree tickling him gently on the nose with one of its branches. [37]

"Up—up," it sang.

Barker thinking it was calling "up pup" jumped up, and ran madly around the tree for his morning's exercise. And then suddenly there was no tree. Barker didn't notice this at first, and circled around where the tree had been three times more before he discovered that it was gone.

Have you ever seen a dog look surprised and hurt and just a little bit ashamed? Well, that's the way Barker looked when Billy picked him up and stowed him away again in his jacket.

"Well, I must be off," said Billy to himself.

"Don't hurry," said a voice at his elbow.

Billy was so startled that he stepped back, caught his foot in a vine, and rolled over and over on the ground. There, where a minute before had been nothing at all, stood a great red Tomato leaning on its vine.

"It's—it's a fine morning, sir," said Billy.

"A vine morning you mean," said the Tomato sourly.

"I beg your pardon?" said Billy, because he hadn't quite understood the Tomato. [38]

"Granted for just this once. But don't do it again."

"What?"

"Anything—great tin cans! how I hate boys."

"I'm sorry, sir," said Billy.

"No, you're not," grumbled the Tomato; "you say you are, but you're not; boys are never sorry."

"Why don't you like boys, sir? I'm sure"—and then he stopped. He was on the point of saying "boys like tomatoes" when he remembered that this might sound a little personal and thought better of it.

The Tomato did not notice this, however, and said, wiping a dew tear from his eye, "A boy threw my favourite sister at a cat last week and I have never been able to abide boys since; and, come to think of it, you look like that boy."

"Oh! no, sir, it wasn't I," said Billy, frightened. "I—I've only just come."

"Well, maybe not; goodness knows, though, you're ugly enough. Where are you going?"

[39]



**"Come, now, don't give me any of your tomato sauce."—
Page 39.**

"I'm taking a message to Bogie Man, sir; and—and I really must go at once. Good bye."

"Oh! ho! so you're the boy Bumbus warned me about last night. I guess you'll have to stay here," said the Tomato threateningly.

This made Billy angry. "I guess not," he said, and gave a great jump into the air.

"Not so fast, Mr. Rubber Ball, not so fast," said the Tomato in Billy's ear. And though Billy was many, many feet away from the ground, Tomato's vines had grown right up to him, while one of his tendrils had wound itself about his feet.

Not only that but hundreds of other tomatoes, not quite so large as the first one it is true, but large enough to frighten Billy, were shaking their heads at him threateningly.

But Billy plucked up his courage and said in a voice that was a wee bit shaky, "Come, now, don't give me any of your tomato sauce; if you're not careful I'll squash you."

"Even then I'd be some pumpkins," shouted the Tomato, nearly bursting with rage, "and as [40]

everybody knows a well red tomato is not a greeny, I certainly should be able to catsup with a small boy."

"You ought to go on the stage," said Billy, trying to smile; "you really are very funny."

This seemed to mollify the Tomato. "Some of my family have gone on as soupers. What would you suggest for me, comedy or tragedy?"

"Comedy, by all means," answered Billy, settling himself more comfortably on a large leaf, because, of course, having stopped moving, he would have fallen had he had nothing to support him.

"I can recite," said the Tomato. "Don't you want to hear me?"

"I'd be delighted, only, you know, I'm late, and—"

"You will be the late lamented if you don't sit tight, my boy," said the Tomato, sourly. "Listen."

TOMATO'S RECITATION.

"There lived a wicked Wenket once,
Who kept a castle keep,
And when he wasn't wide awake
You'd find him fast asleep.
He ate his food with knife and fork,
And I am loath to state,
He wore a shoe upon each foot,
A hat upon his pate.
Of course it's hard to give belief
So sinful one could be;
But oft he wore a collar too,
Betwixt just you and me.
And think of this—I blush with shame
To tell this awful truth—
He wore a coat and vest and pants—
How horribly uncouth!!!
But wickedness *will* get its due,
As sure as corn is corn.
He went to bed one stormy night
And got up in the morn.
Now little boys and little girls,
This tale a moral bears:
Don't strike the baby with an axe
Or throw the cat down stairs."

[41]

"Good," said Billy, "it really must be very funny indeed when it is well done," and pop he had jumped on Tomato's head, given a quick spring, and had sailed off before Tomato realized what he was up to.

"I'm glad Tomato recited; he was so out of breath when he finished that he couldn't grow after me," said Billy to himself when he saw that he was safe from pursuit. [42]

"I wonder what Honey Girl is doing today." And I fear that he was still thinking so hard about Honey Girl that he forgot to notice when he next dropped to the ground. Anyway, he was standing deep in thought when something tapped him on the shoulder.

"Salute!" said a stern voice. Looking up Billy saw that he was surrounded by hundreds of grim-faced soldiers, dressed in uniforms of the very deepest indigo, and all wearing blue glasses. And such a thin, sad, hollow-cheeked, hollow-eyed officer as had tapped him on the shoulder! Billy could tell he was an officer because of the gun metal sword he carried and the epaulettes of crepe that he wore.

"Salute," said the officer again in a deep, sepulchral tone.

"Yes, sir," said Billy, cracking his heels together and putting his hand up to his cap as he had seen soldiers do.

"That's not the proper salute. Take out your handkerchief and wipe your right eye," said the officer. "That's the proper salute for the Blues."

Billy did as he was told with a sinking heart. Everything seemed so changed by the Regiment of Blues. The sun had gone under a cloud, the wind whistled dismally, a frog croaked in a nearby pond, and all together Billy came near to wanting to use his handkerchief in earnest. [43]

"So you think you are going to see Bogie Man."

"Yes, sir, I am."

"You're not, as sure as my name is Colonel Solemncholly."

"Excuse me, but I am," said Billy staunchly.

"I knew it, I knew it," said the Colonel, sadly. "He is too fat to give up easily—goodness, how I hate fat people—they laugh."

"Don't you ever laugh, sir?"

"I'd be court martialed if I did."

"But aren't you Commander?" asked Billy.

"Yes, of the Blues, but you know we're the away-from-home guard of Bogie Man, and he is our real Commander."

"Oh! I see. Then you can tell me how to get to Never Was."

"Indeed not. We were sent out to stop you, and that reminds me—Corporal Punishment and Private Tear, seize this boy."

"Snap," went the whip in Corporal Punishment's hand, "Crack," it struck Private Tear on the shoulder, and snuffing and wiping his eyes, Private Tear stepped out of the ranks.

"Seize him and throw him in the Dumps," cried Colonel Solemncholly.

As the Colonel spoke the drums gave a long dismal roll and the band struck up a funeral march.

Corporal Punishment's whip was circling in the air preparatory to coming down on Billy's head, and Private Tear was getting ready to put his handkerchief over his eyes when Billy laughed. It wasn't because he felt like laughing at all, but because Barker in snuggling closer to him had tickled him in the ribs.

"Look out, he's armed!" cried Colonel Solemncholly, Corporal Punishment and Private Tear in one breath.

This gave Billy an idea, and he burst out into a loud laugh.

"Throw a wet blanket over him," commanded the Colonel. "Regiment, carry arms!"

At that the soldiers drew out their pocket-handkerchiefs, held them to their eyes, reversed their guns, and advanced boldly on Billy, while the band played the tune the old cow died on.

Billy continued to force his laugh, trying hard to think of some way out of his difficulty. He didn't like the idea of the wet blanket, and he couldn't jump or run because Corporal Punishment's whip was wound around his neck.

"Double quick!" cried the Colonel. "Catch him before the sun comes out."

Barker stirred uneasily in Billy's pocket.

"Saved!" cried Billy. "It's worth trying." And quickly taking Barker out of his pocket, he held him by his hind legs and gently thumped his little stomach.

"Plump," and out fell the bar of sunlight he had swallowed the night before. When it struck the ground it burst into a million dancing, sparkling bits of golden sunshine, and presto! the Blues had disappeared, lock, stock and barrel.

And there stood Billy, in a glow of sunlight on the beautiful green grass, listening to the sweet notes of forest birds in the trees nearby.

"Now I know how to get rid of the Blues," sang Billy to himself, as he leapt into the air, "a good hearty laugh and a bit of sunshine will always disperse them."



Private Tear.

CHAPTER IV.

ADVENTURES IN EGGS-AGGERATION.

"Hello!" cried Billy, "what's that ahead?"

Far off on the horizon he saw a large white and gold thing sailing through the air. As he drew nearer he could see its wings gently flapping.

"It looks something like—why it *is*, a large fried egg," said he, excitedly.

"Good day, sir," for by this time they were side by side.

"It's not a good day, and I'm not sir, I'm White Wings," said the fried egg, curling up around the edges scornfully.

"Well, maybe you're not sir," said Billy, tartly, "but you're very surly."

"You wouldn't blame me if you knew how nearly I jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire this morning; you can see that I'm all of a-tremble still, and all because Bogie Man sent an airless message to the Blue Hen's Chicken that I was to get up before breakfast and do sentry duty." [48]

"What for?" asked Billy.

"To stop one Billy Bounce, alias Rubber Ball Boy, and take him prisoner to the town of Eggs-Aggeration. He's a very dangerous person."

"Why, I'm——" and then Billy stopped.

"Of course you are; I knew that as soon as I saw you," said White Wings, complacently.

"What did you know?"

"That you're——"

"*What* am I?"

"I don't know, but you said you were," said White Wings. "But wait a minute, I have a lineless picture of this Billy Bounce some place about me."

"You needn't trouble," said Billy. "I'm Billy Bounce."

"Yes, I know," answered White Wings, unblushingly, "it's impossible to deceive *me*."

"Well!" was all Billy could say, so disgusted was he with the barefaced fib.

"And here we are," said the Egg, as they dropped gently on the sidewalk in the town of Eggs-Aggeration. And such a grotesque town as it was. Not a straight street or house in it. The walls, a little distance away, went up and up so high that Billy could just barely see the roofs of the houses; but when he was standing next them he could almost reach their tops by standing on tiptoe. The streets looked miles long, but he knew he could almost come to their end in three steps and a jump. [49]

"What an exaggeration," said Billy to himself; "why, of course, that's the reason they call it Eggs-Aggeration."

"Here's Billy Bounce," called White Wings, and out of their doors and windows trooped the inhabitants.

First came the Blue Hen's Chicken, and after her rolled eggs of all kinds and descriptions.

"My goodness," said White Wings, "what a time I had with him, to be sure. It was only after a fierce hand-to-egg struggle that I succeeded in capturing him."

"Why!" exclaimed Billy in surprise. "I——"

"Is he very strong?" interrupted the Blue Hen's Chicken.

"Strong," said White Wings, "*Strong*, I should say he was; much stronger than our oldest inhabitant."

"What are you going to do with me?" asked Billy, too disgusted to deny the story.

"Wait and see," chuckled the Chicken, "wait—wait—wait—wait—and see—bad luck—bad luck—bad luck."

"Serve him right for being a greedy boy," said Turkey Egg, angrily. "I know him, he's a bad lot—always eating, just gobble, gobble, gobble, all day long."

"That's not true," said Billy, "you know you don't know me."

"Never saw you in my life before," whispered Turkey Egg, "but don't mention that, if I want to get my witness fee I've got to say something, haven't I?"

"But you may be swearing my life away," said Billy.

"I never swear, but I'm sure you want to get away, don't you?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, you want to take your life with you, don't you?"

"Yes."



Blue Hen's Chicken.

[50]

"There you are, then; if your life is taken away it won't be here, and if it is not here you won't be here, and if you are not here you will be away," and Turkey Egg laughed heartily at his joke.

"You are the most heartless egg I ever knew," said Billy, in despair.

"Sh-h-h-h-h! now you've hit the truth," said Turkey Egg, confidentially; "years ago, when they thought I was going to turn out bad, they blew my heart out."

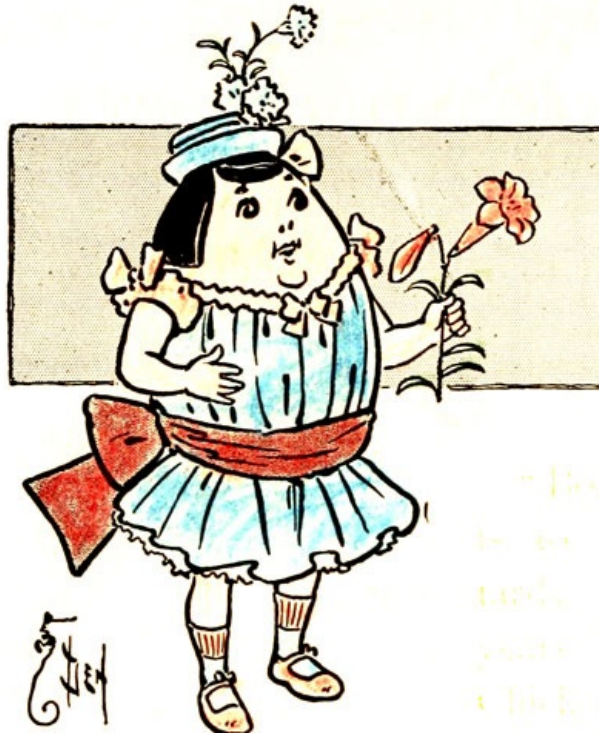
"Isn't he handsome," simpered little Miss Easter Egg, coloring up.

Billy pretended not to hear this, but it did his heart good to know that he had one friend in the city.

In the meantime Blue Hen's Chicken and the Official Candler, who was called Egg Judge, had been discussing what should be done with Billy.

"Bogie Man says he is to be kept in custardy for a thousand years," said Blue Hen's Chicken.

[52]



Little Miss Easter Egg.

"I know that's an exaggeration," said Billy; "why, I can't live that long."

"Of course not," answered the Official Candler; "and if you're not alive, what difference will it make whether it's a thousand years or ten thousand?"

"Come, come! We're wasting time," fussed the Blue Hen's Chicken. "To the Packing House jail with him."

"I'll stick to him," cried Al Bumen, the policeman, shaking his egg-beater at Billy fiercely; "come along now! There's no use trying to resist, for I have you egg-sactly where I want you."

And Billy, seeing that it was indeed useless to try to escape as things then were, went sulkily off, with Al Bumen's moist hand in his collar.

[53]

"Please take your sticky fingers off of my neck," said he; "I won't try to run."

"You promise?" asked Al Bumen.

"I do, cross my heart and hope to die," said Billy eagerly.

"Well, I don't believe you, I can't believe any body in Eggs-Aggeration."

Poor Billy hung his head in shame as he was led along the street like a common criminal. He tried two or three times to pull away, but Al Bumen's arm would stretch out like a rubber band and then "snap," Billy would bounce back like a return ball.

"There, now, what did I tell you," said Al Bumen, "that's the second time that you have tried to escape and you said you wouldn't."

"But you wouldn't take my word."

"Of course not, I have no use for your word, I have plenty of my own. And anyway, how could you keep your word if you gave it to me."

My, my, my, what a day it was for the inhabitants of Eggs-Aggeration. They had seen Eggs beaten, and taken up by the Police, but never a boy. The Scramble Egg children tumbled along at

[54]

Billy's side, shouting and rolling over and over in their glee. Mothers brought their little cradled Egg babies out to see him pass—even poor "Addle," the village egg idiot, made faces at him; only Billy felt sorry for him because he could see that he was cracked. But when some of the bad little street boys threw stones at him, even Al Bumen was angry—indeed, they barely missed his head two or three times.

"Stop it," he cried, "I know you every one, you are the Strictly boys."

"How do you know them?" asked Billy, for they looked like any other eggs to him.

"Do you think I can't recognize a fresh egg when I see him—oh! I know them—their mother thinks because they have had their names in the grocer's window that they can't turn out bad, but I've known some terrible ones in that family."

Billy felt almost relieved when they reached the jail. "In with you," said Al Bumen. "By the way, have you ever had the Chicken Pox?" [55]

"No, sir," said Billy.

"Well, you must be vaccinated at once; I wouldn't have you catch it and break out now that you are safely here."

"I warn you I shall try to," said Billy, in a temper.

"I give you leave to try, but it's useless to try to leave—you can thank your lucky stars you weren't put in the incubator instead of in here."

"The incubator?" asked Billy.

"Yes—the Orphan Asylum—it's a terribly hot place; an egg that goes in there never comes out the same," said Al Bumen, gravely.

"Oh, I know," said Billy; "it changes them into chicks."

"Yes—it's capital punishment; they either come out entirely bad or with fowl natures. It's enough to make one chicken-hearted to think of it."

Billy was shown into his cell and the door was locked. "Why—who are you?" said he, in surprise. For when his eyes got used to the darkness he discovered that he had a cell mate.

A shaven-headed, heavy-jawed egg yawned and sat up on the cake-of-ice cot he had been lying on. [56]

"Me? I'm Boiled Egg."

"What—what have you done, sir?" said Billy, hoping it wasn't murder.

"That's the trouble," said Boiled Egg, sulkily; "I'm overdone—got into hot water last night and they arrested me for a hard character this morning. I believe the charge is salt and peppery."

"That's too bad," said Billy, sympathetically.

"It is that—but they'd better look out, or I'll turn into an Easter Egg and dye on their hands," said he, fiercely.

"Tap—tap—tap," came from the wall.

"What's that?" asked Billy.

"Oh! a couple of softies in the next cell."

"Who are they?"

"The Poachers—Ham Omelet found them trapping a rasher of bacon on his property and had them arrested—they've been put on toast and water for punishment. By the way, do you know what they have done with Nest Egg?"

"Who?" asked Billy.

"Nest Egg—the laundryman?" [57]

"No, I've never heard of him; what has he done?"

"He was arrested for impersonating an egg," said Boiled Egg, "and it served him right, because he never could be served any other way, you know."

"Why?" asked Billy.

"Well, in the first place, he came here from China, and I tell you we Union eggs are all down on Chinese labor. What chance has an honest, hard-working egg against that sort of a fellow. I say, crack his head open, that's the only thing that should be done to him."

"Goodness! That ice makes it damp in here; I believe I'm taking cold—catch—choo—catch—choo," and Billy sneezed twice.

"Gehsundheit!" said a voice in his ear.



Gehsundheit

"Did you speak, Mr. Boiled Egg?" asked Billy, surprised. [58]

"No; please be quiet and let me sleep," said Boiled Egg, sleepily.

"Gehsundheit!"

And this time Billy turned his head and saw a little snuff-colored fellow sitting on his shoulder, with the funniest little face he had ever seen. His eyes were puckered up, his nose wrinkled and his mouth open, so that he looked for all the world as if he were going to sneeze any minute. In his coat pocket he carried a very life-like stuffed rabbit.

"Who are you?" asked Billy.

"Gehsundheit!"

"And what is that?"

"A Cherman Count—and amateur presti-indigestion-tater, or magician—you haf called me—alreatty am I here."

"I didn't call you."

"Ogscuse me, but did you not schneeze?"

"Yes," said Billy.

"So—vas I right—ven you schneeze den does it call me. See, here are my orders from Mr. Gas." And, taking a paper out of Gehsundheit's hand, Billy read "Gehsundheit, Draughty Castle, Germany; when Billy Bounce sneezes he needs your assistance—go to him at once. Signed by Mr. Gas." [59]

"What luck," whispered Billy excitedly. "What luck—indeed I do need you."

"It is most well, I am here. Vat was your vish?"

"I want to get out," said Billy.

"Can you crawl through a keyhole?" asked Gehsundheit.

"Of course not—if I could I shouldn't need your help," said Billy, disdainfully.

"No; dat iss too bad, I can. Can you disappear?"

"Certainly not."

"Too bad—too bad. Let me think. Ah! I haf it, turn yourself into a fly," said Gehsundheit eagerly.

"But I can't. Can you?"

"No, but it would be so useful if you could. I am afraid times haf changed. Ven I vas a boy peeples could do so much magic. To-day it iss not so. I—I only am de greatest magician in vorld."

"But I thought you were here to help me," said Billy. [60]

"I am, but if you will not follow my directions how can I?" said Gehsundheit, crossly.

"Then can you do nothing for me?"

"Sure can I—would you lend me your cap?"

"Yes," said Billy, handing him his cap and wondering what he was going to do with it.

Gehsundheit carefully took the rabbit out of his pocket and laying the cap over it made several passes with his hands. "Presto—chesto—besto—change!" and lifting up the cap and the rabbit with both hands made a quick turn and pulled the rabbit out of the cap.

"It iss wonderful, iss it not?" said Gehsundheit. "See I haf taken a rabbit from your cap."

"Is that all you can do for me," asked Billy in disgust.

"It's all the tricks I haf yet learned, but yes, I can lend you a pocket handkerchief."

"What good will that do?" asked Billy.

"Vy, if you haf caught cold you will need it," said Gehsundheit, pulling out a little handkerchief.

"Oh, go away and let me alone," said Billy, thoroughly angry. "Much use you are." [61]

And presto—Gehsundheit was gone.

"He's a nice one—gracious, but I'm hungry," and Billy hammered on the cell door.

"Do be still," said Boiled Egg. "Can't you see I'm trying to sleep?"

"But I'm hungry," said Billy.

"Hungry," exclaimed Boiled Egg, turning pale—"why, why, you don't mean to say you eat?"

"Indeed I do. I haven't had my breakfast yet, and I want some eggs."

"Help, help, help!" yelled the Egg, crouching down in a corner and pulling the cake of ice cot in front of him; "he wants to eat me. Help, help, help, help! he wants eggs."

"If you're not quiet I *will* eat you, sure enough," said Billy, angrily.

"He says he *will* eat me. Help, help, help!"

Rattle! went the key in the door; bang! it opened wide, and in ran Al Bumen and Yolk, the jailer.

"What's the matter here?" asked Al Bumen, in a fierce voice.

"I'm hungry, and I want some eggs for breakfast," said Billy, sullenly.

Out went Al Bumen, in a jiffy, and after him tumbled Yolk, leaving the door wide open and the keys behind them. [62]

"This is my chance," cried Billy, and out he dashed after them. Far off, down the street, Billy saw Yolk and Al Bumen running as fast as their legs would carry them.

"Billy Bounce wants eggs to eat! Billy Bounce wants eggs to eat! Look out, everyone, he's loose! Help, help, help!" In a minute the town was in an uproar; mothers seized their children, and, carrying them inside, locked the doors and barricaded the windows.

Gray haired old eggs hobbled as fast as their legs would carry them to places of safety. Strong egg men fainted and were dragged indoors. In a minute Billy was the only living soul on the street.

"Now is my time," cried he. "Good-bye, eggs, some day I shall come back and eat you all up," and laughing heartily he jumped high into the air and sailed far, far away.

CHAPTER V.

[63]

PEASE PORRIDGE HOT

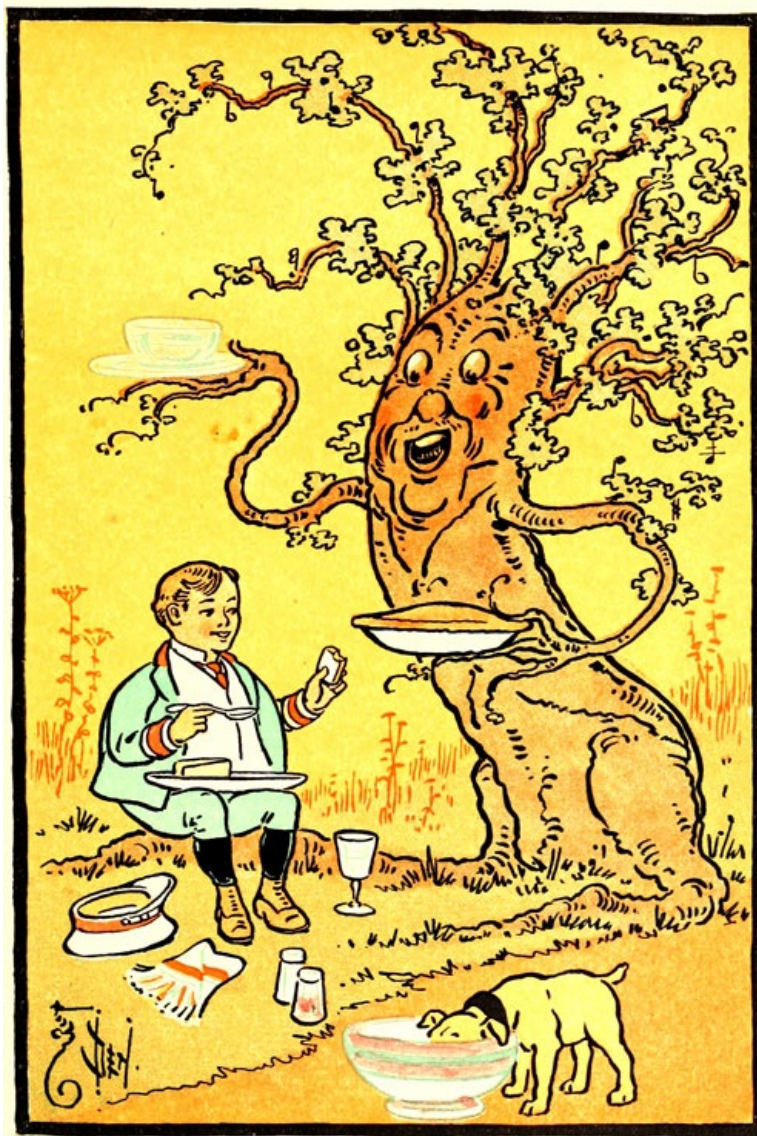
Billy sat under the Singing Tree. "Time for supper, isn't it, Mr. Tree?" he said; "I'm as hungry as a wolf."

Immediately the tree commenced to sing, "Pease porridge hot, pease porridge cold, pease porridge in the pot nine days old," and with a rustle of leaves it handed down three kinds of porridge. Billy chose some of the hot pease porridge and found it very good.

Then it sang, "Little fishey in the brook, papa caught it with a hook, mamma fried it in a pan and Billy ate it like a man," at the same time handing him a sizzling hot fish on a clean white platter. The fish was done to a turn and it's no wonder Billy left nothing but the bones.

Next came "Pat a cake, pat a cake, baker's man! so I will, master, as fast as I can; pat it and prick it and mark it with B; put in the oven for Billy and me." [64]

"There," said Billy, when that was finished, "I feel as though I'd had almost enough; but a little pie would—"



Billy never wanted for plenty to eat.—Page 64.

And sure enough, the tree sang "Little Jack Horner sat in a corner, eating a Xmas pie; he put in his thumb and he took out a plum and said what a good boy am I!"

Of course, one plum was gone, because Jack Horner had taken that, but there were plenty more left, and Billy ate to his heart's content.

So it was every night, and Billy never wanted for plenty to eat.

But this night he had had such a hearty meal that I fear it made him a bit restless in his sleep. At any rate, some time in the middle of the night he was awakened by a voice calling "Umberufen," and a tiny hand thumping him on the chest.

"Was-smatter?" asked Billy sleepily.

"Umberufen," said the voice.

"Oh!" said Billy, sitting up suddenly and upsetting a little old man with wooden pajamas and a nut-cracker face. "Who's Umberufen?"

"I am, and you called me out of a sound sleep. I do think you mortals are the most inconsiderate people I ever met," said Umberufen angrily. "Now what do you want? Tell me quickly, because I want to get back to my sawdust bed." [65]

"I didn't call you—I've been asleep myself."

"You did—there's no use trying to deceive me. I distinctly felt it when you touched wood—why," pointing at Billy's hand which rested on the trunk of the singing tree, "you're still touching wood. Now tell me you didn't call me."

"What has my touching wood to do with you?" asked Billy.

"It calls me to you, worse luck—what a dull fat boy you are, to be sure," said Umberufen scornfully.

"How was I to know? *I've* not made any arrangement with you, I'm sure."

"Well, if you didn't, your Fairy Godfather did,

and got me dirt cheap at that—ten cents a day and traveling expenses. But speak up, what do you want?"

"I want to go to sleep," said Billy crossly.

"But you were asleep," replied Umberufen.

"Yes, I was."

"Then if you were asleep, why did you call me to tell me you wanted to go to sleep?"

"It was an accident," said Billy. "I didn't want you, don't want you, and if you can't do anything but scold a fellow because you came when you weren't wanted, I don't ever want to see you again. Good-night." And Billy turned over in a huff and closed his eyes.

"But I can't go until I do something for you—those are my orders," said Umberufen sulkily. "You called me here and you've got to abide by the consequences."

"I don't care what you do. Well, then, stand on your head," said Billy.

"Zip"—and there stood little old Umberufen on his head. "Why didn't you say so sooner?" said he as he regained his feet. "I'd have been home by this time—good-night," and he was gone.

When Billy woke in the morning he felt just a bit sleepy and cross, but after he and Barker had had a game of romps he felt better, and tucking the dog under his arm he jumped off into space singing gaily.

"My gracious, what a big sea shore this is!" exclaimed Billy, when he drifted down to earth again; "and how hot the sun is, but where is the water?"

And Billy stood wiping the perspiration from his brow, while Barker squirmed out of his arms and stood in Billy's shadow with his tongue lolling out.

"It seems to me the singing tree can help us here," said Billy.

Barker undoubtedly understood him, and thought it a splendid plan, for quick as a flash his little fore paws had dug a hole in the soft sand. He barked into it, kicked the sand in again with his hind legs, and he and Billy were soon sitting in the grateful shade of the tree.

"Ah-h," said Billy, "this is what I call comfort."

"Comfort," said a voice on the other side of the tree, "much you know about comfort." The voice was followed by the saddest-looking mortal that Billy had ever beheld. A regular sugar-loaf head—large at the jaws and small at the top, scrawny neck, sloping shoulders, and skinny legs. And such a face—weeping beady eyes, a long sharp nose *and thin lips* turned down at the corners.

"Who are you?" asked Billy sharply. "And what do you mean by coming up so suddenly?"

"I'm a hermit, and this is my fast day, so I couldn't come slowly," said the man sadly.

"What is a fast day?" asked Billy.

"A day when you don't eat."

"Oh!" said Billy, "I thought you meant a day when time flies."

"No," said the man, wrapping his legs around and around each other, "no; if that were the case every day would be a fast day, because it's always fly time in this desert."

"You seem unhappy. Cheer up!"

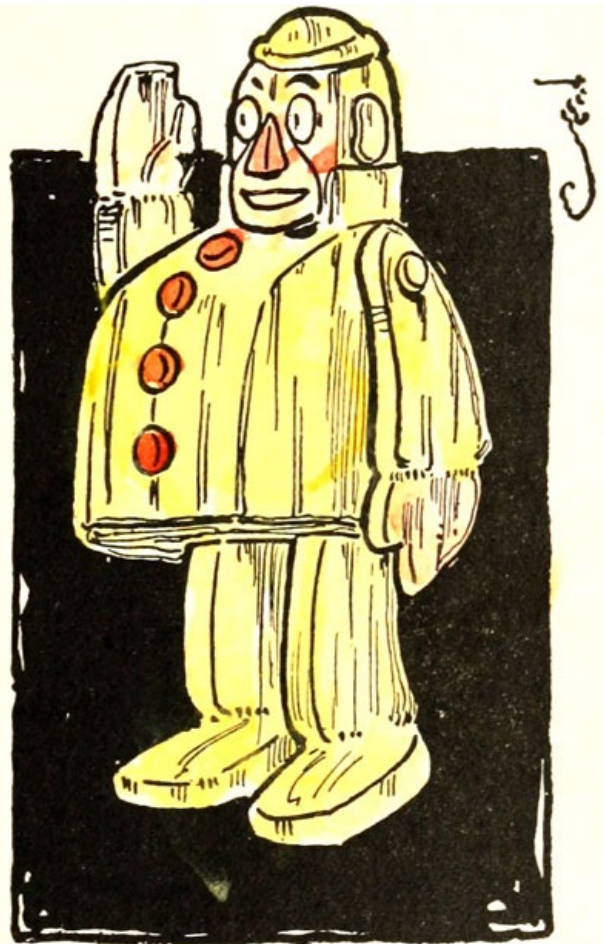
"I can't cheer up. How is a fellow to cheer when he can't speak above a whisper?"

"I mean laugh," said Billy.

"Laugh," said the man wearily, "what's that?"

"Don't you know what a laugh is?" cried Billy, in surprise. "Why, this is a laugh: ha-ha-ha!"

"I don't see any sense in that," said the Hermit; "that's just a noise."



Umberufen.

[67]

[68]

[69]

"Of course it's a noise. Come, now, I'll tell you



The Hermit.

a joke: When is a door not a door?" Of course it was very, very old, but so was the Hermit, and Billy wanted to start with the simplest joke he could think of.

"Quite impossible."

"No; when it's a-jar. Isn't that a good one?" said Billy. "Ha-ha-ha!"

"Oh, my! oh, me! what a terrible thing!" cried the man, bursting into tears. "Suppose all the doors should be changed into jars, what would the poor people do?"

[70]

"But don't you see, that's the joke," said Billy; "a-jar means partly open."

"Yes, but if it were still a door how could it be a jar? It's got to be one or the other."

"Oh, pshaw!" said Billy, in disgust; "can't you see it's a joke. I think it's very funny."

"Oh! is that funny?" asked the Hermit.

"Of course."

"Then that's the reason it doesn't make me laugh. When I was a boy I broke my humerus and had to have my funny bone extracted, so I can't see anything funny."

"Poor fellow!" said Billy sympathetically. "What town is that over there?"

"Mirage town," said the Hermit; "but you can't reach it unless you fly."

"Why not?"

"It's built in the sky."

"In the sky? Is it on the road to Bogie Man's house?"

"Are you seeking Bogie Man? Oh, me! oh, my! Don't tell me you are seeking him."

"But I am," said Billy; "why not?"

"Because I've got to hold you if you are, and I'm so tired," said the Hermit, slowly reaching out his arms.

[71]

"Good-by," cried Billy, giving a jump and bounding out of his reach.

"Oh! please come back and tell me another joke, I haven't had a good cry for a week," called the Hermit, holding out his arms.

"Too late," Billy called back—"But when is a door not a door? when its a jar."

"Thank you," sobbed the Hermit, and the last Billy saw or heard of him he was murmuring, "When is a door a jar," and weeping bitterly.

In a twinkling Billy stood at the gates of Mirage Town. Far beneath him he could see the burning hot desert, while through the gates he could see cool, airy houses, beautiful streets shaded by great trees and far beyond soft, green meadows and sparkling brooks.

"My goodness, but I'm thirsty," said Billy to himself. "I wish the gate keeper would hurry and let me in," and again and again he knocked, but seemingly with no result.

Finally when his throat was parched and his tongue dry with thirst, he could stand it no longer. He put his shoulder to the gates—open they swung, and Billy fell inside on his face. "Why, it was just like pushing clouds away," he exclaimed.

[72]

"But I'm in the sun here; I must cross to the other side."

So across the street he ran.

"Why this is strange, I was sure this was the shady side," he said in surprise. For when he got there the sun if anything was hotter than ever and the side he had left was cool, shady and inviting.

Billy shut his eyes. "I'm afraid this is sun-stroke," he said, "anyway I'll try again," and back he ran as hard as he could go. But when he got across it was the same thing as before.

"Come in and rest," called a voice from a house at his side; "you look hot and tired—come in and

rest your face and hands."

"Thank you, I will," said Billy, gratefully, not noticing that the voice was just a wee bit derisive.

"This way," called the voice; "turn the knob and walk in—if you can."

"Oh! I can," said Billy, walking toward the door of the house he thought he heard the voice coming from.

"Not that way—I'm across the street," called the voice.

[73]

"Oh!" said Billy, politely, starting across again, "I beg your pardon—I thought——"

"Think again," said the voice; "are you coming in or not? I'm not over here, I'm over there."

"Where?"

"Back where you're coming from."

"I thought you said—" began Billy.

"It doesn't make any difference what I said, I didn't say it," answered the voice.

Billy began to lose his temper.

"Are you making fun of me—who are you anyway?"

"I'm Nothing Divided By Two."

"Why, that's nothing," said Billy.

"Wrong," answered the voice.

"Why?"

"Don't ask so many questions—are you coming in or not?"

"I think not," said Billy, "I can't spare the time."

"I suppose you think you'll have to get right on to Bogie Man's House."

"Yes."

"But you're not—you'll never get away from Mirage Town."

[74]

"Why not?" asked Billy,

"Because there is no such place."

"But I'm here."

"That's the trouble—you are in a town that doesn't exist, so of course, you are not in any place. And, if you'll tell me how you can leave a place where you're not I'll——"

"I'll show you," said Billy angrily, "I'll jump out," and he tried to jump.

"No use," said the voice laughing, "there's nothing under your feet—and you can't jump from nothing."

"Well, I'll get a drink of water from that brook and then you'll see," said Billy, "I'll go out by the gate I entered."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the voice, "try and see."

Nothing daunted, however, Billy ran toward the brook—"Can't catch me—can't catch me," called the brook, "running boys can't catch running brooks."

"Indeed I will," and sure enough after a long hard run Billy reached the brook. "Now," said he exultingly, "now I've got you." Dipping his cap deep into the water he eagerly lifted it to his lips and found it—empty, while far off down the road ran the brook.

[75]

Billy came very near crying, he was so hot and thirsty and disappointed. But he swallowed the lump in his throat (which, being salty, made him thirstier than ever) and turned back again.

"The gates are all that's left," he said, bravely, "and I'll catch them, I'm sure." But it wasn't to be, for the farther and the harder he ran, the farther off the gates were. And finally he sank down, entirely out of breath.

"No water, no shade, no trees—why the Singing Tree, of course," he cried, delightedly. Out jumped Barker, scratch, scratch, scratch, bow-wow-wow, and, "Bing!" the topmost branches of the Singing Tree popped up and almost struck Billy in the face.

"Hello!" cried Billy, "where are your roots? I don't see anything but branches."

"Two miles below, where they ought to grow," sang the tree. "Come, hold on tight, you'll be all right."

And Billy seized the branch that held itself out to him.

[76]

"Hold on there, I want to speak to you," called the voice that had teased him so.

"I'll hold on," called Billy, "but I'll soon be out of your hearing."

Down grew the tree; shorter and shorter it grew, and sure enough, in a minute Billy was on solid ground and Mirage Town had disappeared from view.

CHAPTER VI.

[77]

BLIND MAN'S BUFF.

Billy made an early start the next morning so that he could get away from the desert before the sun rose to its full height. And indeed the pink had just begun to appear in the East when he looked below him and saw once more trees and grass and streams of water.

"Thank goodness, I am clear of the burning desert at last," he said to himself—"Ugh!! though, here I am falling, and I know I'll be drenched passing through that cloud."

"Plump—squash," and he was in the cloud, "there—it wasn't so bad after all. Why there's Honey Girl's Palanquin." Sure enough he had alighted within a few feet of Honey Girl, General Merchandise and the Bee Soldiers all sound asleep.

"Who—o, who—o—who—o goes there?" cried a large owl, perched on the limb of a tree above the sleepers' heads.

"I'm not going, I'm coming," said Billy.

[78]

"Who—o—o—who—o—o—who—o—o are you?"

"Billy Bounce."

"That's not the right answer," cried General Merchandise, jumping to his feet, "you must say, a friend."

"A friend then," answered Billy.

"Not a friend then or now—just say a friend," said the General.

"A friend."

"That's right—advance and give the what-you-may-call-it."

"The what?" asked Billy.

"The counter sign I mean."

"I don't know it."

"Well I suppose I'll have to tell you, seeing it's you—it's Bogie Man," said the General.

"Bogie Man," repeated Billy.

"There, that's all over—now you may sit down."

"Thank you—but—but what has happened to the soldiers, they seem to have lost their arms—have you had a battle?"

"Oh! no—" answered the General proudly, "that's my own idea, you've read of soldiers before a battle sleeping on their arms, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, every night our soldiers take off their arms and sleep on them; of course, it was a little uncomfortable at first, but it's very military."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Billy, dubiously, "but who is that—a—gentleman up in the tree?"

"You mean the owl?"

"Yes-s, I thought he looked like an owl."

"That's our sentry—he does it very cheap by the night, because he says he has to stay awake anyway, and he might as well stay awake here and get paid for it," answered the General.

"How is Princess Honey Girl?"

"Well—very well, in fact, but a little nervous; you see Bumbus and the Scally Wags are on our trail and she feels uneasy."

"Bumbus!" cried Billy.

"Yes—he is a renegade bee you know, and it makes him very bitter against the Princess. You

haven't seen anything of them lately, have you?"

"No, I have not. But who are the Scally Wags?"

"Oh! they're terrible fellows. I can't tell you what they look like for I've never seen them, but many a time I've read of their doings in 'The Morning Bee.'" [80]

"Good morning, Billy Bounce," said Honey Girl, opening the curtains of her Palanquin. "General, isn't it time to sound the reveille?"



The Bee Bugler.

"Exactly, we must get our soldiers up bee-times," said the General, saluting. "*Bugler*." Up jumped a little bee, saluted, plucked a trumpet flower and gave the reveille.

"I can't get 'em up,
I can't get 'em up,
I can't get 'em up in the morning,
The Corporal's worse than the Private,
The Sergeant's worse than the Corporal,
The Lieutenant's worse than the Sergeant,
And the Captain's worse than them all."

And in a second the whole camp was buzzing with soldiers.

"There—how's that?" said the General [81] proudly.

"Splendid," said Billy—then turning to the Princess, "I have thought of you many, many times since I last saw you, Princess Honey Girl."

"And I have thought of you, Billy Bounce: perhaps some day when this cruel war is over you can visit my Aunt and myself in the Bee Palace," said the Princess.

"Perhaps," said Billy, "and I don't believe that time is far distant, for when I once find Bogie Man I shall—"

"Buzz-z-z—There they are—There they are," called a voice—and looking up and away to the East Billy saw Bumbus and several objects that he knew at once for Scally Wags.

"Princess, you must leave at once," he cried.

"Right again," said the General. "We can outfly them—Company, 'Tenshun!!!—fix stings—carry Palanquin—forward—fly!" and up and off went the whole company, the Princess waving good-bye to Billy.

Indeed he was so intent on watching her and waving to her that when he did come to himself and realized that it was time he got away, it was too late.

"Buzz-z-z—here's Billy Bounce," cried Bumbus, settling down at his side. [82]

"He-he-ho-ho, oh! what a joke," cried the Scally Wags in one voice, tweaking his nose and his ears and pinching his legs.

And though the tweaks and the pinches hurt, Billy couldn't help laughing at the funny little figures. Such great flapping ears, such wide slits of mouths set in a continual grin, such long arms, such round, funny little stomachs and such gay parti-colored clothes.

"Well, boy," said Bumbus, poking him in the ribs, "what are you laughing at?"

"At your friends, the Scally Wags," said Billy.

"Bite him on the wrist," cried the head Scally Wag angrily.

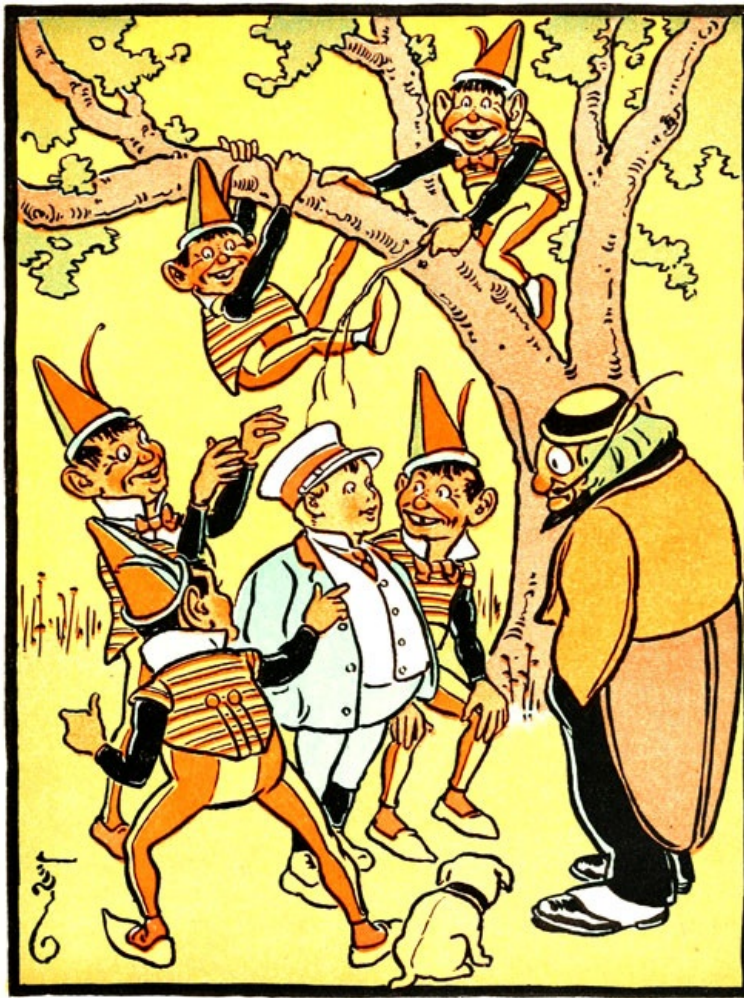
"Bite me," laughed Billy, "why you haven't a full set of teeth between you." And it was true, for there was only one tooth to a Scally Wag.

"Be quiet," said Bumbus, "I'm thinking! Where's that note Nickel Plate gave you?"

Billy did not answer.

"Did you hear me?"

Billy nodded yes.



***"He-he-ho-ho, oh! what a joke," cried the Scally Wags.
—Page 82.***

"Then why don't you answer? Come, speak up," cried Bumbus in a temper.

[83]

"I thought you said to be quiet, that you wanted to think," said Billy, looking very, very innocent.

"You'll pay for this," said Bumbus.

"What, the thought?" asked Billy. "You shouldn't sell it if it is the only one you have, you'll probably need it some time."

"Gr-r-r-r-r, buz-z-z-z-z," was all that Bumbus could answer, he was so angry.

"Leave him to me," said the head Scally Wag. "I'll joke him to death."

"Do your worst," said Bumbus, regaining his breath.

"No, I'll do my best. Here's a conundrum, little fat boy—but you mustn't answer it correctly."

"Why not?" said Billy.

"Oh! that's against the rules of the game; no wag, not even a Scally Wag expects his conundrums to be answered correctly."

"Why do you ask me then?"

"So that I can laugh at you for not knowing the answer."

"But that's nonsense," persisted Billy.

"Of course it is—we Scally Wags are all nonsense."

[84]

"Well, go ahead."

"What time will it be this time last week?"

"You mustn't say will it be, but was it."

"Have you ever heard this conundrum before?"

"No," said Billy.

"Well, you see I have—it's my conundrum and I guess *I* know what I ought to say."

"Then it will be the same time that it is now," answered Billy.

"Wrong—wrong again," said the head Scally Wag. "It will be a week earlier."

"Ha-ha-ho-ho-he-he, oh! what a joke," cried the Scally Wags again, tweaking, pinching and punching Billy.

"If you do that again I'll pitch into you," cried Billy angrily.

"There, that will do," interrupted Bumbus; then hummed,

"Boys delight to bark and bite,
It is their nature to,
But every cat has many lives
And thereby hangs a tale."

"But that doesn't rhyme," said Billy.

[85]

"Of course not—why should it?" asked Bumbus.

"Wasn't it meant for a poem?"

"Certainly not; it was meant for the truth."

"But it's not the truth."

"I didn't say it was the truth," said Bumbus.

"You just said it was meant for the truth," said Billy.

"Yes, *meant* for the truth—it was just an imitation, so there's no more truth than poetry in it."

"It's my turn now," said the Head Scally Wag. "We couldn't joke him to death, so lets tickle him into little bits."

"Oh, don't!" cried Billy; "I'm ticklish."

"So much the better," said Bumbus. "But if you will give up the note we'll let you go."

"I can't do that," said Billy decidedly, "I've got to carry that to Bogie Man."

"Come on," cried the Scally Wags, and they swarmed over Billy digging their fingers in the spots where he should have been ticklish. But of course they didn't know that he had on his air suit, and the more they tickled the more serious Billy looked.

"No use," said the head Scally Wag, sinking down on the ground exhausted. "We would need a sledge-hammer to tickle that boy." [86]

"Give him laughing gas," suggested Bumbus.

"Just the thing," cried the Scally Wags.

"Wait a minute," said Billy, "just let me have one little game before you give me the gas."

"As a last request?" asked Bumbus.

"Yes."

"Well what is it? speak quickly, for time is short and life is long you know."

"I want to play a game of blind man's buff," said Billy.

"That sounds reasonable," said Bumbus. "How do you play it?"

"First you must all tie your handkerchiefs over your eyes."

"Ha—ha—he—he—ho—ho—. Oh! what a joke," cried the Scally Wags, "we all carry pocket handkerchiefs."

"And then?" said Bumbus.

"Then," said Billy, "you all try to catch me."

"Is that all?" asked Bumbus.

"Yes."

"What fun—ha—ha—he—he—ho—ho," said the Scally Wags, "what a game to be sure." [87]

Billy had some difficulty tying the handkerchiefs around the Scally Wags' heads on account of their enormous ears, but finally they were all blindfolded. Bumbus was tied up in a jiffy.

"Go," cried Billy, at the same time leaping into the air, and Bumbus and the Scally Wags all made a rush for the spot where he had stood.

"I've got him—I've got him," cried all the Scally Wags, hanging on to Bumbus. "I've got him," cried Bumbus, catching hold of a Scally Wag. And Billy laughed aloud to see them scrambling and pushing and jostling one another in their efforts to catch him.

Even when he was just a moving black speck on the horizon Bumbus and the Scally Wags were

CHAPTER VII.

THE WISHING BOTTLE.

"I can't understand why Bumbus wanted to take that note away from me," Billy said to himself as he floated along. "First he and Nickel Plate employed me to carry it and now he tries to hinder me. Why of course—I know—he is aware that Princess Honey Girl has told me her story and fears that when once I do find Bogie Man I will vanquish him—so I shall, too. I wonder what the future will bring."

"Won't you have your fortune told sir?" and Billy looked up to see sailing along at his side a very old, very withered woman sitting on a broom.

"Why it's a witch," said Billy.

"I'm not a which, I'm a Was," said the old woman.

"Oh! I beg your pardon, ma'am," said Billy, "I saw that you were riding a broom."

"Well what of it—the broom's willing."

"I didn't mean it that way," began Billy.

"Oh! you mean you meant it any way. But this is not having your fortune told," interrupted the old woman. "Come right into the house."

And sure enough Billy discovered that he was standing in front of a little old house, as wrinkled and ugly and out of repair as the old woman.

"What town is this?" he asked.

"Superstitionburg—don't bump into the ladder."

"What is that for?"

"Oh! we all have ladders over our doors here for bad luck. Sit down and I'll get the cards and tell your fortune."

"Thank you," said Billy, "will it be true?"

"No, of course not. Ah—h! you have lately had serious trouble."

"That's true," said Billy.

"Then I've made a mistake. You will marry a tall, short, blonde dark complected man."

"Hold on," said Billy, "I'm a boy—how can I marry a man?"

"There I knew something was wrong. I have the deck of cards that I tell ladies' fortunes with— shall I try it over again?"

"No, I think not," said Billy, "I must be going."

"Purr-r-r-r-r, Purr-r-r-r-r," and a great black, hump-backed cat with glaring green eyes and nine long black tails rubbed against his leg.

"Oh!" he cried, "what a large cat."

"Yes," said the old woman, "that's my black cat-o-nine tails. I'm very proud of him, he's the unluckiest cat of the entire thirteen in Superstitionburg."

"Unlucky?"

"Yes, the cats always sit thirteen at table for bad luck. As there never is more than enough for twelve and as he always gets his share he brings bad luck to one of the cats every meal. Isn't that nice?"

"But isn't that hard on the extra cat?"

"Oh! no they don't mind at all—it's so good for the digestion."

"Won't you have a cup of poison before you go?"

"Poison?" said Billy, edging toward the door.



**"That's my black cat-o-nine tails," said the old woman.
—Page 90.**

"Yes. I have some lovely poison, I brewed it myself; *do* have some."

[91]

"No thank you, I—I really am not thirsty, and I *must* go."

"I don't see how you are going to get away now, the town guard knows you are here and is bound to arrest you if your eyes are not crossed."

"What have I done?" asked Billy.

"Nothing, only it's not bad luck to meet a straight-eyed person, and if you can't bring somebody bad luck you're not allowed in the city."

"But how do they know I am here?"

"Their noses are itching because a stranger has come to call. Their noses are very sensitive to strangers. It makes them such careful guards."

"Have they guns?" asked Billy.

"Oh! yes, they all have guns that are not loaded."

"Oh! well, then, they can't shoot me."

"I guess you don't know much about guns—because it is always guns that are not loaded that shoot people."

"That's so, I had forgotten," said Billy. "But as you are a witch, can't you——"

"I am a Was, remember."

"I mean as you are a Was—can't you help me?"

[92]

"I can lend you my invisible cloak," said the old woman, going to a closet and taking nothing out of it. "Here it is," handing Billy nothing at all very carefully.

"But where is it?" asked Billy.

"I just gave it to you."

"I don't see it."

"Of course not—it's invisible."

"Then if I put it on will it make me invisible?"

"Certainly not—it's the cloak that's invisible."

"Have you anything else?" asked Billy.

"Yes, I have the wishing bottle."

"Shall I be able to see that?"

"Oh! yes—here it is."

"Why that's hair dye, it says on the label."

"Sh-h—don't speak so loud—that's all it is, but you see it turns the hair so black that it almost makes it invisible. It's the best I can do for you. But don't tell anyone—it would ruin my reputation as a cuperess."

"A cuperess?" asked Billy.

"Yes, I cast charms."

[93]

"What kind?"

"All kinds but watch charms."

"I thought that was a sorceress."

"I used to be, but it's rude to drink poison out of a saucer now, and so I am a cuperess."

"Thank you very much for the wishing bottle," said Billy. "I don't know that I shall need it, but I'll take it anyway."

"Bad luck to you," called the old woman. "By the way where are you going now?"

"To Bogie Man's House," answered Billy.

"What have I done—what have I done—I'll have to stop him—if I only hadn't been a Was I might have guessed this was the boy," said the old woman, wringing her hands.

But Billy didn't hear this; he was busy examining the left hind foot of a rabbit displayed in a shop window.

"My cats," cried she, "I'll send them after him," and opening an inner door she called:

"Stingaree, Stangaree,
Whollop and Whim,
Mizzle and Muzzle,
Luckety, Limb,
Niddle and Noddle
And Puzzlecat too,
Roly and Poly,
I need all of you."

As each name was called, out ran a great black hump-backed cat-o'-nine-tails, and by the time she was done the thirteen of them were standing in front of her, their 117 tails swishing back and forth with a noise like a hurricane. "Run and catch that boy for me," said she, pointing to Billy. And off they scampered.

"What a wind is coming up," said Billy to himself when he heard the cats behind him.

"Meow-w-w—"

And turning round he saw the great cats bounding after him.

"They're after me—I'm sure," he said to himself, "but I can jump."

Alas for Billy, he was standing under a ladder when he spoke, and when he jumped "bump" he hit his head on the topmost rung.

Quick as a flash he reached out his hand and caught the ladder—and there he hung, dangling in mid air with thirteen great cats meowing and spitting and yowling on the ground just out of reach of his feet.

[95]

"This won't do—they will climb the ladder in a moment. The wishing bottle: maybe I can blind them with the dye." Holding on tight with one hand, he fished the bottle out of his pocket. "If I only had something to turn them into white cats," he said, staring at the bottle, "maybe they would become harmless."

And just at that minute a thought struck him so hard that it almost knocked loose his hold on the ladder.

"This is black dye," said he; "perhaps if I reverse the label, it will become white dye. I'll try it anyway."

And quick as thought he had loosened the label and turned it upside down. Certain it is that the

contents of the bottle changed to a snow-white on the instant.

Out came the cork. "Blub—blub—gog—gurgle, splash," and the cats were drenched with the liquid. "Pouf," and where Billy had seen thirteen black cats appeared thirteen snow-white ones.

The cats looked at one another in astonishment for a moment, and then forgetting all about Billy, began to flog one another with their nine tails. [96]

"White ca-a-a-at—meow—flog him out of town," and off they went flogging each other mercilessly, each one thinking that he was the only black cat in the whole town and determined to beat the strangers out of Superstitionburg.

"There's some good in hair dye after all," laughed Billy, and dropping to the ground, he stepped from under the ladder, leaped into the air, and bade farewell to Superstitionburg for ever and ever.

CHAPTER VIII. [97]

GAMMON AND SPINACH.

Billy didn't know how long he had been sleeping when he was awakened by a loud galloping.

"Who in the world can be riding through the forest so fast and furiously at this time of the night?" he exclaimed to himself. "I hope it's no one after me. I want to go to sleep."

"Thunder—col-lop—col-lop—col-lop," came the hoof beats nearer and nearer, "clop—clop, clop—clap—clap," and the gallop had changed into a trot. Nearer and yet nearer came the sound.

"It's coming here sure enough. I must get up and meet him, whoever he is," but when Billy tried to move he found himself bound hand and foot.

"Well, this is a fine how-de-do," he said, after vain attempts to release himself.

"How-de-do," said a little voice in his ear. [98]

"Who are you?" asked Billy, in surprise.

"I'd really like to tell you, but if I did, you'd know, you know." So saying, a little figure jumped up on Billy's chest and sat there with his face all screwed up as if he were making fun.

"Who are you laughing at?" asked Billy.

"Oh! what a good spring board you make," said the little man, jumping up and down on Billy's chest. And the rubber suit did make a fine jumping place for him.

"I asked you a question," said Billy, indignantly.

"That's not my fault."

"Aren't you going to answer me?"

"Give it up; try me with another," said the little man.

"Another what?" asked Billy.

"Another question of course, and if I can't answer that you owe me two forfeits—by the way how many does that make?"

"What?"

"Two forfeits—does it make eight feet or four fore feet?"

"I don't know, I'm all mixed up," said Billy, "how many?" [99]

"Well, seven times two makes twenty-four, doesn't it?"

"Yes—no-no—of course not; it makes fourteen."

"How can I expect you to understand if you know how to figure? Well, well, here's Night Mare after all—I thought she was never coming."

And sure enough up galloped a great night mare. Now some people say that Night Mare looks just exactly like a horse, but Billy knows better, for he saw this one very, very plainly. Her body was made of a long hard bolster, her legs of the four posts of a bedstead, her neck was a pillow, her head a piano stool, her eyes were two night lamps, and her tail was mosquito netting.

"Here's Billy Bounce," called a chorus of voices from her back, and down scrambled a cabbage, a carrot, a plum pudding, a mince pie, a welch rabbit, a pot of jam, and goodness knows how many other things that little boys should not eat.

"Is Gammon there?" called a voice. [100]



Spinach.

"Yes: is that Spinach?" answered the little man on Billy's chest. "Come on, I've got Billy Bounce tied down tight and we can make a splendid spring board of him."

"But where do I come in?" asked the Night Mare plaintively; "aren't you going to let me have a little horse play?"

"Certainly," said Gammon, "when we're through you can take a little ride on Billy—and be sure you ride him so hard that he can never get to Never Was and Bogie Man."

"By the manes of my ancestors I'll do that," said the Night Mare. "I'll put him to the rack, never fear."



The Night Mare and the Dream Food Sprites.—Page 101.

"Then tie yourself to the Singing Tree while the rest of us are playing."

"I don't want to be tied," said the Night Mare sulkily.

"Now do as you're told," said Gammon. "Suppose you should run away from yourself and leave yourself behind, how would you ever get home?"

"Well, if I must I must," said the Mare, wiping an oil tear from her eye.

"Come on everyone," called Gammon.

"But wait a minute," said Billy. "Who are you? You look like good things to eat."

"Who are we? We're bad things to eat," and joining hands in a circle about Billy they began to dance and sing.

THE SONG OF THE DREAM FOOD SPRITES.

Cream food, scream food,
 We are the things for dream food;
 Moan food and groan food,
 Any of us alone would
 Fill the tummy of one small boy,
 And give him dreams—oh! joy, oh! joy.
 Puddings and pies and cakes and jam,
 Turkey and fish and meat and ham,
 Candy and carrots and plums and lamb,
 Boys *will* eat and stuff and cram.
 We are the things,
 We are the things,
 The things that dreams are made of.

[102]

And as they sang "Fill the tummy of one small boy," they dropped hands, formed a long line, and one by one leaped on to Billy's stomach, bounded into the air, turned a double somersault and landed, laughing and shouting, on the ground on the other side, for all the world like acrobats in the circus.

"Please let me try," said Night Mare. "I promise not to run away."

"Oh! no, no, no," cried Billy. "Night Mare will kill me."

"That's a good idea," said Gammon; "shall we?"

"Not yet," answered Spinach; "I want to have some more fun before that happens."

"So do we all," cried the others.

"Oh! pshaw," said Night Mare, "you never let me have any fun—I don't know why I brought you here."

"Why we brought you, you mean," said Gammon. "If it wasn't for us you'd stay in your stall all night." [103]

"Excuse me—I forgot," said Night Mare humbly.

"Well, don't be ungrateful, that's all," said Spinach severely. "Some people never know when they're badly off."

Gammon had perched himself again on Billy's chest.

"Why don't you get up and go to Bogie Man?" he laughed, trying to poke his fingers in Billy's eye.

"I can't, I'm tied," said Billy.

"Time and tide wait for no man," said Gammon; "of course you're not time but you're tied."

"I don't see why everybody tries to keep me from seeing Bogie Man," said Billy.

"Because you want to see him," said Gammon.

"That's no reason," said Billy.

"Certainly not—there's no reason about any of us, most of all Bogie Man. You know the old proverb says—

'He that will not when he may Will live to fight another day.'

I suppose you would say there was no reason to that." [104]

"I certainly should," said Billy.

"And there you are wrong," answered Gammon; "there is a reason for all things, only some things have lost their reason."

"Now you've contradicted yourself," said Billy; "you just said that there was no reason about any of you."

"I have a perfect right to contradict myself—it's only rude to contradict other people."

"But which is correct?"

"Both."

"How can they both be correct?"

"I don't know, but they are—but my, my, we're wasting time—we've got to dispose of you before morning."

"Why before morning?" asked Billy. "I'm in no hurry."

"You never are," said Gammon. "Night Mare, are you ready for your ride?"

"Yes, I will have to start now if I am to have any kind of a canter before the cock crows."

"Good!" whispered Billy to himself. "I wonder if I can still crow. It's worth trying, anyway—Cock-a-doodle-do!" And snap, the Night Mare, had broken her hitching-strap and was off in a jiffy with Gammon and Spinach and all the other dream sprites running pell-mell after her as fast as they could go. [105]

Billy shook himself; sat up, to prove that he was no longer tied down; lay back, rolled over, and in a minute was sound asleep.

When Billy woke up the next morning he felt stiff and sore from being tied down so long by Gammon, and very heavy about the eyes from his lack of sleep.

"I don't feel very hungry this morning, Singing Tree," he said; "I think I'll save my appetite for to-night. May I have some eggs?"

No sooner said than done—

"Higglepy, Piggieby,
My black hen,
She lays eggs
For gentlemen:
Sometimes nine
And sometimes ten,

sang the Singing Tree, and held out a bowl of nine steaming hot eggs.

[106]

"She is a very good hen, isn't she?" said Billy, "and I suppose, under the circumstances, she must consider me a gentleman, even if I do sometimes forget to brush the cow-lick on the crown of my head. M-m, how good!"

He broke three nice eggs into the cup the tree held out to him, dropped a delicious lump of butter into the cup, shook in a little pepper and a little salt, and sat down on the ground to enjoy his breakfast.

"Give the hen back her eggs, and as they are cooked," he said, laughing, "maybe if she sits on them she will hatch out a chicken fricassee for dinner."

And he went to work with a light heart. He had just gotten down to the last mouthful when a little speck of pepper that had flown into his nose when he seasoned his eggs made him sneeze.

"Gehsundheit!" and there stood the little German Count who had been so powerless to help him in Eggs Aggeration.

"Eggs again, isn't it?" said Gehsundheit.

"That's so," said Billy. "How do you do?"

"Vell, I haf been resting mineself since I saved your life in dot Egg City."

[107]

"Saved my life—I'd like to know——"

"Vat," said Gehsundheit, "you mean to say dat I did *not* save it?"

"Indeed I do," said Billy warmly.

"Ach, de ungratitude of boys—and after Mr. Gas thanked me so kindly for vat I did for you."

"Well, what did you do?"

"Did I not lend you a pocket handkerchief?"

"Yes, but that didn't save my life."

"Of course you say it did not, but it did."

"How?" asked Billy.

"You used it to gag the jailer—iss it not?"

"Certainly not; I didn't gag him."

"Dat is not my fault; you could have gagged him with it, could you not?"

"Perhaps," said Billy, "but I didn't think of that."

"Ach, so, vat did I tell you—am I to be plamed because you did not think of it?" said Gehsundheit.

"But you didn't suggest it—you didn't think of it yourself."

"Perhaps not at the time—but I thought of it afterwards and said—so I haf saved his life. Now can you say I did not?"

[108]

"I think I'd rather not say," said Billy.

"As you vish—but here," and Gehsundheit struck an attitude and pointed to his heart, "here I haf de satisfaction of knowing dat I am a brave hero and a great magician."

"Well, if you're pleased," said Billy, "that's something."

"You are right," said Gehsundheit, bowing low; "to be pleased vit oneself iss enough. But I accept your apology."

"What apology?"

"When you said Gehsundheit, you are a brave hero. Mr. Gas shall know how pleased you are with me."

Billy looked hard at Gehsundheit to see if he was joking, but he looked so seriously well pleased with himself that Billy did not have the heart to argue further.

"And what do you want now?" said Gehsundheit

"Nothing," said Billy.

"You shall haf it at once," said Gehsundheit. "It iss a hard task you ask of me, but you shall haf it."

[109]

"But I said nothing," said Billy.

"Exactly—but fear not——" and spinning around on one toe, waving his arms above his head and

ending by kissing his fingers, Gehundheit rolled up his sleeves and said, "You vill notice dat I haf no cuffs to deceive you—and yet de hand is quicker as de eye—mumbo, Jumbo, zip, boom, rah—it iss here." And reaching out he caught a handful of air, gravely handed it to Billy and disappeared.

CHAPTER IX.

[110]

IN SILLY LAND.

It was afternoon, and Billy was resting in the shade of the Singing Tree while Barker played about at his side. He was laughing softly to himself over his experience with Gehundheit that morning. "He's a funny little fellow—calls himself a hero. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Woof, woof, woof!" said Barker, and Billy looked up just in time to see him rush madly at a man and try to bury his teeth in his leg. I say try, because if there was ever a surprised dog in all the world that dog was Barker. Billy could hear his teeth grit and scrape on the man's leg, but he made no more impression on it than if it had been made of stone; and that's not strange, because it was stone. Barker opened his jaws, ran back a few feet, stared at the man's leg, then up at his face, tucked his little button of a tail between his legs, gave one yelp of terror, and leaped into Billy's arms.

[111]

It is hard to tell whether it was surprise at his failure or the man's face that frightened Barker—perhaps it was both. Certainly the face was enough to frighten any well-brought-up dog.

He was made entirely of stone; even his constant smile showed the chisel marks; but his head was the oddest part of him—just one straight line from the tip of his nose to the top of his head.

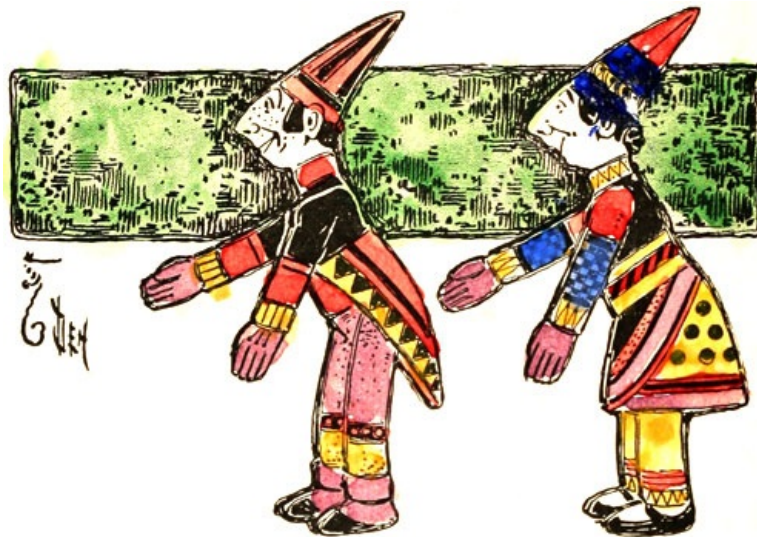
"Hello! where did you come from?" asked Billy.

"From the quarry," said the man. "I'm an Aztec Fragment. Can't you tell that from my well-chiseled features? He-he-he! That's a good, silly joke, isn't it? You see: stone—my well-chiseled features—stone chiseled. He-he-he!"

"Who is that back of you?"

"That's my sister, Her Terics. I'm His Terics. Does your dog bite?" said the Fragment, and he and his sister burst into gales of laughter.

[112]



The Aztec Fragments: His Terics and Her Terics.

"Sometimes, when he's hungry," said Billy, knowing that they were making fun of him; "but he's not very fond of stone legs."

"He-he! that's funny. He ought to eat stone; it would give him grit."

"I don't see anything funny about that."

"Neither do I, but it is silly, isn't it?" said the man, and he and his sister giggled harder than ever.

"Well, of all the Sillies I ever saw," said Billy in disgust.

"Silly is as silly does, in Silly Land," said the Fragment; and again he and Her Terics laughed until Billy thought their stone sides would crack.

[113]

"Look out," said he, "you'll burst."

"We've already bursted," said His Terics.

"Where?"

"We've bursted into laughter of course. He-he-my-my, but isn't that a good joke?"

"You enjoy your own jokes, don't you?" said Billy, trying to be sarcastic.

"So would you if you could make them—I was just cut out for a joker—he-he-he."

"I should say that you were just plain foolish," said Billy. "Why do you laugh so at nothing?"

"Because we've just brains enough to be silly, and of course we have to laugh at everything whether its anything or nothing—isn't that so, Her?"

"Yes," said the girl. "He-he-he."

"For goodness' sake stop giggling," said Billy; "you set my teeth on edge."

"He-he-ho-ho, that's good," cried His Terics, "but suppose they weren't on edge and lay flat in your mouth, you would have to lie on your side to chew. He-he-he." [114]

"Stop it," said Billy, "I'm so nervous now I could jump out of my skin."

"Oh, *do*," laughed both of them, "please do; that would be awfully funny!"

"He-he-he! Yes," said His Terics, "then you would be beside yourself, wouldn't you?"

"Well, I can't waste time with you any longer, I'm going."

"You think you're going but you're not—he-he-he," said His Terics.

"I'll show you."

"Oh! no—he-he-he oh! no, but you'll not, you know—he-he-he," said both of them, suddenly throwing their arms around his neck.

Billy fought and squirmed and kicked, but of course as the Fragments were stone they easily held him down, nor could he make any impression on them with his heels or fists.

"Oh! don't go—please don't go," said His Terics; "I really shouldn't go if I were you—he-he-he."

"That's all right," panted Billy, "you've got me now, but remember that he who laughs last laughs best." [115]

"I know that," said His Terics, "because I laughed last and it was the best I've had in a long time."

"Let me go," said Billy, "I've a message to deliver to Bogie Man."

"That's the reason we're here," said His Terics, "but we will take the message—he-he-he, oh! Yes, we will take the message."

"I have to deliver it myself—and besides I don't believe you'd take it to him anyway."

"Of course not—we'd take it, but just out of your pocket—he-he-he-he! ho-ho!"

"Oh! here comes the Gillies," cried Her Terics. "Now we will have some fun."

Billy looked in the direction in which she pointed and saw three very, very stupid looking fellows slouching toward them.

When the Gillies got up to where Billy and the Fragments stood, they stopped, and without looking up one of them said:

"Do you know where His Terics and Her Terics are?"

"Here we are," cried His Terics, "at least we think we're here, if we're not won't you go find us and then come back and tell us where we're to be found—he-he-he." [116]

"Why, so you are," cried the first speaker. "I didn't think to look."

"Who are these people?" asked Billy.

"Gillies," explained His Terics—"Big Gillie, Silly Gillie, and Dottie Gillie."

"You don't happen to know whether or no the moon is made of green cheese, do you, boy?" asked Big Gillie.

"Of course it's not," said Billy.

"Thank you—you're sure I suppose."

"Certainly."

"My, my, my, the poor man in the moon—I wonder what he eats," and Big Gillie began to weep.

"There is no man in the moon," said Billy.

"No man in the moon!" cried all the Gillies and all the Aztecs in one breath.

"No."

"Wicked boy," said His Terics. "We were warned by Nickel Plate that you didn't believe in your

Mother Goose, but we didn't think it would be this bad."

"What is the harm if I don't believe in such things?" asked Billy.

[117]

"Why if all the children in the world stopped believing in wicked giants, and Bogie Man, and witches and bad things generally, they would have to go to work and earn an honest living," said His Terics.

"What do they do now?"

"They all have more business than they can attend to frightening children. It's very easy work, and most amusing to make little children shiver and shake and cry, especially when we all know that there never was one of the wicked ones that could really hurt anyone that is not afraid. But my, my! I'm divulging state secrets—that's what comes of trying to be serious," and His Terics grinned sadly.

"What shall we do with the boy?" asked Silly Gillie.

"Tie his feet together and make him run himself to death," suggested Dottie Gillie.

"How could I run if my feet were tied?" asked Billy.

"I don't know," said Dottie, "that's why I suggested it—there is nothing like finding out for certain." [118]

"I know," said Her Terics, "make him laugh at your jokes, brother; that will be an awful punishment—he-he-he."

"Or yours," said His Terics; "that would be worse. No, we will tie him out here for a year and let him think things over; then if he promises to go straight home we will let him go."

"But I'd starve," said Billy.

"Don't be obstinate," said Silly Gillie, "or we'll make it two years."

"Hand me the rope," said His Terics.

"Which one of us has it?" said the Big Gillie; "have you, brother, or you?"

"I don't know, have we?" said the other two.

"I don't know, I'm sure," said the big one, "maybe I have it." At that each one began to search in the others' pockets for the rope.

"Not in your pockets, you Gillies," said Her Terics. "He-he-he, how funny!" said His Terics, "not in your pockets."

"Well, it might have been, you never can tell," said Big Gillie. "I don't believe any of us has it; hold this," handing his coil of rope to his brother, "while I hunt in my hat." The other Gillies took the rope and stood looking at their brother while he took his hat off his head and tore the lining out. [119]

"There—you two are holding it," said His Terics, almost beside himself. "You, Big Gillie, just handed it to your brother."

"So you did—what a coincidence!" said they.

"Why of course," said Big Gillie, "how foolish of you! I knew all the time that *I* didn't have it."

"Now tie him tight," said His Terics.

"We'll do that," answered Big Gillie, and in a jiffy they had tied, not Billy at all, but His Terics and Her Terics, though they still held Billy.

"Oh! you Gillies," cried His Terics, "can't you see you've tied up the wrong persons?"

"How strange!" said the Gillies, letting go of Billy in their surprise.

"Now is my chance," thought Billy, and stepped away to get room for his jump.

"Safe," he had just said to himself, when he found himself caught by his collar.

"Not yet, my fine fellow," said a voice. "Haha, so it is you," said Nickel Plate, tapping his boots with the limber cane he carried. [120]

"Nickel Plate," cried Billy.

"Nickel Plate," cried the Aztec Fragments and the Gillies.

"Foiled—foiled again," he hissed between his teeth; "then you recognize me—tell—a—me—do you?"

"Of course," said Billy.

"He recognizes me in spite of my disguise—strange—strange," said Nickel Plate.

"Oh! are you disguised?" asked Billy.

"Sh-h-h, not so loud. Yes, completely disguised—even an utter stranger would not know me—I have changed my mind."

"Wonderful!" said Big Gillie; "if we had not seen your face and figure we should never have known you."

"Ha-ha, you see?" said Nickel Plate, shaking Billy.

"Yes sir," said Billy.

"He-he-he," laughed Her Terics, "how funny!"

"Isn't it silly?" said His Terics.

"What?" asked the others.

"I just happened to think of a joke about a mind."

[121]

"What is it?" asked Nickel Plate, "and look sharp because we're wasting time."

"Never mind—he-he-he," and Her Terics threw back her head and laughed aloud.

"Enough," thundered Nickel Plate—"boy, where are those papers?"

"What papers, sir," asked Billy.

"The note, base varlet—the note, or by me halidom——"

"The note for Bogie Man?" interrupted Billy.

"Yes, but why in the world did you interrupt me?" said Nickel Plate, pettishly. "I've been studying that speech for a week, and now you've put it out of my head."

"Where did he put it? I'll find it," said Big Gillie, looking on the ground.

"He-he-he," laughed the Aztecs.

"I'm sorry, sir," began Billy.

"It's all very well to say you're sorry, but I know you're glad you're sorry. The note, give it to me."

"I can't, sir," said Billy.

"You dare to refuse?"

"I'm sorry, sir——"

[122]

"Don't use that word again; give me the note," said Nickel Plate.

"I can't, sir, it is addressed to Bogie Man, and I must carry it to him."

"Ah! but I have learned that in delivering it you would betray us. I *must* have it back. Besides it is not needed, Honey Girl is in me power, ha-ha!"

Billy's heart sank way, way down into his boots.

"You have captured Honey Girl?" he asked in a trembling voice.

"Yes, even now she languishes in a donjon cell, ha-ha. To-morrow she goes to work in the factory, while Glucose takes her place in the Queen Bee Palace."

"You villain," cried Billy.

"Thank you, thank you most kindly, me boy, not only a villain, but a polished villain."

"She won't stay there long after I have seen Bogie Man."

Nickel Plate snapped his fingers in Billy's face. "That for you, I do not fear your threats, I have you in me power now."

"That for you," cried all the Aztecs and the Gillies, snapping their fingers and treading on Billy's toes, just to show that they didn't fear him. [123]

"The note—the note, or I shall strike you to the gr-r-ound," cried Nickel Plate, and raising his cane he stepped back to strike. But it was a fatal step, for he stumbled over Big Gillie and fell flat on his back. In falling he let go of Billy's collar, and you may be sure Billy didn't waste any time in jumping up and away.

"Catch him," cried Nickel Plate.

"Certainly," cried the Gillies, stumbling over each other.

"Certainly," cried His Terics and Her Terics, stumbling over the Gillies and falling plump onto Nickel Plate. And you can well imagine that it was not a very light fall.

"Ugh!" groaned Nickel Plate.

"How funny. He-he-he," laughed the Fragments, rolling over and over on Nickel Plate.

"Rah! 'rah! 'rah!" cried Billy, and floated away.

CHAPTER X.

[124]

SEA URCHIN AND NE'ER DO EEL.

Now, although Billy felt very happy indeed to have escaped Nickel Plate, the Aztec Fragments, and the Gillies, he was very much worried about Honey Girl. And as he floated along through the air he pictured her weeping in her lonely cell.

"I wonder if Nickel Plate told me the truth," he said to himself, "and if he did, what happened to good old General Merchandise and the Bee Soldiers. I wish I knew."

"Hello!" called a voice in his ear. He looked around but could see no one. "That's strange," he said.

"Hello!! Is that Billy Bounce?"

"Yes. Who are you and where are you?" said Billy, in amaze.

"I am Mr. Gas and I'm at home," said the voice.

"Then where am I?" said Billy, thinking he had suddenly lost his mind.

[125]

"You're wherever you are," said Mr. Gas's voice. "I'm talking to you over the wireless telephone—less telephone."

"Oh!" said Billy, "how wonderful!"

"You wanted to find out about Princess Honey Girl, I believe."

"Yes, sir."

"Don't worry about her, she is perfectly safe—I have my eye on her as well as on you. How are you getting along?"

"Very well, thank you—but I suppose I'm still a long way off from Bogie Man's house?"

"You are nearer than you were when you were not so near as you are now, so keep afloat and you will get there all right."

"Thank you," said Billy; "I'll try."

"Well, good-bye—I thought I would ease your mind a bit—the suit can't carry you and a heavy heart very fast nor far, you know."

"Thank you," said Billy, "good-bye."

"Now I feel lighter hearted," he said, and sure enough instead of falling (which he had just begun to do) he rose several feet in the air.

But as the old proverb says, "What goes up, must come down," and in a few minutes he was on the ground again. This time he stood on the sandy beach of a great sea. [126]

"I wonder if I can jump all the way across," he said aloud.

"Ask me not in mournful numbers
What o'clock a boy has dreams;
Sleep is real, sleep is earnest,
Hash is seldom what it seems."

And a great gray-bearded eel wagged his head solemnly at Billy from a few feet off the shore.

"Did you speak?" said Billy.

"No, I sang, which is worse," said the eel sadly.

"I thought it was you."

"It wasn't you, it was I," said the eel. "What a sad world it is, to be sure!"

"How do you mean?" asked Billy.

"I don't mean, I swim, and that's a terrible bore."

"I think swimming is lots of fun," said Billy.

"Not when you do it for a living; it stops being fun when you have to."

"I suppose so," said Billy thoughtfully; "but then, you see, I've never had to do it for a living." [127]

"Then don't ever take it up. I've been at it all my life, and I'm very tired; why, I've almost

forgotten how to climb trees. What's your name?"

"Billy Bounce."

"So you're Billy Bounce. I'm Ne'er Do Eel," and though he smiled, the eel looked very, very sly.

"How do you do?" said Billy politely.

"I don't do; that's the reason I'm called Ne'er Do Eel."

"Oh!" said Billy, "then how don't you do?"

"Pretty badly, I don't thank you. But come, you must hear me sing; this song was discomposed by the whistling Buoy, set to music by Sand Bars, and dedicated to me," and balancing himself on a large wave, the eel began to sing in a sad voice.

THE SONG OF THE NE'ER DO EEL.

The Ne'er Do Eel raised his dreamy eye
And said, with a ponderous, weary sigh,
I'd really, yes, really try to try,
But I'm tired to-day—let's go and lie
In the cool sweet shade of an apple pie,
And think of the which and what and why.
Oh! why is the whatness of which and when;
If then were now what would be then?
Because and but—oh! what's the use.
"To-morrow will do," is my excuse.

[128]

"How's that?" said Ne'er Do Eel when he had finished.

"Very pretty," said Billy, "but is it—is it very sensible?"

"I really don't know—nobody ever understands it, so of course it must be very fine."

"I suppose so," said Billy, wondering if Ne'er Do Eel was quite in his right mind.

"Come in, the water's fine," called a funny, bristly little fellow popping his head up beside Ne'er Do Eel.

"No, thank you," said Billy, not wishing to join company with such a prickly looking individual.

"Aw! come on—see, it's only so deep," and he held up one hand.

"You're treading water," said Billy.

"How did you guess it?" asked the Sea Urchin.

"I can see your feet."

[129]

"So can I see your feet, but you're not treading water."

"That has nothing to do with it," said Billy.

"Just what I'm trying to prove to you," said the Urchin. "Are you coming in, or shall I have to come out and get you?"

"Neither," said Billy, jumping up very, very hard, because he knew it would take a long leap to carry him over the sea. "Good-bye."

"I suppose they are harmless," said Billy to himself, "but I'm glad enough to be away from them—that eel looks like a slippery old fellow and the Urchin has a bad face."

Up, up, up he went, floated forward quite a distance, stopped just a second, and then began to fall.

"I believe I am going to make it," he began, and then looked beneath him. Alas! poor Billy, the shore was yet far distant, and he knew that he was bound to fall into the sea.

How he did kick and wave his arms! He even tried to swim through the air, but, though this helped him a little, it didn't carry him far enough forward to reach the shore.

"Thank goodness I have on my rubber suit; I can't sink anyway," said he. And splash he hit the water, where he bobbed up and down like a cork. [130]

But his troubles were not yet over, for he was horrified to see Ne'er Do Eel and the Sea Urchin swimming along at his side.

"So you decided to drop in on us after all," said the Urchin.

"Have you chosen a life on the bouncing wave as a profession?" asked Ne'er Do Eel, "in spite of my warning that you would do well to bid farewell to well-faring if you chose sea-faring?"

"Yelp, yelp!" said Barker, climbing up onto Billy's shoulder, where he stood shivering miserably.

"What's that thing?" asked the Sea Urchin.

"My dog," said Billy.

"Don't tell me that's a dog fish," said Ne'er Do Eel, "because I'll never believe you."

"You don't have to," answered Billy, "because he is not a dog fish, he's a dog."

"Oh, you mean a fish dog! You're sure he's not a bird dog—a flying fish dog, you know?"

"No, just a plain dog."

[131]

"He's plain enough, goodness knows—but a dog—humph!"

"Who ever heard of a dog without fins?" said the urchin; "why, it's ridiculous."

"I expect there are lots of things you never heard of." It made Billy angry to have his word doubted, especially when there was Barker to prove them true.

"Ridiculous," said Ne'er Do Eel. "How can we help seeing everything in the sea? He who sees seas sees everything in season."

Billy didn't think this worth answering, so he redoubled his efforts to reach the shore. My! how he did make the water boil, dashing spray way over his head, and making poor Barker blink with the water he dashed into his eyes.

"With a little practice you might learn to swim," said the Urchin, "but you make lots of fuss in the water."

"So would you on dry land," panted Billy.

"But we wouldn't be so silly as to go on dry land," said the eel.

"I suppose that's as much as to say that it's silly of me to come into the sea."

"Take it or leave it—if the white cap fits you don't put it on," said the Urchin, turning a somersault in the water. [132]

"Where are you going?" asked Ne'er Do Eel.

"Yes, you seem in a great hurry," said the Urchin.

"I'm going ashore as fast as I can," said Billy.

"That's your first guess—try another," said the eel, sticking his face up into Billy's.

"I don't guess it, I know it," answered Billy, striving to keep his courage up.

"No, is the right answer," said the Sea Urchin.

"Why shouldn't I go ashore?"

"Just because," replied the Eel, "oh! gracious what a sad world it is—here's a boy that thinks he knows."

"But how are you going to prevent it?" said Billy. "I'm not afraid of you."

"We will prevent it this way," said Ne'er Do Eel, winding his tail around Billy's legs.

"And this way," said the Sea Urchin, pricking a hole in Billy's suit with one of his bristles.

Poor Billy felt himself getting thinner and thinner as the air bubbled out of the suit. And while he knew that he could swim and so keep afloat a while longer, he was well aware that in a very few minutes all would be over and he would go down, down, down to the bottom of the sea. [133]

Barker seemed to know it too, for he whined piteously.

"Now tell me that there is not just one more fish in the sea that never was caught," said Ne'er Do Eel triumphantly.

Billy didn't answer, for he knew that he must save his breath. But when he saw a plank floating just within reach he could not resist a feeble "Hurrah."

It required but a second for him to throw his arms over it and cling on for dear life.

"That's what comes of having planked white fish for dinner," said Ne'er Do Eel.

The Sea Urchin, seeing what Billy had done, swam madly about trying to find another opportunity for stinging him with his bristles, but was unable to make any impression through his wet clothes.

Ne'er Do Eel thrashed the water into a perfect foam in his efforts to drag Billy and the plank down, but barring giving Billy an occasional ducking and making Barker yelp with fright he could do nothing. [134]

Suddenly Billy felt the plank sink deeper into the water so that his chin was barely above the surface. At the same moment a voice said "Umberufen."

And there balancing himself on the plank stood Umberufen.

"Get off, you're sinking us!" cried Billy.

"You called me," said Umberufen.

"I didn't."

"You touched wood and I'm sure it's very inconsiderate of you to call me way out here to sea."

"I don't want you," said Billy.

"Then you shouldn't have called me. Goodness knows I'm not here because I want to be—I can feel myself warping already."

"Do go away," said Billy; "can't you see it's all I can do to keep afloat?"

"I'll help you," said Umberufen.

"How?"



"Get off, you're sinking us," cried Billy.—Page 134.

"I don't know. Who is your friend with a face like a hair-brush?"

[135]

"That's Sea Urchin, and he is trying to drown me."

"You must not do that, you know," said Umberufen, "it's very wrong." Then turning to Billy he whispered, "Leave him to me; I'll give him a good talking to."

"That's all you can do," said Billy desperately—"talk, talk, talk! I don't want words, I want help."

"Come down, come down. Oh! why be so obstinate?" cried the Eel, lashing the water.

"Gentlemen," said Umberufen, sticking one hand in the breast of his coat and bowing very low—almost too low, for just at that moment the plank twisted and he came very near going overboard—"gentlemen, you are doing very, very wrong."

"Bravo!" cried the Sea Urchin, "thank you for the compliment."

"Stop it and get away," cried Billy.

"Ingrate," cried Umberufen, "can't you see that already I have won their hearts—did you not hear the applause?"

"Of course I did," said Billy, "but it's only because they want to keep you here so that they can pull me down. But if you really want to help me, for goodness' sake pump me up and stop the leak

[136]

in my suit."

"I wish I could," said Umberufen; "but I am not a mechanic, I am a thinker."

"You're a nuisance——" but just at that minute Billy's feet touched bottom. Looking up he found that in the excitement of the events he had drifted within a few feet of shore. Splash, dash, curling! and a wave had carried him well ashore. Ne'er Do Eel let go his hold when he saw the case was hopeless, and he and Sea Urchin bobbed about on the waves, shaking their fists and gnashing their teeth in despair at having lost him.

"Ugh!" cried Umberufen, "I told you I'd get wet helping you," and there stood the miserable little man soaked through and through.

"I warned you," said Billy.

"I—I—I kn-n-ow you-u-u d-d-did," said Umberufen, his teeth chattering, "but I stood to my post like a man—that's what comes of being brave and brainy. Good-bye. I'm going home to change my clothes," and away he went. [137]

"Good-bye, Ne'er Do Eel and Sea Urchin," called Billy, running up the beach. "Death on the bounding wave isn't as easy as you thought, is it?"

CHAPTER XI.

[138]

IN DERBY TOWN.

Poor Billy was in despair over his punctured suit. It is a good thing he had no mirror to see how like a broken toy balloon he looked, or he would have felt even worse. He tried pumping it up with his hot air pump, but it was no use—sizz-z, the air came right out of the hole. "If I had just thought to bring some bicycle tyre tape," he said, examining the puncture carefully, "or if I had some gum."

When he said this Barker ran up to him, and laying his head in his lap, looked up at him knowingly. "What is it, old doggie—do you feel sorry too? I'm sure I don't know what is to become of us; we shall have to walk now. Of course we still have the Singing Tree. That's so, the tree—do you suppose you could bark up any other kind of tree? A gum tree—but how?" Barker nodded his head and wagged his tail, as much as to say, "Of course I can; just try me." [139]

"I have it!" cried Billy, and tearing in two pieces the pocket-handkerchief that Gehsundheit had given him, he carefully wrapped and tied one half of it over Barker's lower set of teeth, and the other half over his upper set. It was a tedious operation, but finally Barker stood before him with his teeth all hidden and nothing but his gums exposed. Barker didn't mind, indeed he seemed to know just what Billy was about, and capered and danced with glee.

"Now we will see what a gum bark will grow into," said Billy, quickly digging a hole. Over to it ran Barker and stood holding his nose down—pinch. "Wow—wow," went the dog, a muffled bark, for all the world like a toothless old man trying to talk. In a jiffy the dirt was shoveled in and up sprang—a gum tree. Yes, there instead of the Singing Tree stood a gum tree, its branches laden with "Yucatan," and "Pepsin," and "Tutti Frutti."

"Hurrah!" cried Billy, shaking down package after package of gum. And popping a great piece into his mouth he chewed away for dear life. Quickly he spread the soft, sticky mass over a piece of cloth snipped from the lining of his jacket and pressed the whole thing over the puncture. It stuck as close and as tight as wall-paper, and Billy knew that he was indeed repaired. [140]

"Chug-ff—chug-ff—chug-ff—squee-ee!" went the hot air pump, and there stood Billy as round and fat as ever with never a leak in his suit.

"Thank you, Barker, old boy," said Billy, patting Barker's head and taking the handkerchief out of his mouth.

"And now we must be off." So saying he tucked the Dog under his arm and jumped up and away.

Far, far away they sailed. The gum seemed to have given the suit new life—and why shouldn't magic gum improve a magic suit? It seemed to Billy that this jump was by far the longest he had ever taken.

Indeed, he felt so very happy that he commenced to sing, "Over the Hills and Far Away"—but alas! for Billy this was a fatal step. He had hardly gotten any further in his song than "far away," when he saw flying to meet him several shaggy bears. [141]



He saw flying to meet him several shaggy bears.—Page 141.

"I suppose I'm in for it now," he said to himself; "they look fierce enough to be some more of Nickel Plate's friends. I wonder if I shall ever get to Bogie Man's house, anyway."

"Gr-r-f gr-r-r!" growled the foremost bear when they got in speaking distance. "Gr-r-r-r gr-r-r-rf!" growled the other bears.

But true to his habit, Billy put on a bold front, and smiling politely said, "Good afternoon."

"Afternoon," said the first bear gruffly. And then all the bears surrounded Billy and flew along by his side.

Billy was really very much disturbed by this, but turning to the largest bear, he said:

"I see that you were bound in the opposite direction to me—and though I appreciate your company I wouldn't detain you for the world."

"Mind your own business!" growled the bear.

"I'm trying to," said Billy. "Excuse me, I've seen many dancing bears, but I've never until now laid [142] my eyes on flying ones."

"We're Bugbears, if that's what you want to know," said the bear in a surly voice.

"Thank you," said Billy, smiling in hopes that by being very, very polite and pleasant himself he could improve their temper.

"Save your thanks, they are not wanted."

"My goodness, you're as cross as——"

"A bear," interrupted the Big Bear, "exactly, and I'm proud of it. What's the good of being polite—tell the truth, I say, no matter whom it hurts."

"I'm sure that the truth is always best," said Billy.

"It's not," said the bear; "never tell it if it doesn't hurt. Under those circumstances, I say, tell a

bear faced lie."

"You haven't a very sweet disposition, have you?"

"No, thank goodness, I haven't—what would a Bug Bear do with a sweet disposition unless he could eat it?"

"I don't know," said Billy.

"Of course you don't—nobody ever said you did—boys don't know anything."

"Here we are," cried the Little Bug Bear. And sure enough, they were standing in the strangest of strange looking towns. Every house and every building was covered with an enormous derby hat, while the windows and doors were so arranged that at a little distance they looked like the eyes and nose and mouth of a face. [143]

"Where are we?" asked Billy, looking about him in surprise.

"Derby Town—where else do you think?" said Big Bug Bear.

"I didn't know," said Billy.

"For goodness' sake, say something original," said the bear crossly. "What an idiot you are, to be sure!"

Billy ignored this remark. He had had some experience with cross people in his messenger service—people who were cross for no earthly reason but that he was a little boy—and he had always found it better to say as little as possible when they bullied him. Nevertheless it made him very, very uncomfortable, and of course the more uncomfortable he got the more blunders he made.

"Can't you stand up—you're all feet, I declare," said Big Bug Bear, when Billy stumbled over a stone in the path. With that he gave him a push that nearly sent him on his face. "Stand up, I tell you," said the bear, catching him by the arm and jerking him back so that he nearly fell on his back this time. [144]

"Excuse me, sir—I didn't mean to," said Billy, almost ready to cry.

"Didn't mean to, didn't mean to—don't tell me that; you did it on purpose, anyone can see that with half an eye."

And with that all the Bug Bears took turns in pulling and jerking him about.

Billy was afraid to resent it, for their teeth looked very white and very sharp, and their claws looked very long, but he kept his eyes open for some means of escape. After a while, though, this exercise seemed to put them in a little better temper—just as it does lots of human bears—and they allowed Billy to walk along with only an occasional cuff or jerk.

"What are those?" Billy finally ventured to ask, pointing to a row of tree-like things along the sidewalk.

"Hat trees, silly," said one of the bears. "Can't you see the hat on the top?" [145]

"Oh!" said Billy, "they're very funny, aren't they?"

"Not a bit funny," said Big Bug Bear, "and if you had to listen to their bands all night, you wouldn't think so either."

"What kind of bands?" asked Billy.

"Hat bands of course—they're brimful of horrid noises."

"Oh!" said Billy, and relapsed into silence.

By this time they had walked quite a distance, and though Billy had kept his eyes open for a chance to escape, one or another of the bears had hold of his arm all of the time.

"I suppose you know why we have captured you?" said Big Bug Bear, finally.

"Because you don't want me to find Bogie Man, I expect," said Billy.

"For once in your life you are correct—little credit to you, though." [146]

"But why?"

"Why what?"

"Why don't you want me to find him?"

"He's our cousin for one thing, and for another thing, it's our business to keep people from doing anything they want to."

"And you expect to keep me from it," asked Billy.

"Indeed we do," said Big Bug Bear.

"How?"

"You'll find out soon enough. Now stop your talking."

Billy shut his lips tight and walked along with a sinking heart.

"Isn't he a sulky brat?" said Little Bug Bear, "pouting along and not saying a word."

"But you told me to stop talking," said Billy.

"Don't be impertinent," said Big Bug Bear, shaking him. "If you can't speak politely to your elders you needn't speak at all."

My, my, how Billy did hate the Bug Bears for that! Pinching and beating, anything he had been through could not have hurt him worse than this treatment. The Bug Bears seemed to know it, for they bullied him back and forth, and forth and back until he thought he would go crazy.

"Here we are at last," said Big Bug Bear, stopping in front of a prison-like Derby House.

"Yes, and if this boy hadn't lagged so on the way, we'd have been here an hour ago," said another Bug Bear crossly. "Get in with you." And giving Billy a push through the door, he and the rest followed close after.

Indoors they were greeted by another Bug Bear. Greeted is hardly the word, because that seems to mean some kind of a smile or a pleasant hand shake. As it was, the Bug Bear got up sulkily from a corner where he had been lying and grunted by way of "how do you do."

"We've got Billy Bounce," said Big Bug Bear.

"Huh! at last—it took you long enough, goodness knows," said the first speaker surlily.

"We didn't come here to talk," said Big Bug Bear angrily. "Get to work."

"What are you going to do to me—kill me?" asked Billy.

"No—not if you do what you're told," said Little Bug Bear.

"Worse than that," said Big Bug Bear.

"We're going to operate on your eyes," said the owner of the place.

"Blind me?" cried Billy. "Oh! don't blind me."

"Wait and see," growled Big Bug Bear.

"Oh! but I'd rather you killed me than put my eyes out—how could I see to get around?"

"You'll be able to see to get around," said Little Bug Bear, "but you won't be able to see Bogie Man."

"But I must—I have a message for him. Oh! good Mr. Bug Bear, oh! kind Mr. Bug Bear, don't do that."

"Tell him what it is, Photographer, and stop his noise," said Big Bug Bear, giving Billy a shake, "and listen quietly, Billy Bounce, or I'll give you a beating."

"I'm going to take a picture," said the Photographer Bug Bear.

"My picture?" asked Billy relieved.

"Your picture—your picture," growled the Photographer, "do you think I have nothing better to do than take ugly fat boys' pictures—huh!"

"Then whose?"

"Big Bug Bear's, of course."

Billy looked around the room for a camera, but could see nothing but bare walls. Not even a photograph was to be seen, much less the large glass cases of brides and grooms and military men and little boys and girls with sand buckets and shovels in their hands.

"Have you a camera?" asked he.



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The Hat Tree.

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"You're the camera; what else did you think?" grunted the Photographer.

"I am," exclaimed Billy in surprise.

"I said you, yes. Now stand up, will you—there," and the Photographer stood him up in front of him, holding in his hand a great big round black cap, such as photographers put over the lens of a camera.

"Sit down, Big Bug Bear, in that chair in front of Billy Bounce, please. So—that's it, head a little higher, look at the camera—that's it," and the Photographer threw a black cloth over Billy's head and turned it here and there, just as if he were focusing a camera.

"But what is it for?" asked Billy.

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Little Bug Bear spoke up. Indeed, he seemed to be the kindest one of all of them, perhaps because he was the youngest.

"Were going to photograph Big Bug Bear on your eyes so hereafter you'll never be able to see anything without a Bug Bear in it. And as Bug Bears keep people from succeeding in everything they attempt, you will never succeed in finding Bogie Man. There now you have it, and I hope you will stay quiet."

"Oh! but that will be terrible," said Billy.

"Of course it will, but we don't care; be still," growled the Photographer.

"Big Bug Bear, move your right hand a little more to the left, please—that's better—now look unpleasant—good." At this Big Bug Bear opened his mouth very wide and showed his teeth—when plump, one of his teeth, which must have been very loose, fell out of his mouth and squashed on the floor.

"Why," exclaimed Billy, "his teeth are dough." Then turning to the Photographer he looked in his mouth, "and yours"—then looking at the others, "and yours—and yours—all of you." Then reaching out suddenly he caught hold of the Photographer's paw—"and your claws are rubber—hurrah!! hurrah!! I don't fear you now."

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The Bug Bears were all so startled that they did not make a move and before they knew it Billy had pulled out his air-pump and was beating them all about the head—all but Little Bug Bear, who scuttled out of the door at the first move Billy made.

"Oh! oh! oh! ouch! ouch! ouch!" cried the Bug Bears, running about and trying to get to the door, "let us go—let us go." And in a minute Billy was all alone.

"So that's all Bug Bears amount to," he said; "they will never frighten me again."

And walking leisurely out of the door he jumped up and away from Derby Town and the Bug Bears forever.

CHAPTER XII.

[152]

O'FUDGE

The next time Billy alighted he examined his suit with great care, for fear his adventures with the Bug Bears had strained the patch over the puncture, but to his great delight he found that it held as tightly as ever.

As it happened, he had stopped on a dusty highway just outside the gates of a city. We will call it a city because Billy later learned that its inhabitants did so, but to Billy's gaze it seemed but a collection of the poorest huts.



The Herald.

And as he stood punching and pulling and examining his suit a party of horsemen and horsewomen rode up. A few feet in advance of the rest of the party rode a tattered and torn individual on a lame horse. In his hand he carried a battered old fish horn on which he occasionally blew a feeble blast; this he followed by calling in a voice loud enough to make up for the wheeziness of his horn, [153]

"Out of the way, out of the way O—the King rides."

"What if he does?" said Billy to himself. "I do too when I can catch behind a street car."

"Out of the way," cried the man, pulling up his horse, "out of the way, boy."

"I'm not in the way, there's plenty of room for you to pass, and I don't want to climb down into the ditch," said Billy.

"But the King passes—out of the way."

"Well, I'll be in that town by the time he comes along."

"He is here, varlet."

"Where?"

"That noble looking gentleman in rich raiment—true, a trifle faded—but rich—he that rides alone." [154]

"Do you mean the one on the blind mare?"

"True, the mare is blind, but that is her misfortune not her fault—she comes of fine stock. Yes, that is our great and noble Comic Paper Irish King O'Fudge."

"A Comic Paper Irish King," said Billy. "Is he Irish?"

"No," said the Horn Man, "not really Irish, he's the kind of Irish they have in Comic Papers."



O'Fudge, the Comic Paper Irish King.

Billy was bewildered—he looked from the King to his company, from the company to the Horn Man and then back again to the King. Such a faded, worn, torn, uncut, unshaven and unkempt crowd he had never seen outside of a company of beggars. And such nags as they bestrode. The lame, the halt, and the blind were all represented among their horses, while donkeys and mules in all states of decrepitude carried others. [155]

"So that is the King?" said Billy.

"Ay! the King and his retinue of noble ladies and gentlemen—out of the way."

Here the King spoke, "Phwat detains our noble silf Herald?"

"And so this crazy quilt is the Herald, is it?" said Billy to himself and true enough when he examined the man's tattered clothes more closely he saw that he wore a much dilapidated Herald's Tabard.

"A base born fat boy, your serene Highness, who refuses to out of the way, though I have outed him several times."

"I can't, your **Honor**—" began Billy.

"Treason," cried a voice, "he called his Highness your Honor."

"That's Lèse Majesty," whispered the Herald to Billy.

"Oh! is that his name?"—then turning to the King he bowed low and said, "I beg your pardon, Your Lazy Majesty." [156]

"Treason!" cried the company of men, spurring their horses into a rapid walk. "He called his Majesty lazy."

"I thought that was his name," said Billy. "Mr. Herald here told me it was."

"I didn't," cried the Herald in consternation.

"Silence," said the King, riding up. "I will hear this case, and bye, if it is true that you hov miscalled me, it's to de lowest dongin wid yez!"

"Indeed your Serene, Contented, Happy, Highness, Majesty O'Fudge," said Billy, giving him all the titles he could remember and a few extra by way of good measure. "I meant no disrespect."

"Hold," interrupted the King; "before we go further we must call out the gyard to gyard this bye—General Swash Buckler, do your dooty, no matter how pleasant it may be."

"Ay! Ay! also I salute your Majesty," said a fierce looking old man, saluting and riding a few paces to the rear. Then saluting the air, he gravely said: [157]

"Colonel Swash Buckler—you have heard the orders, execute them." Then turning his horse around, he saluted the spot where he had just been sitting. "Very good, General, I will do so at once." Again turning his horse, he saluted the air, saying, "Captain Swash Buckler, you have heard the orders—execute them." Again he turned his horse and saluted the spot where he had

just been sitting, saying, "Very good, Colonel, I will do so at once." This time he looked down at the ground and said, "Lieutenant Swash Buckler, you have heard the orders—execute them." Then climbing down to the ground he saluted the saddle, "Very good, Captain, I will do so at once." He quickly turned on his heel and called, "Sergeant Swash Buckler, you have heard the orders—execute them," and saluting he said respectfully, "Very good, Lieutenant, I will do so at once." Then in a hoarse commanding voice he called, "Private Swash Buckler, you have heard the orders—execute them." This time he saluted cringingly. "Very good, Sergeant, I will do so at once," and marched solemnly to Billy's side, halted and saluted, "It is done." [158]

"How's that for quick work, me bye, and what do ye think of me ar-rmy?" said King O'Fudge proudly.

"Oh! is that your army—your *entire* army?" asked Billy, who had watched the proceedings with surprise and amusement.

"It is," said the King. "Sometimes it's me sitting ar-my, but now it's me standing ar-m-y. There has never yet been mutiny or insubordination—it stands as wan man by its King. It can move rapidly and without much noise, and above all things it is most economical to maintain."

"I'm sure it's very fine, sir—I mean Your Majesty," said Billy.

"And now, bye, why did ye call me, the Irish King O'Fudge, a Lazy Majesty?"

"I meant nothing wrong, sir, but when I said, your Honor, Mr. Herald here whispered to me that's Lèse Majesty."

"So that's the way the wind blows—Herald, explain."

The Herald bent one knee, "Your Highness, I but explained to the fat boy that he had committed Lèse Majesty, which means that he had insulted you—it's Latin." [159]

"It's Latin, is it?" cried the King. "Latin, you say? How dare you talk Latin before me when Brogue is the court language? I fine you a month's pay."

"But, your Majesty's pardon, I have received no pay for two years."

"Sure," said the King, "and your salary is \$3.75 a month."

"Yes, sire," said the Herald, smiling, because he thought the King was going to give him all his back pay. "Yes, sire, forgive me for reminding you."

"You are forgiven," said the King, "and now, Gyard, search him and take from his pockets \$3.75."

"But your Majesty," began the Herald.

"Enough, I can't remit the fine, and if you have the money you must pay it."

In a jiffy Private Swash Buckler had fished \$3.75 in nickels and dimes from the Herald's pockets and handed it to the King.

"And now me vartuous subjects, give three cheers for your noble and generous king, and we will enter the City." [160]

"Hurrah! hurrah!" cried the people—even the Herald gave three feeble toots on his horn.

"Good-bye," said Billy, hoping that by this gentle hint they would understand that he did not desire their company any further. Indeed he felt uneasy about the few coppers in his own pockets in the presence of such a free handed King.

"Not so fast, me young friend," said the King; "you must come with us."

"Truly, your Majesty, I haven't the time," said Billy.

"I didn't ask you for the time," said the King, "so whether you have it or haven't it you'll have to take it—forward!"

And Billy found himself in the grasp of Private Swash Buckler, and being led in the direction of the City.

They hadn't far to go, and in spite of their naturally slow progress with such sorry steeds, Billy soon found himself within the gates.

And oh! what a place. Dirty, miry streets, pigs every place, tumbledown, leaky roofed houses and ragged people. And the palace—well, Billy would never in the world have known it for a palace if the King hadn't told him it was. It was simply a larger, dirtier, more tumbledown house than any of the others, with more and fatter pigs in the front yard. [161]

"Bring in the prisoner, Gyard," said the King, dismounting and picking his way up the tottering steps.

"Prisoner," cried Billy, "what have I done to be made a prisoner?"

"I don't know yet," said the King, "but I will find something. We haven't had a prisoner for years, and now that I've got one I'm not going to let him go again for such a simple reason as his having done nothing wrong—am I right, ladies and gentlemen?"

"Always right—never left," cried the retinue, who were now entering the palace.

"I thought you would agree with me," said the King, "but sometimes I'm left—it's a poor ruler that doesn't work both ways—come in."

Billy was hustled into the palace, which he found hung with torn and faded tapestry. The floor had not been swept or scrubbed for years, and there did not seem to be a solid four legged chair in the room with the exception perhaps of the throne, which was built entirely of Irish potatoes. [162]

"And now," said the King, putting his crown rakishly on one side of his head, "now I'm prepared to open court. First, has any one here any petitions—in writing?"

When he said this an old man hobbled up, and kneeling with many crackings of joints before the King, laid a paper at his feet.

"What is it?" asked the King.

"A request, sire, that my daughter——"

"Refused," said O'Fudge. "Who's next, please—leave the papers."

"But, sire——"

"I positively must refuse, but I thank you for the petition; me crown is a bit too large for comfort," and folding the paper into a strip he placed it in his crown, which he put on with much satisfaction.

"So that's over with—bring the bye before me."

"He is here, sire," said Private Swash Buckler, leading Billy before the throne. "Kneel, boy." [163]

"What's your name?" said the King.

"Billy Bounce," said Billy.

And what a shout and roar went up from the company—even the King jumped to his feet in his excitement and threw his crown into the air.

"Billy Bounce!" they cried, "Billy Bounce—we've caught Billy Bounce!"

"What a good day's work!" cried the King—" \$3.75 from the Herald and \$5.99 from Bumbus for catching Billy Bounce."

"But, your Majesty—" began Billy.

"Don't talk to me," interrupted the King, "unless you can offer \$6.00 to be set free."

"Alas! I haven't that much," said Billy.

"Too bad—too bad," said O'Fudge; "and now I suppose I'll have to off with your head."

"Oh! sir—please, please don't!" cried Billy, struggling with Swash Buckler.

"Don't lose your head," said the King, "because I want to have it chopped off."

"But, sir—" began Billy. [164]

"Sire," and a gray-bearded man, wearing a tall pointed cap and a long, flowing gown covered with the signs of the Zodiac, walked to the King's side and whispered in his ear.

"Are ye sure?" whispered O'Fudge.

"Certain, your Majesty," answered the man.

"The Court Astrologer," announced the King to the people, "tells me that Billy Bounce's star predicts that anyone who kills him will himself be hanged."

"Then I'll be hanged if I do!" cried the executioner, throwing down his meat cleaver.

"What are we to do with him then?" said the King, scratching his head. "I don't want to keep him here, or he will eat me out of house and home—I know what boys are." [165]

"Let me go, your Majesty!" cried Billy hopefully.

"And lose \$5.99—twice the national debt—oh! no. Has anyone else any suggestions to make?"

"Let me cast his horoscope again, sire—maybe the stars will show us a way out," said the Astrologer.

"Good," said O'Fudge, "begin at once."

"By daylight?"

"Why, of course, you can see better by day—do not argue but away."

And off the Astrologer trotted, shaking his head in perplexity.

Billy felt Barker stirring uneasily in his pocket, and in

order to shift his position took him out into his arms.

As soon as O'Fudge saw him he said: "Ho! a dog—this changes things. Astrologer, include the Dog star in your calculations."

Billy had been idly scraping his foot on the dirty floor, so that he really had made a little hole there, when, greatly to his surprise, Barker wriggled out of his arms and barked into the hole. Up sprang the Singing Tree and at once began to sing in a soft, dreamy voice a sleep song.

A strange and sudden silence fell over the room. O'Fudge sank back onto his throne and closed his eyes, while a contented smile came over his face.

Swash Buckler's hand dropped from Billy's arm, his head nodded and he fell in a heap.

So it was throughout the Palace—slumber overpowered all who heard the song excepting Billy and Barker. In a moment all that Billy heard was the Singing Tree and a loud chorus of snores.

You can imagine that it didn't take him long to run out of the door with Barker in his arms and jump away from the land of O'Fudge, the Comic Paper Irish King.



The Astrologer.

CHAPTER XIII.

BILLY PLAYS A TRICK ON BOREAS.

"Br-r-r-r, it's cold," said Billy the next morning when he arose: "if my suit were not full of hot air I believe I should freeze. I wish, though, I had some warm things to put on; it looks like snow." And he swung his arms and blew on his blue fingers and rubbed the tip of his nose to be sure it was still there.

"Why, hello, what's this?" for while he was exercising, the Singing Tree had sung softly:

"By lo, Baby Bunting,
Papa's gone a-hunting,
To get a little rabbit skin
To wrap his Baby Bunting in,"

and now stood holding a complete suit of nice heavy, warm rabbit skins. Either Baby Bunting was a very large baby, or when papa had skinned the rabbit (which must have been a giant one) he found it much too large for Baby Bunting. However that may be, Billy jumped into it in a jiffy and found that it fitted him to perfection. And what a fine time Barker had with it! He crouched low, and then with yelps of delight jumped up and down on Billy's legs. He was playing that he had sighted a great big rabbit, and Billy joined in by running around the tree and back and forth with Barker in hot pursuit. Finally Billy stowed him away warmly inside and doggy went sound asleep, very, very much contented. Then with a leap Billy was off.

Billy had not been away from the earth very long when a snowflake lit on his nose—then another and another, until they came down so thick and fast that he could not see a foot ahead of him, which wasn't strange, for his feet were under him.

"My, my," he said, laughing, "Mother Goose must be picking a whole flock of geese to-day—

gracious, I'm glad dear old Singing Tree gave me this nice suit; it's as warm as toast and keeps out the snow better than a whole store full of umbrellas and mackintoshes."

And the snow fell thicker and faster, while it grew colder and colder, but Billy didn't mind that for he was nice and warm. Then the snow suddenly stopped, and looking beneath him Billy saw a great white field of snow with here and there mountains of ice and occasional patches of blue, cold-looking water. And there by the water's edge sat a white bear: indeed he seemed almost to be sitting in the water, so close to the edge was he, his face turned toward the land. As soon as Billy struck the ground, which he did within a few feet of the bear, he recognized him as an old, old friend, Fuzzy White. [169]

"Why, hello Fuzzy White, what are you doing here?"

"Fishing," said Fuzzy, "don't talk, please, I've just had a nibble."

"Where's your line," asked Billy in surprise, for he couldn't see any line or pole, and certainly Fuzzy was not faced the right way for fishing so far as Billy could see.

"Sh! h—," said Fuzzy, raising a paw in warning, "there I've got him," and turning around quickly he showed a can of sardines clinging tightly to his button of a tail. [170]

"Is that your line?" asked Billy.

"Certainly, line, bait, and pole—it gets cold sometimes hanging one's tail in the water for an hour or two, but one must eat."

"But that's a can of sardines," said Billy.

"Yes, and I hope they are the best French, with pure olive oil. This isn't a good season for the fine sardine cans to bite; though the big Maine Mustard variety are very easy to catch—ah-h-h, these are the good ones." And Fuzzy with great eagerness opened the can with his claw and gulped down the contents.

"Do you really catch canned sardines?"

"Of course—I can't bear raw fish, I suppose that's from living in civilization so long. I find that a little lemon juice on my tail makes the canned varieties bite splendidly."

"How wonderful," murmured Billy.

"Well, well, Billy Bounce, what have you been doing with yourself since I saw you last? How you've grown."

"I've been pretty well, I thank you—what are you doing now?"

"Nothing much," said Fuzzy sadly. "I came up here to go in the ice business, but I found that old Boreas was the ice man and had a corner on the market, so I'm just looking about for something to turn up. What are you doing?" [171]

"I'm carrying a message to Bogie Man," said Billy.

"You're nearly there then," said Fuzzy, pointing out over the ice fields, "it's just beyond Aurora Borealis and back again ten thousand miles."

"Back again ten thousand miles— isn't that pretty far?"

"Not very, they are imaginary miles, much shorter than the regular kind."

"Who is that whistling?" interrupted Billy.

"That's old Boreas—he must have just made a good deal in ice and is whistling over it—by the way, he's a good friend to Bogie Man and Nickel Plate."

"Then he's no friend of mine."

"I shouldn't fear him," said Fuzzy, "he's a fearful blow-hard, and though he's certainly cold blooded, he makes more noise than anything else."

"Talking about me, were you?" said Boreas, arriving in a swirl of snow and clicking the ice tongs he held in his hand. [172]

"We—we merely mentioned your name," said Billy, trying to turn his back on him. But that was useless, for old Boreas faced him whichever way he turned.

"You can't escape me that way," and he threw a handful of snow in Billy's face.

"Stop it!" cried Billy, "it's no joke to treat a fellow this way."

"Of course it is," said Boreas, jumping over Billy's head.

"Is what?" asked Billy.

"Snow joke, of course—I feel frisky this morning and I must have my joke."

"You're always frisky," said Fuzzy White sulkily.

"Who wouldn't be—I just exchanged my old bicycle for an icicle this morning and it works like a charm," said Boreas.

"I suppose you travel rather fast," said Billy, hoping to keep his mind off of Nickel Plate and Bogie Man.



"Talking about me, were you?" said Boreas, arriving in a swirl of.—Page 172.

"Fast," answered Boreas, puffing his chest way out, "fast—why, while you are jumping three [173] miles, I will have run a hundred."

"That's blowing," murmured Fuzzy White.

"Then you recognize me?" said Billy.

"Of course I do—South Wind blew in here one day and warned me that you were coming."

"Let's change the subject," said Fuzzy White nervously.

"Yes," said Billy eagerly, "you, you whistle very well, Mr. Boreas."

"I pride myself on my whistling," said Boreas, lifting up a block of ice with his tongs and throwing it over his shoulder. "But to return to yourself, Billy Bounce—you will have to go back home."

"I'd like to oblige you," said Billy sturdily, "but I can't."

"Oh! you can't, can't you—we'll see about that," and Boreas ran actively around Billy, cuffing him in the face and over the ears—it seemed a thousand places all at once, whistling dismally all the time.

"Look out for his teeth," shouted Fuzzy White. "If you once get in the teeth of the wind, he will bite your nose and ears and fingers and toes off."

"Now, do you think better of it?" said Boreas, coming to a sudden stop. "That was only half trying [174]—next time I'll catch you in my ice tongs and carry you home."

"You can't frighten me," said Billy, patting Fuzzy White on the head. He didn't know quite why, but the feel of something that was friendly seemed to keep his courage up.

"Go it, old boy," whispered Fuzzy encouragingly.

"Wow-ow-ow! Oh-h-h-h-h!" howled Boreas, "you say I can't frighten you—why, I've frightened little boys and girls all my life. Every winter I howl and whistle my way around the world, and the

way I make the branches creak and the windows rattle through the long, dark nights is a caution. Why, even Bogie Man says that next to him I'm the greatest frightener in the world."

"I don't care, I'm not afraid of you," said Billy. Which, I fear, was not quite the exact truth, for he didn't feel very easy when he looked at Boreas' long, sparkling white teeth and his tousled gray head and beard.

"Nor am I, even though you have got a corner on the ice market," said Fuzzy White, "for really you know you are an ice man." [175]

This made Boreas furious, he stormed and howled and spluttered and beat Billy wildly on the chest, caught hold of him even and spun him round and round on the ice, but he couldn't knock him down nor lift him off his feet so long as Billy did not try to jump.

"You'll get out of breath if you keep that up much longer," said Billy, plucking up courage when he saw that Boreas could not really do him much damage. But it was a fatal speech, for with one loud yell Boreas leaped at Billy's face and tried to fasten his tongs in his nose.

It was a trying moment for Billy, he felt his nose turn pale with fright, and when Boreas' tongs touched it, it grew absolutely numb. Indeed, he had given his poor nose up for lost, and it would surely have been if Fuzzy White had not scooped up a paw full of snow and clapped it on Billy's nose just as Boreas began to clamp the tongs.

"Ou! wow-ow-o-ow!" screamed Boreas, jumping back, "ow! ow! I can't bite through snow," and he turned somersault after somersault on the ice in his fury. [176]

"Thank you, Fuzzy," cried Billy, as he felt the blood return to his nose, "you have saved me, old fellow."

"That's nothing, I know his tricks better than you do."

Billy anxiously felt his nose with his fingers and found it all there and quite right.

"But I'll get you yet, Billy Bounce," howled Boreas, "and when I do I'll nip you hard."

"You're not so very fast or dangerous after all," said Billy laughing.

"Look out for him," whispered Fuzzy, "he has other tricks."

And sure enough, along raced Boreas, this time close to the ground, and before Billy knew it, he had caught him by the legs and was sliding him along the ice, right toward the cold water.

But Billy knew a trick worth two of that, and suddenly threw himself backwards.

"Plump—" he had fallen back, right on top of Boreas. "Ugh!" cried Boreas and lay still for a moment with the breath quite knocked out of him.

"Good for Billy," cried Fuzzy White. "You got him that time." [177]

"So it seems," said Billy laughing.

"Wait until I get you up in the air," grunted Boreas, "I'll show you something then."

"You have been trying pretty hard all morning," answered Billy, "but you haven't shown me much yet."

My, my, my, how furious this made Boreas. He raged and tore around and above Billy and Fuzzy White, but they lay close to the ground, and though he gave them some pretty hard kicks, he could not budge them.

"If he keeps this up, he will tire himself out," laughed Fuzzy to Billy. "He's getting to be a pretty old man for such violent exercise, and the first thing he knows his wind will give out."

"I'd like to stand up though," said Billy, "I'm afraid I'll catch cold."

"Catch cold—" cried Boreas, stopping suddenly, "catch cold—why you couldn't catch anything."

"That's all you know about it," said Billy.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," panted Boreas, "I'll give you a start of a hundred ice floes and beat you down to that iceberg two miles away." [178]

"Done," cried Billy, winking at Fuzzy—"but I'll be generous—I'll give you the start."

"What shall we bet," asked Boreas.

"I don't bet," said Billy.

"Well, we will do this—if I catch you, you must give up searching for Bogie Man—if I don't, you may continue your journey." And Boreas chuckled to himself, for he intended putting Squall, one of his children, in Billy's way so that he couldn't jump any distance at all.

"Come here, Squall," he whispered softly.

"Screech—I am here," cried Squall, gaily settling down at his father's side.

"When that boy jumps, blow him in just the opposite direction than that in which I am going."

"Yes, sir, the opposite direction you say?" answered Squall.

"Yes!" Then calling to Billy he said, "Are you ready?"

Now Billy had heard just enough to know that Boreas was planning some trickery, so he decided quickly how to fool him. [179]

"All ready," answered Billy, whispering "Good-bye" to Fuzzy White.

"Then go," cried Boreas and was off.

"Go," cried Billy, turning his back on Boreas and jumping in exactly the *opposite* direction and away toward Aurora Borealis.

Now Squall did not know any more than his father had told him, so of course he got right back of Billy and pushed him faster than ever away from his father, making him fairly hum through the air.

You can imagine how surprised Boreas was when he reached the Iceberg and turning around to see how far he had beaten Billy, found that he was sailing way, way off away from him, with Squall pushing him along with all his might and main. He was furious. "Come back, come back," he called to Squall, and the boy turned back obediently to meet his father.

"He has not escaped me yet," cried Boreas, jumping after Billy—and it is very doubtful indeed if he would have escaped had Squall not been so anxious to do just what his father said, for back he came with his head down and his eyes shut, going as fast as he could. [180]

Boreas, too, had closed his eyes when he jumped after Billy, and so neither knew that the other was near until they went bump right into each other. "Ouch! Ugh!" they cried and fell to the ground, the breath knocked completely out of them. And so Billy sailed far, far away toward Aurora Borealis and safe from Boreas and Squall.

CHAPTER XIV.

[181]

KING CALCIUM AND STERRY OPTICAN.

What a dazzling sight was the town of Aurora Borealis when it broke on Billy's vision! Sparkling blue, red, and golden houses cut out of solid icebergs. Even the poorest huts shone with all the colors of the rainbow in the wavering, flickering light that rose and fell on them.

When Billy alighted in the streets he stood amazed at the beauty surrounding him, but when he saw the magnificent ice palace that stood directly in front of him, he had eyes for nothing else.

Higher than the highest office building he had ever seen in the City, wider than the longest block he had ever walked, and more brilliant in its changing colors than any kaleidoscope he had ever looked into.

"Phew!" he said, with a great sigh of enjoyment, "that *is* a beauty, sure enough." [182]

"Not bad, is it?" said a voice at his elbow. Looking around Billy saw a funny little chap with sharp, bright eyes—a short, pinched blue little nose, and long, tapering fingers. In one hand he carried an artist's maulstick and in the other a palette and brushes.

"It is beautiful," said Billy, "can you tell me what place it is?"

"The Ice Palace—I built it."

"Are you a contractor?" asked Billy.

"No, I'm an expander."

"A what?"

"An expander—frost expands—I'm Jack Frost: Architect, Artist and Ice Bridge Builder."

"You must enjoy the work."

"Yes, I'm fond of water colors—I suppose you've seen some of my pictures window-framed and hung in your own house?"

"Yes, sir—you must be a lightning sketch artist."

"Never have been out when it lightened—I'm afraid of thunder."

"I didn't mean that—" began Billy.

"You must learn to say what you mean," interrupted Jack Frost, "because if you should get the habit of not meaning what you say, no one could say what you meant whether you meant it or not—that's clear, isn't it?" [183]

"Not exactly," said Billy.

"Perhaps you'll understand this better. Seeing is believing, but believing is not seeing, unless you believe you see; and, so seeing, believe what you see. How's that?"

"I suppose it's very true, indeed," answered Billy politely, but he was certainly at sea as to what Jack Frost was talking about.

"Not a bit of it! What's the good of telling the truth when an untruth is more interesting?"

"I don't agree with you," said Billy.

"No sun ever does; I suppose you *are* somebody's son?"

"Yes, sir—I'm my mother's son."

At this Jack Frost wept little icicles, saying: "Poor me—poor me—I'm an orphan."

"An orphan?" said Billy. "That is too bad; how old are you?"

"Only a million years. Mother died when I was born, and I sometimes feel so young and helpless without a mother to spank me." [184]

Billy thought this rather silly, but did not like to say so, for Jack Frost seemed to take it all very seriously.

"Now that's over," said Jack suddenly. Looking up in Billy's face and smiling, "I just wanted to show you that I was a man of sentiment. Suppose we go into the Ice Palace and have a little light refreshment."

"That would be nice," said Billy.

"A little ice-cream, for instance."

"That sounds cold."

"It tastes colder," said Jack Frost, putting his arm through Billy's. "Come along, and if that's not enough you can have a glass of ice-water."

"Ugh!" how the thought of the cold things made Billy shiver, and how like a cake of ice Jack Frost's arm was!

"I—I thank you very much," he faltered, "but if you'd just as soon—"

"Sooner," said Jack Frost; "what is it?"

"I don't think I care for anything to eat."

"Oh! but you must have something to cool you up; you'll take your death of warmness if you go into the heat without a cup of cold coffee to keep out the warm." [185]

And Billy allowed himself to be dragged along for fear that if he refused further, Jack Frost would think of something colder to give him.

"Are you allowed to enter the palace whenever you wish?" asked Billy.

"I don't have to wish—I just go in."

"Who lives here?"

"The Calcium King and his daughter Sterry Optican: she's an actress."

"An actress?" exclaimed Billy.

"Yes—she's a cold, proud beauty—but the King rules us with a light hand—here we are," and Jack Frost led Billy through the Ice Palace gates.

"Who are those men?" asked Billy pointing to two tall, soldierly looking men who stood at either side of the gate with huge ice-picks in their hands.

"The Ice Guard," whispered Jack Frost, "all picked men; let me introduce you to Calcium King."

Billy looked about him, but could see no one but an old man seated at the window behind a great reflector and two boiler-like things, such as they have at the theatre to throw a bright light on the stage. The machine was buzzing and sizzling away, and the old man was turning the light this way and that out over the streets and houses. And whichever way it turned a thousand flames of golden light shone in the heavens and made the houses sparkle and sparkle again with brilliant colors. Billy knew then where the Northern Lights came from. [186]

"Where's the King?" whispered Billy.

"That's he," answered Jack, pointing to the old man. "The Lord High Master of the Lime Lights is sick in bed with a warm in his head, and the King is attending to things himself;" then aloud, "Hello, King!"

"Good midnight," answered the King, without turning around.

"I want you to meet my friend," said Jack Frost.

"Where do you want me to meet him?" asked the King; "don't make it very far away, because I can't trust the machine to anyone else."

"He is here," said Jack.

[187]



***"Me feyther," cried she, in a tragic voice, "the light, the light."*—Page 187.**

"Oh! well then, I'll meet him half way," and jumping quickly up, the King ran to Billy, shook his hand, murmured, "How de do," and trotted back to his machine.

"Glad to know you, King," said Billy.

"You don't know me," replied the King. "I don't even know myself; so how could a fat boy, who has just shaken my hand, expect to know me?"

"I don't know," said Billy.

"That's better. Where is my daughter, Jack?"

"I don't know, Your Calciumness," answered Jack Frost. But even as he spoke a tall, handsome young woman with raven-black hair and large blue eyes came slowly into the room.

"Me feyther," cried she, in a tragic voice, "the light, the light." And immediately the King turned a small calcium light directly on her. Bowing and kissing her hand, she turned to Billy.

"Whither goest thou, fair sir, and whence comest thou? Answer, I prithee."

"Ma'am?" was all Billy could say in his amazement.

"She means where are you going and where did you come from," whispered Jack in Billy's ear.

[188]

"Why couldn't she say so, then?" grumbled Billy.

"Goest thou henceford or thenceford, fair sir? Fain would I know—or wilt thou tarry awhile and let me pour into thine ear—"

Billy put his hands over his ears and stepped back in a hurry. "Please don't pour anything into my ears."

"She means she wants to talk to you," whispered Jack again; "that's stage talk."

"Ay, such is indeed the truth," said Sterry Optican, moving forward, followed closely by the light.

This time Billy stood his ground and she took his hand in hers, saying sadly—

"Would thou wert not so fat, fair sir, else could I learn, ay! gladly learn to love you—but hold, villain—unhand me!" and she flung Billy's hand away from her and burst into sobs.

"Jack Frost," said Billy wildly, "for goodness sake pinch me—I don't know whether I'm asleep or crazy."

"Nay, nay—curfew *shall* not ring to-night," cried Sterry Optican, seizing Billy by his hair and dragging him up and down the room. While she did this the King and Jack Frost clapped their hands loudly and cried, "Bravo, bravo!" [189]

"You do it better every day," cried Jack. "My, my, won't people stare when you really do go on the stage!"

"And to think that she's my daughter," said the King proudly.

"Oh! was that just play?" asked Billy, relieved, but very sore about the scalp, for Sterry had not been gentle.

"Yes, wasn't it grand?" said she sitting down. "I'd have been on the stage long ago—I mean really on the stage, you know, and acting for real stage money, but there's so much jealousy in the profession that I can't seem to get a hearing."

"That's too bad," said Billy sympathetically. "What do theatre managers say to your acting?"

"Just what you said—that it's too bad; but my friends all say I'm just grand, and by all means should go on the stage. Father, you may turn off the light now; I'm through." [190]

"Thank goodness," murmured Billy to himself.

"What did you say?" whispered Jack Frost.

"I was talking to myself," said Billy.

"That's a waste of time; though I suppose you're more interested in your conversation than any one else."

"That's sarcastic."

"No, it's true," said Jack. "Don't you think I'm clever?"

"You're what I would call a sharp Frost," said Billy laughing.

"Stop talking for a minute," interrupted King Calcium.

"I'm not talking," said Sterry Optican; "I'm thinking, and it's much harder to think than to talk."

"It is for some people," said Jack. "Now as for me——"

"Be silent," cried the King; "Nickel Plate is trying to signal me."

"Nickel Plate!" exclaimed Billy rising to his feet.

"Yes," said the King, "do you know him?" [191]

"I've met him," said Billy; "but excuse me, good day——"

"Night, you mean; it won't be day for six months," interrupted Jack Frost.

"Good night, then; I really must be going."

"Not until you've carved your initials on the North Pole," said Sterry Optican. "It's my autograph album, you know, and I have the names and initials of many famous people on it. Why, even my own is there."

"Thank you very much," said Billy, nervously, "but I really can't spare the time."

"That's all you know about the North Pole," said Jack. "You could stay there a year and not be spending a minute."

"What do you mean?" asked Billy in surprise.

"Just what I say, this time—how are days, hours, minutes and seconds measured? Answer me that."

"By the length of time it takes a given point to completely revolve about the earth's axis," answered Billy, not quite sure that this was the exact definition, but thinking it was near enough.

"Right," said Jack; "and so, if you are on the axis, the North Pole, that is, you can't revolve around it, can you?" [192]

"No," said Billy.

"And if you can't revolve around it you can't measure time, can you?"

"No."

"And if you can't measure time, then there is no time: so you see you can't waste time or spend time when you're on the North Pole. I hope you understand that."

"Yes sir," answered Billy dubiously.

"Then come along and cut your initials in the pole."

"Please do," pleaded Sterry.

And Billy was just about to yield—indeed, he had taken two steps toward the door when King Calcium suddenly exclaimed:

"Hold! Jack, lock the doors; Billy Bounce, you are discovered."

"What! Billy Bounce in our mongst?" cried Jack, blowing on the doors and freezing them tight shut.

"Not the real Billy," cried Sterry, walking over to a sofa and preparing to faint.

"Yes," cried the King, "it is indeed he—Nickel Plate has just wigwagged me that he is in this room." [193]

"I am undone!" screamed Sterry, throwing herself carefully onto the sofa.

"Seize him, Jack!" cried the King.

"Seize him yourself," said Jack, dancing away out of Billy's reach; "remember I'm a nervous child."

"I will," cried the King, tottering over to Billy and laying his hand on his collar. "Jack, call the ice guard."

"Ice guard, ahoy!" shouted Jack.

"Lemme go," cried Billy, "or I'll—"

"No you won't," panted the King, clinging desperately to Billy.

"You'll see," said Billy, and began to drag the King over to the window where the calcium was burning brightly.

"Help me, help me, Jack!" called the King, trying to sit down on the floor. But Billy kept him from doing so, and finally reached the window. Quick as a flash he turned the entire Northern Light right into the room, and with a sizzle, splash—puff the ice doors went up in steam. The next moment he found the lever that controlled the lamp, and zip the light was out. [194]

My, my, my but how dark it got—darker than a thousand nights—blacker than a million hats. The King let go of Billy's collar and commenced wildly to grope for the machine.

"Now to escape," cried Billy. "Barker, lead me out by scent," and quickly he pulled Barker out of his pocket, tied a string to his collar and turned him loose.

Barker gave one little yelp, and then darted for the doorway with Billy hot after him. Out they ran into the open air, and picking Barker up in his arms, up jumped Billy away from Aurora Borealis.

CHAPTER XV.

[195]

BILLY MEETS GLUCOSE.

To say that Billy was glad to see real sunshine and feel its warmth again, hardly expresses his joy, when, on emerging from Aurora Borealis, he floated into a warmer climate.

And the next time his feet touched earth it did not take him long to take off his rabbit skin and give it back to the Singing Tree. And then how he and Barker rolled on the soft green grass, breathed in the sweet, flower-scented air, and basked in the sunlight!

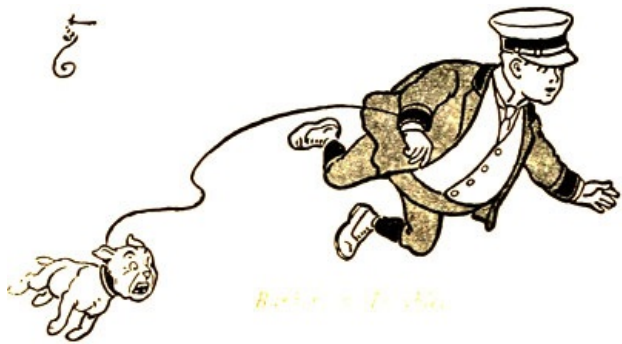
"You saved my life, old boy," said Billy, patting Barker's head. And Barker wagged his little tail and cocked his head on one side, as much as to say: "I'm glad, and I would do it again if I had the opportunity, Billy Bounce."

"And now, off we go," said Billy, thrusting Barker into his pocket and jumping up into the air. [196]

Now it is hard to say just exactly how it happened—whether Barker slipped out of Billy's pocket, or just climbed out, thinking that he too could float in the air, I do not know. At any rate the first thing Billy knew there was a sharp jerk on the string that Barker was tied to—a frightened yelp, and there was doggie being dragged up and up through the air by his collar.

Of course it did not take Billy a minute to haul Barker up to him and to catch him in his arms; but even then it was none too soon, for in another moment there would have been no more Barker.

"Poor old fellow," cried Billy, snuggling him up



Barker in Trouble.

Turning, Billy found himself looking down the barrel of a cap pistol. But not being particularly interested in what he saw there, he looked further and discovered the face of its owner. On his head was a very, very large wig of raveled rope, and attached to his chin by large elastic bands that ran over his ears was a heavily matted blue beard. Following the beard to its end, Billy's eyes traveled on down to a large tin star.

"Who are you?" asked Billy in surprise.

"Snawksnaw, the famous boy detecative," cried the boy, pulling off beard and wig with one sweep of his hand, and folding his arms dramatically.

"What do you detect?" asked Billy.

"Hist!" said the boy, again putting on the wig and beard, and pointing the cap pistol at him. "Hist! I detect crime, but move not or I will below your be-rains out."

"Is that a disguise?" asked Billy, pointing to the boy detective's hair and beard.

"It is, and a perfect one. Who would ever guess that Snawksnaw, the famous boy detecative, and this bearded ruffian were one and the same person? This is my favorite transform."

"But why did you get a blue beard?"

"Ah-ha! that is the completest part of the disguise; for though they might guess that I would raise a black beard or a yellow one or a red one, *who* would think that I could raise a blue one?" Then scowling terribly, he hissed, "Are you one of them?"

"One of whom?" asked Billy.

"One of the party of desperat men that inhabit yon fair but foul factory?"

"Of course not; I've just arrived."

"Ah-h, then perhaps you, too, are a detecative on the same trail; but I warn you Snawksnaw will have no partner to share the glory of this capture. I have run them to earth, and mean to take them single handed."

"What have they done?" asked Billy.

"I know not. That I will find out when I have bound and gagged them."

"Then you don't know them?"

"Yes," and Snawksnaw seeing no immediate use for his pistol carefully put it in his hip pocket after examining the cap to see that it was still in place. "Nothing like being sure of one's firearms," he said, "for should me trusty 32 miss fire at a critical moment I should be in a dangerous position."

"Who are they?"

"Nickel Plate, the Polished villain."

in his arms. "Your dog days were nearly ended that time, weren't they?"

And he was still soothing and patting Barker when his feet crashed through a jungle of blades and stalks, and he found himself in an enormous corn field. He looked about him, and saw dimly ahead through the corn a factory building; at least he took it for this, for he could hear the distant hum of machinery and the churn-churn-churn of an engine. [197]

"Now I wonder where I am," said Billy, beginning to walk toward the factory.

"Stop—or you are a dead man—or boy," said a voice at his side.



Snawksnaw, the Boy Detecative.

"Ah-ha! that is the completest part of the disguise; for though they might guess that I would raise a black beard or a yellow one or a red one, *who* would think that I could raise a blue one?" Then scowling terribly, he hissed, "Are you one of them?" [199]

"What!" cried Billy, "Nickel Plate?"

"Yes, and Bumbus."

[200]

"Bumbus?"

"Yes, and Drone."

"Drone? I don't know him."

"He's a cowardly ruffian, the tool of Nickel Plate."

"A sort of Nickel Plated tool," said Billy, laughing.

"I suppose so," said Snawksnaw seriously, missing the joke. "And worst of all their fair but false accomplice Glucose, possessing a beautiful face to look upon, but with the crafty, crawling, venomous wiles of the serpent."

"I've heard of Glucose," said Billy; "she is the one they tried to put in Honey Girl's place at the Bee Palace."

"Ah-ha!" cried Snawksnaw, "a case of abduction—but I will foil them—it shall be my greatest shadow. I must perfect my disguise in such a serious case," and taking off his coat he turned it inside out and struggled into it. "Now I defy them."

"You're not going to the factory, are you?" asked Billy.

"I don't know—if I just knew what old Sneuth, the detective, would do under the circumstances I could decide." [201]

"Huh! I shouldn't wait for that," said a voice. Looking up, Billy and Snawksnaw saw Bumbus leaning against a cornstalk, wearing a very self-satisfied but wicked grin.

"So it's my old friend Billy Bounce," continued he.

"Bumbus!" was all Billy could say.

"I be," said Bumbus; "who's your friend?"

"Snawksnaw, the famous boy detecative," shouted that youth, drawing his cap pistol. "But I shall sell my life dearly," and he snapped the cap at Bumbus. How it did make Bumbus jump, but instead of falling dead in his tracks as they do in dime novels, he seized Billy's collar with one hand and reached for the boy detective's collar with the other.

"Missed!" cried Snawksnaw, throwing his pistol to the ground; "ten thousand furies. I don't know what old Sneuth would do now, but I know what I'm going to do," and he ran off as fast as his legs would carry him.

"Good riddance," said Bumbus, laughing, "which proves beyond a doubt that the wicked flourish like a green bay rum tree." [202]

"How is that?" asked Billy.

"Meaning that no matter how close the shave, green bay rum can face it."

"I suppose you are going to take me prisoner to the factory," said Billy, wishing to have the worst over as soon as possible.

"My, my, but you are a good guesser," then calling loudly, "Nickel Plate, Drone—here is Billy Bounce."

"Ha-ha-ha-ha!" laughed Nickel Plate, striding through the corn. "So Billy Bounce is once more in our power, eh! This time he shall not escape us."

"Yaw-haw," yawned a sleepy-looking Bee, coming slowly out of the factory.

"Come, wake up, Drone!" cried Bumbus.

"Aw-ri," yawned Drone.

Here Billy thought he saw an opportunity to run, and giving a sharp twist he broke from Bumbus and started away to get room to jump. But alas for his hopes! the cornstalks suddenly intertwined their tops all about and over him and he found himself again a prisoner.

"How impolite!" laughed Bumbus, "how very impolite of you to think of going away without saying good-by!" [203]

"To the factory with him," said Nickel Plate in a loud voice. And Billy was pulled and hauled through the cornfield up to the factory which bore the sign "Nickel Plate, Bumbus and Glucose." Inside past the grinding machinery and the great vats of boiling syrup and finally thrust into a little room marked "Office."

"Honey Girl!" he cried, catching sight of a young girl seated at the typewriter.

"Billy Bounce!" she cried, starting to her feet with a peculiar smile; but the sound of her voice and something about her eyes told him that it was not Honey Girl at all, but Glucose, that stood

before him.

"I, I beg your pardon," he stammered; "I thought you were the Princess."

"Well?" she said questioningly.

"But I see now I was mistaken; you are Glucose."

"Beware, Billy Bounce, how you anger a woman—hereafter address me as Honey Girl, or take the consequences." So saying, Glucose closed down her desk and hurriedly left the room. [204]

"I suppose I've made another enemy—but I don't care; she's proved now that she is not Honey Girl, and this knowledge may prove useful some day." Billy was seated in a chair near the door when suddenly through the keyhole and above the hum of machinery came the sound of voices.

"We must get the note from him and prevent his seeing Bogie Man," said the voice of Bumbus.

"Yes," said Nickel Plate, "but I fear that so long as he lives he will be in our way."

"Throw him in the grinder," suggested Drone.

"Or boil him in a syrup vat," added Bumbus.

"Too sweet a death," said Nickel Plate. "Of one thing I am certain—he must die."

Then their voices died away, showing that they had moved off.

"I suppose it's all up with me," said Billy, looking about him for some means of escape. "Oh! how I wish I had Mr. Gas here—I'll try Umberufen: perhaps he can carry the message."

You can imagine that it did not take him long to touch wood, and "Zip!" Umberufen stood before him. [205]

"Well, so you need me again, do you?"

"Yes, sir," said Billy.

"The last time you treated me very badly."

"I'm very sorry."

"Humph! that won't pay for a ruined suit of clothes—everything I had on warped dreadfully. But I suppose I shall have to forgive you—what is it?"

"I want you to carry a message to Mr. Gas."

"Out of my district," said Umberufen curtly.

"But you often go to Mr. Gas," said Billy; "this is a matter of life and death."

"I can't go to him unless he touches wood."

"But you are supposed to do what I ask you to."

"Anything here yes, but I'm not an errand boy," answered Umberufen indifferently.

"Have you no heart?" exclaimed Billy.

"Certainly, but Mr. Gas didn't hire that—he just arranged for my brains and ability."

"Then whatever he pays you he's got a bad bargain," said Billy angrily. "You may go."

"There you go, showing your temper again —goodness, I wouldn't have your disposition for anything—good-by," and Umberufen disappeared. [206]

"I wish I could sneeze—perhaps Gehsundheit would take the message—I'll try," but do what he would Billy could not make himself sneeze. He tickled his nose with a straw, snuffed up dust, did everything he could think of but not a sneeze would come. At last he gave up in despair. "I'll imitate a sneeze," cried he—"ca-choo!" It did not sound very much like a sneeze, but sure enough a shadowy form of Gehsundheit appeared before him.

"Gehsundheit," came from the figure but it sounded far, far away like an echo.

"At last," cried Billy. "Oh! Gehsundheit, I need your help."

"So, iss it?" he whispered.

"Yes, I want you to carry a message to Mr. Gas."

"Alas! it cannot be did."

"Why not?"

"Because I am not here."

"Not here—where are you?"

"At home in my castle."

"But I can see you."

[207]

"No, it iss but my shadow."

"Why didn't you come yourself? I sneezed."

"It vas not a real sneeze, so the real Gehsundheit could not come—good-by," and slowly the form faded away.

"Well! what do you think of that?" exclaimed Billy as the last of Gehsundheit vanished into thin air.

"I never think," said Bumbus, suddenly opening the door. "Why waste time in thought when thoughtlessness makes more trouble than villainy?"

"I don't see the point," said Billy.

"It has no point, it's a blunt statement—but come along."

"Where?"

"Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no truths," said Bumbus. "Come along."

"I don't want to," said Billy, holding back.

"Before you get much older you'll do many things you don't want to—that is, if you live to get older."

By this time Drone had come in and was leaning against Billy, fast asleep.

"Wake up, Drone, and help," said Bumbus.

[208]

"Oh!" said Drone, "I just dreamed that I was asleep."

"That's one dream that came true," said Bumbus; "now out with him." Bumbus pulled and Drone pushed, and although the latter went to sleep three or four times before they got out of the room, Billy finally found himself in the main factory where Nickel Plate was directing some workmen in taking the lid off of a vat.

"Ah, ha!" said Nickel Plate when he saw Billy. "Now, boy, I will give you a last chance—promise that you will give up all search for Bogie Man and return the note to me and we will free you, otherwise——"

"It will be a case of boil instead of freeze," interrupted Bumbus.

"Then boil!" cried Billy. "I must do my duty while I live."

"In with him!" cried Nickel Plate.

"In with him!" cried Bumbus.

"Yah-haw!" yawned Drone.

And with that they lifted Billy up and were about to drop him into the vat, when through the open skylight and down in their midst dropped Mr. Gas. He was seated in his big arm-chair which was carried along by hundreds of toy balloons of all colors.

[209]

"Hold!" he cried.

But instead of holding they were all so surprised that they let go of Billy and he fell to the floor, just missing the vat by a few inches. Luckily he lit on his feet, and, of course, as this was just the same as a jump, he bounded up again and out through the skylight, followed by Mr. Gas.

CHAPTER XVI.

[210]

IN SPOOKVILLE

When they had gotten well away from the factory, Billy recovered his wits sufficiently to thank Mr. Gas warmly for his assistance.

"You are welcome, Billy Bounce—it was lots of fun for me and I needed an outing anyway."

"But how did you know about my need?" said Billy. "I tried to send Umberufen and Gehsundheit, but could get neither of them to go."

"The wireless telephoneless telephone brought me your wish. I came very near answering, but you didn't hold the wireless wire, and I thought it would be more exciting to save you at the last minute, the way they always do in books."

"I'm afraid—" began Billy.

"Don't do it," interrupted Mr. Gas.

"What?"

"Be afraid."

"But I meant to say I was afraid—" he began again.

"You did say it—you didn't just mean to say it," said Mr. Gas severely.

"Well, what I meant was that I didn't think Gehsundheit and Umberufen have been of much use to me."

"That's better—never use the word afraid, because there's nothing in the world to be afraid of if you do your best."

"I'll remember that, sir," answered Billy.

"About Gehsundheit and Umberufen—they are not very useful, it's true, but the two old fellows have been out of work for so long that I hire them out of charity."

"I suppose they mean well."

"Oh! yes; but be careful of well meaners unless they are good doers—that's what counts."

"Yes, sir," said Billy.

"And now good-by—keep your teeth clean and don't eat any dirt."

"Of course not, I never do eat dirt."

"I know you don't, but it is my rule to give advice that can be easily followed—that's the way I keep my friends. Good-by." [212]

"Good-by, and thank you," called Billy, and in less than half a jiffy Mr. Gas and his toy balloons were only a speck on the horizon.

When Billy again reached the earth it was night. He had just taken Barker out of his pocket and was going to dig a hole for the Singing Tree, when he saw that he was in a great shadowy city.

"That's strange," he said, looking about him. "I was sure that I was in the middle of a green meadow when I first came down and here I am in a city."

And yet when he looked again he found that he could see clear through the houses. This made him just a wee bit nervous.

"Ah! here comes some one with a lantern; I'll ask him about it." And sure enough there came bobbing and dancing up the street a ball of light. "He's an awfully unsteady walker, whoever he is," said Billy. For one minute the light would be way up in the air and the next minute almost touching the ground—then it would be on one side of the walk and again on the other. On it came until it was within a few inches of his nose and then he saw that *no one* was carrying it. [213]

Gracious! what a start it gave him—for a moment only and then he was off after it in hot pursuit. But the faster Billy walked the faster the light went—when he ran it ran—and suddenly "puff!" it disappeared.

"Huh! I don't like that a little bit," and he stopped and looked around him.

The moon cast a pale and sickly light, and the gaunt trees waved and creaked sadly in the moaning breeze, throwing long, claw-like shadows on the ground. Then a sad-voiced bird piped out from the forest, "Whip-poor-will—whip-poor-will—whip-poor-will-o'-the-wisp."

"That's what it was, of course," said Billy, sturdily sticking his fists into his pockets—"a will-o'-the-wisp." And back he trudged whistling as hard as he could whistle. Because whistling *does* keep a fellow's courage up on a lonely walk, doesn't it?

It certainly cheered Billy a great deal, so that when he got back to the place he had lately left he was laughing at his fears. [214]

And then the moon went under a cloud.

"Goodness! it's dark," he said half aloud.

"Isn't it though?" whispered a voice right behind him.

If Billy had been a wax figure on a pivot he could not have turned around quicker than he did—and then when he *had* turned he was sorry that he had, for looking into his face was a great, white flabby head on a long, wavery body. It did not seem to have any eyes, and yet Billy felt them looking into his. It did not seem to have any mouth, and yet Billy had heard it speak.

"Wha-wha-what d-did you say?" he asked in a quavering voice; and he distinctly felt each separate hair on his head grow stiff as a poker and his cap rise a couple of inches from his crown.

"I said it was dark. What's the matter, do you stammer?"

"N-not usually," said Billy, trying to set his teeth and stop the tune they were chattering.

"Then I wish you'd stop—it's very annoying," said the figure, chuckling to himself. [215]

By a great effort Billy got his lower jaw under control and said:

"Who are you? Your manner is familiar, but I don't recognize your face."

"Oh! I'm a Ghost."

"A Ghost!" exclaimed Billy, stepping back.

"Yes—I've met you lots of times," said the Ghost.

"Who were you when—when you were alive? Perhaps if you'd mention the name," and Billy tried to recollect some of his former friends.

"I *am* alive, though goodness knows if times keep up the way they're going now I can't tell how soon I'll starve to death."

"Starve to death?"

"Yes; times have changed in the last four hundred years. Why, I remember years ago we ghosts were busy on haunting jobs night after night, but now we have to scratch pretty hard for a living."

"But where have you met me?" asked Billy.

"On your way to bed when the nurse had been telling you silly tales—come, we're old friends, let's shake hands." [216]

"Can—can you shake hands?" said Billy, putting his own behind him.

"Certainly. Of course I can't shake your hand, but I can shake my own," and with that the Ghost held two long white arms in front of him, joined the ends (one really couldn't call them hands) and waved them up and down.

Much relieved, Billy clasped his own two hands and feebly shook them—and my, how cold and clammy they felt!

"Well, good-by, I must be going," said Billy nervously.

"Don't go yet—let's talk over old times. And by the way, you don't happen to know a quiet family, keeping two servants, no children preferred, who wants to hire a respectable ghost. Thoroughly tame—will eat out of the hand—terms reasonable and references exchanged. Guaranteed to give satisfaction or money returned. If desired can take the shape of an old ancestor. Guarding buried treasure extra." And the Ghost rattled this off as if he had learned it by heart.

"No," said Billy, "I really do not—in fact, I'm sure I don't." [217]



"Come up to the house and spend an unpleasant evening."—Page 217.

"Now that's too bad—but perhaps you would hire me—I'll make it cheap for old acquaintance' sake," said the Ghost wistfully.

"No," said Billy quickly, "I don't think I care to be haunted."

"If the price is all that stands in the way I'll work for my keep just to keep in practice."

"No," said Billy, "I'm—," he was going to say "afraid," but remembered Mr. Gas's advice and said, "I'm sure I don't need you."

"Well, I suppose if you won't, you won't—but anyway come up to the house and spend an unpleasant evening. I'd like you to meet the wife and children—my wife is a little high-spirited—the ghost of a lighthouse-keeper's daughter, but she will thaw out after a while, and I'm sure she can fix up a nice little supper for us."

"I really have not time," said Billy, backing off.

"Not if I tell you that we have some cold fear pie and a roast of imagination, a neat little salad of blood-curdling screams topped off with groan pudding—come, that ought to tempt you—and I'll get the children to do the shadow dance for you after supper." [218]

"You are very kind, I'm sure," said Billy, "but I have a message I must deliver to Bogie Man."

"You don't mean to tell me that you're Billy Bounce?" exclaimed the Ghost.

"Yes!" said Billy.

"What have I done? Oh! me! that's what comes of getting old and near-sighted—I took you for little Tommy Jones."

"No, I'm Billy Bounce."

"Then you shan't come to my house, but you *will* come to the haunted house." Then he called aloud in a weird voice: "Spooks, Spirits, Ghosts, Wraiths, Banshees, and all, come quick—here is Billy Bounce in Spookville."

With a rattle of chains, screams, groans, and a thousand odd and terrible sounds, the inhabitants of the village swooped down on them.

For a few moments Billy was absolutely frozen stiff with fear, and when he looked around him at the horrible shapes and faces that surrounded him he was worse frightened than ever. Some of [219]

them breathed fire and steam while their eyes glowed like red-hot coals. Others had old, crafty and wicked faces with huge snaggle teeth. Some looked like fierce and bloodthirsty pirates—all sorts and conditions of ghosts were there, and all seemingly intent on tearing Billy limb from limb.

"See him tremble!" called one old Pirate. "Ah! this reminds me of old times on the Spanish Main—make him walk the plank!"

"Scream into his ear until he is deaf!" cried a Banshee.

"Put a ball and chain on him and throw him in a cell!" suggested the ghost of a convict.

"He's the boy who discovered Shamville—he will tell on all of us if we let him live!" said a crafty-looking old merchant.

"Make him eat his own head!" cried a headless horseman.

"Get away!" cried Billy; "you are a host of delusions! I don't believe in ghosts anyway, and I'm not afraid of you," for he had just remembered what Mr. Gas said about being afraid. He took a step forward, and in doing so walked through five or six ghosts who were crowding him closely. [220]

"Swish!" and every mother's ghost of them had disappeared and he was standing in the meadow alone. The moon came from behind its cloud and distinctly winked at Billy. And what a relief it was to be sure! "There," he said to himself; "Mr. Gas was right—so long as a fellow is afraid in the dark he will see all kinds of things, ghosts and everything else; but if he just grits his teeth and makes up his mind *not* to be afraid, there is no more in the dark to hurt you than in the sunlight."

And with that he planted the Singing Tree, curled up beneath it, and in a minute was sound asleep.

CHAPTER XVII.

 [221]

IN THE VOLCANO OF VOCIFEROUS.

When Billy awoke the next morning and saw the dear old sun grinning down at him, and looked about at the green meadow dotted with Black-eyed Susans and Dandelions, he could hardly realize that his adventures of the night before were real. But there on the edge of the open space stood the trees that had creaked so dismally; while even then among its trunks lingered some of the mist that had made the walls of Spookville.

"What did you think of it, dogibus?" he said to Barker. But that merry little chap looked so happy and contented, and his eyes seemed so clear of unpleasant memories, that Billy decided that dogs don't see ghosts—perhaps because they are not afraid in the dark, and anyway haven't any nurses to tell them things that are not true.

"Half past eight—time we were off!" said Billy, looking at his Waterbury. And so off they flew into space. [222]

"I doubt if I can float over that high mountain," he said presently. "What a queer-looking thing it is, too." And no wonder it was queer looking, for it was the Volcano of Vociferous with just a little thin white vapor rising from its crater. "Oh, me! oh, my! I'm falling right into the hole," he cried, "I wonder if I will fetch up in China?" And sure enough, when he got right over the crater he began to fall, fall, fall, through the opening and way down towards the centre of the earth. And just about the time he had given up hopes of ever landing in any place, he hit plump on a floor of lava. Right in front of him was a door bearing this sign: "The Coal Man. Best Anthracite and Soft Coal. New Gold and Silver bought and sold. Nickel-plating a specialty. For admission to works apply at Office. Walk in." Turning the handle Billy walked in.

"Well," said a smutty-faced old man who was bustling about the office and whom Billy rightly took for the Coal Man.

"How do you do?" said Billy. [223]

"Tired, very tired," answered the Coal Man. "Worked to death. I have a rush order for an eruption of Vociferous and it's keeping my alchemist and myself busy day and night, while the coal stokers and furnace tenders threaten to strike for lower wages."



"How many
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"



The Coal Man.

"That's too bad," said Billy sympathetically.

"Not a bit of it. I like the work. I suppose you want to go through the works."

"If it's not too much trouble."

"I don't know whether you will find it too much trouble or not; you will have to decide that for yourself." [224]

"I mean for you."

"It can't be for me, because I'm not going. What's your name?"

"Billy Bounce."

"Billy Bounce? Glad to know you, Billy. I've heard a great deal of you from a customer of mine."

"A customer! Who is he?"

"Nickel Plate the Polished Villain. He comes down here every once in a while to be plated."

"Nickel Plate!" cried Billy in alarm. "Why, he is my enemy."

"I know it," said the Coal Man; "but don't mind that; he's his own best friend."

"But if that's the case, aren't you going to harm me?"

"Certainly not. You can't do me any harm by telling the truth about my work. You will find that your only enemies are the people who know you will expose them as imitations."

"I hadn't thought of that before," said Billy, greatly relieved.

"Of course you hadn't. They wouldn't either if they hadn't felt so guilty themselves. Well, here's your card of admission, and don't pick up any hot lava." [225]

"Thank you," said Billy. "I won't."

The Coal Man opened the door leading into the works.

Such a wonderful sight as met Billy's gaze! A deep red glow was over everything, growing lighter and duller every few moments as the stokers would open a furnace door, shovel in some coal, and slam the door to again.

And the stokers—they were indeed sights. Black as coal and as shiny as patent-leather boots, which, with their fiery red hair, made them look like chimney-pots on fire.

Here and there among them wandered an old, old man with a very wise face and long white hair. In one hand he carried a pair of scales and with the other he was putting into them first some of this and then some of that, which he weighed carefully and deposited in what looked like a great big cartridge shell.

"How do you do, sir?" said Billy.

"Gun cotton and vaseline in parts of two to—Oh! How do *you* do?"

"Sir," said Billy, "I understood the last part of your sentence, but I don't think I heard the first part very well." [226]

"A little sulphur—now I wonder if I'd better put any safety-matches in it this time—what do you think, boy?" And he looked at Billy as if he were a thousand miles off.

"I don't know, sir."

"Then why do you presume to offer advice? So you don't think safety-matches a safe thing to put in it? Neither do I."

"But I said I didn't know," said Billy.

"True, you did; I had forgotten. If that's the case, I'd better use sulphur-matches."

"Are you the Alchemist?"

"Let's see, am I? I've really forgotten. Ace of Spades," calling to the blackest stoker of them all, "come here."

"Yes, sir," said Ace, running up to them.

"Well, what do you want?" asked the old man, looking at Ace in surprise.

"You called me, sir," said Ace.

"Did I—what for? Do you know?"

"No, sir," said Ace.

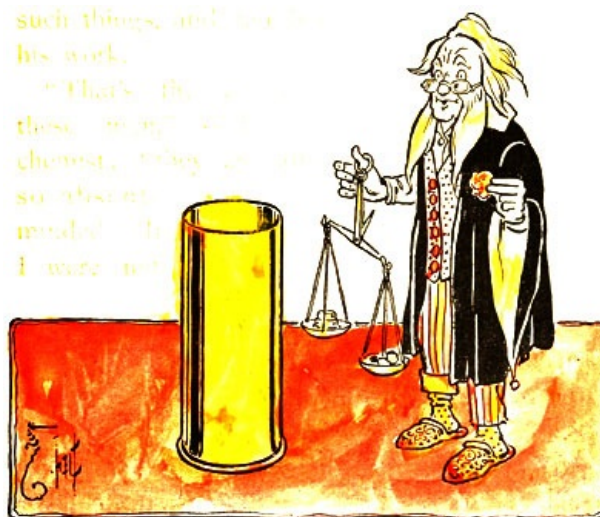
"Excuse me," said Billy, "but I think it was to ask him if you were the Alchemist." [227]

"That can't have been it, because I *am* the Alchemist. No doubt about that, is there, Ace?"

"No, sir," said Ace.

"Then don't interrupt me again with your foolish questions, Ace; you know it bothers me when I'm making up a sample eruption."

Ace bowed gravely, as if he were used to such things, and ran back to his work.



The Alchemist.

"That's the trouble with these men," said the Alchemist; "they are all so absent-minded. If I were not here to think for them, I don't know what would become of the business." [228]

"Excuse me——" began Billy.

"Certainly," interrupted the Alchemist, absent-mindedly putting some gun-cotton in his ears.

"I was going to say—did you say you were making a sample eruption?"

"Did you speak to me? I seem to have heard you speak."

"Yes, sir."

"I can't hear a word you say—I'm afraid I'm growing deaf. Now what did I do with that gun-cotton I had a moment ago?" and the Alchemist looked for it in every place but in his ears. But Billy, by making motions, showed him where it was, and he pulled it out in great surprise. "You shouldn't do that," said he severely, "it's a very dangerous thing."

"But I didn't," said Billy; "you did it yourself."

"Tut-tut—why should I put gun-cotton in my own ears? I never listen to evil reports."

Billy was just about to make further denial when the Coal Man put his head through the door and beckoned to him. "Nickel Plate is coming down in the elevator," said he, as soon as Billy reached his side. [229]

"Nickel Plate—down here!" exclaimed Billy.

"Yes, he is coming for a re-plating, and Bumbus and Drone are with him."

"They mustn't see me."

"That's the reason I called you. I suppose you don't mind hiding."

"Not at all."

"Then come along," and he led Billy into the works and to a dark, heavily barred vault marked "Gold." Throwing open the door, he invited Billy to enter. "This is where we keep the gold supply of the earth," he said. "Pick out a soft nugget to sit on, and make yourself at home—you had better lock yourself in."

"Thank you," said Billy, locking the door and pocketing the key. And as it was dark as pitch in the vault and light in the works, no one on the outside could well see through the bars of the door.

"This is fine, but I don't think I shall sit down, I want to see what they do."

He hadn't finished saying this when in walked Nickel Plate, Bumbus, and Drone, followed by the Coal Man. [230]

"Yes," Nickel Plate was saying, as they entered, "I'm getting terribly rusty, and I need a new plating."

"In other words, he wants you to make a shining example of him," said Bumbus.

"Excuse me," said Drone; "you haven't a cot here, have you? I've lost so much sleep lately I——"

"Lost sleep," exclaimed Nickel Plate in disgust.

"Yes, I have not had more than twenty hours sleep in the last twenty-four; they've kept me busy looking for Billy Bounce."

At mention of his name Billy drew back into the shadow.

"And Honey Girl, too," said Bumbus, "I can't guess what has become of her."

"Ay! we are foiled at every turn, but wait, wait, our day is coming—let me but get rid of these rust spots and restore my polish, and they cannot escape us."

Now when Billy heard about Honey Girl and her safety, it made him very happy, but the thought that Nickel Plate was going to get back his polish worried him considerably. [231]

"I do hope something will happen to prevent the plating," he said to himself.

Bumbus by this time was running about in his usual inquisitive way, peering into everything and handling all the tools and chemicals. Suddenly, "Boom, sizzle, bang!" went the Alchemist's unfinished cartridge, on which Bumbus at that moment was standing to reach a shelf, and up, up, up, went Bumbus through the hot-air shaft that supplied the furnaces. Luckily for everybody there were very few things in the cartridge—not enough to make even a first-class sample eruption. Even Bumbus wasn't hurt, only very, very much surprised and blown too many miles away from Vociferous to get back that day.

"How very careless," said the Alchemist, pettishly; "now I've got to do the work all over again. If I'd known he wanted to be blown up, I could have arranged it very easily, and at half the trouble and expense."

"Why did Bumbus leave so suddenly?" asked Drone, waking up.

"Let Bumbus look out for himself," said Nickel Plate, ignoring the question; "what I want now is my plating." [232]

"Ace of Spades," called the Coal Man, "bring out the nickel-plating furnace."

Ace of Spades and his helper rolled a great portable furnace, glowing red with heat, into the middle of the floor.

"Step in, please," said the Coal Man, and Nickel Plate opened the door and walked in.

"Please hurry up with that two dollars in nickels, Alchemist," said the Coal Man.

"I don't seem to find any nickels," called back the Alchemist; "I suppose a two-dollar bill won't do?"

"You know it won't," said Nickel Plate. "You got up the formula yourself—and please hurry, it's getting warm in here."

"That's true," said the Alchemist, hurrying up with a handful of nickels; "Ace of Spades had forgotten what we wanted them for."

"I didn't say anything about it," said Ace, sulkily.

"That's just the trouble with you absent-minded people," said the Alchemist, pouring the nickels into the top of the furnace, "if you had spoken about it I should have known you were wrong, and saved all this time." [233]

Quickly the nickels melted and down poured the plating onto Nickel Plate. And in a jiffy out he stepped as bright and shiny as a new coin.

"Ha-ha!" he cried, patting himself on the chest, "I feel brighter already—*now* I'll find Billy Bounce and Honey Girl without a bit of trouble." And much to Billy's dismay he walked straight over to the vault in which he was hid. But instead of looking in as Billy expected, he leaned against the grating and putting his hands in his pockets looked about him complacently.

The Coal Man too was worried by this move, and did all he could to distract his attention and call him away from the door.

"Come here, quick!" cried he.

"Can't do it—I'm Nickel Plate, not quick-silver—besides I want to cool off."

"How can I rust his new suit," said Billy to himself. "If I can do that without his knowing it he will be as badly off as ever." And looking down at the floor to think, he saw a large piece of sulphur that had been blown in when the explosion occurred. [234]

"Sulphur tarnishes the silverware at home," he thought, "I wonder if it would affect nickel plating." He softly picked it up and made a mark on Nickel Plate's back. Sure enough it made a long black streak.

"Good," he exclaimed under his breath. "If I put a lot of black marks on his back it will not only destroy his power, but everyone who sees them will know that he is a villain. I know that black marks were what teachers used to give us to show that our department wasn't good," and in a jiffy Billy had covered Nickel Plate's back with black marks.

Poor Nickel Plate had no idea what was going on behind his back; indeed he was so surprised at the Coal Man's antics that he couldn't think of anything else. For, of course, the Coal Man saw what Billy was doing, and was laughing and slapping his knees and jumping up and down with delight.

"Well, come on Drone," said Nickel Plate, starting away. "We must be going—Drone—Drone—wake up, I say."

And Drone got up from a bed of lava rubbing his eyes and yawning. But he was so sleepy he paid no attention to Nickel Plate's back and out they both walked without ever discovering the trick Billy had played. [235]

As soon as they had gone Billy came out of his hiding-place.

"Thank you, Mr. Coal Man, Mr. Alchemist, and Ace of Spades—I shan't ever forget your kindness to me."

"Run along and don't interrupt," said the Alchemist, hard at work with his scales. "You're welcome—good-by."

Ace of Spades bobbed his red head and smiled to show that Billy was welcome to all he had done.

"Come along," said the Coal Man, "I'll show you the way out." And he led Billy to the floor beneath the Crater where he warmly shook hands with him. "Good-by—take good care of yourself, boy—you've made me laugh more to-day than I have for years."

"Good-by," cried Billy, giving a great big jump, and up he popped out of the mouth of Vociferous and away over the green fields and forests.

CHAPTER XVIII.

[236]

THE ELUSIVE BRIDGE.

"I must be very near the end of my journey," said Billy the morning after he ruined Nickel Plate's new coat. "I have been on the air road a long time, and certainly I have had some queer adventures. What shall I say to Bogie Man when I *do* see him, I wonder—" but here he lit on the ground and looked around him. About half a block behind him he saw a most peculiar looking bridge—a bridge that seemed to be floating in the air and yet came very near to touching the ground at each end.

But what interested him was the dark and dismal looking city on the other side of the bridge.

"Why, that's strange. The bridge and the city are behind me, so I must have passed over them; yet I don't remember seeing them at all."

Billy had been looking at them over his shoulder and now turned to get a better view. But when he turned he saw nothing before him but a great wide stretch of land—the bridge and the city had disappeared. "I am sure I saw a bridge and city over there," and he casually turned his head to look around him again—there at his back were the objects he sought. "I must have turned all the way round without noticing it, but this time I'm going to keep an eye on them when I turn." So Billy turned very, very slowly, keeping a close watch on the bridge and city. But as he turned, they turned; it made no difference how fast or how slow the motion. [237]

"Barker, old dog," he said finally in despair, "I'm afraid my head is turned. I want you to try it." So he took Barker out of his pocket and placed him on the ground. Then he turned his own and Barker's heads over their shoulders, and pointing to the city said, "Watch, it, good dog, watch it."

Barker undoubtedly understood, and as his neck wasn't comfortable with his head turned, he turned his body around. He stopped and looked around him in the greatest dog surprise, caught sight of the city over his shoulder, and turned again. Then he began to get excited, and before Billy could stop him was spinning round and round like a kitten after its tail. And he spun and spun and he spun, Billy all the time trying to make head or tail of him, until he got so dizzy that he fell over on his side. "Good old dog," cried Billy, picking him up and putting him in his pocket. "You have proved that I'm not the only one who can't get the bridge in front of him. But I have made up my mind to get to that city if it takes the rest of my life, for it looks to me like Never Was where Bogie Man lives." And with that he commenced to walk backwards. And he walked and walked and walked, but not an inch nearer to the bridge did he get. [238]

"I wonder if I could jump backwards. I'll try it." And back he jumped. Up he went and back he flew. It wasn't a very comfortable feeling, either, not to know just where he was going, and he certainly hoped he wouldn't bump into any buildings when he did reach the city. But he closed his eyes and waited, until at last his feet touched earth. Then he opened his eyes and looked around him, expecting to find himself in the middle of the city. Not a bit of it. There he was in the same spot he had started from, with the bridge and the city just over his shoulder. [239]

"Well, I'll be gum swizzled!" he exclaimed in surprise.

"I shouldn't," said an important looking man in a black uniform and a little round cap bearing the words "Toll Gate Keeper." "You might be gummed, you know, like an envelope, but it wouldn't do to be swizzled."

"What is swizzled?" asked Billy.

"How should I know? But you should, for you said you would be."

"It was just an expression with me."

"Oh! you meant to say you would be expressed. What are the express rates on boys?"

"No, I didn't mean that; what I meant to say is that what I meant to say was—oh! pshaw! I don't know what I'm talking about."

"Of course you don't, and as I don't, either, let's change the subject." And the Toll Gate Keeper nodded his head very gravely. [240]

"Then can you tell me what city that is back there?" asked Billy, pointing over his shoulder.

"Yes," said the Toll Man, and then he began to hum a tune as though that closed the discussion.

"Well?" said Billy.

"Quite well, thank you—how do you feel?"

"But I didn't mean that—I was waiting for an answer to my question."

"I've answered all the questions you've asked; of course, if you haven't asked it yet you can't expect me to answer it."

"But I asked you if you could tell me what city that is back there."

"And I said 'yes, I could.' I'm sure that's answering your question." And the Toll Man looked grieved.

"Then why don't you tell me?"

"Because you haven't asked me to—why should I waste my valuable time answering questions that were never asked?"

"Then what city is it?" asked Billy, angrily.

"Never Was."

"Thank you—and now I will ask you: do I have to cross that bridge to get there?"

"You've already crossed it," said the Toll Gate Keeper, "and I'm here to collect your toll."

"I beg your pardon, I haven't crossed it," said Billy.



The Toll Gate Keeper.

"Oh, but you have, otherwise you wouldn't be here."

"But how could I have crossed it? I haven't gotten to it yet."

"Of course not; if you had gotten to it you wouldn't have crossed it," and the Toll man looked at Billy as much as to say, "Well, you *are* a dull boy if you can't understand that."

"That's ridiculous," said Billy. "What sort of a bridge is it, anyway?"

"The bridge that people cross before they come to it."

"But there is no such bridge."

"Of course there's not, that's the reason people cross it before they get to it."

"Then how am I to get to the city?"

"I don't know and I don't care. I didn't send you there—all I know is that the only way to Never Was is over the bridge that people cross before they get to it." [242]

"Then all I can see is that I shall have to cross the bridge," said Billy.

"I've told you that you've already crossed it."

"Stop a minute," cried Billy, putting his fingers in his ears, "my head is in a whirl."

"How can I stop a minute? I'd have to catch it first, and don't you know that time flies?"

"I mean wait for a minute."

"Which minute do you want me to wait for?"

"Oh, stop it, stop it!—don't stop anything—I mean don't wait for anything—if you say another word I'll go crazy."

And poor bewildered Billy sat down on the ground and buried his face in his hands.

"There, I feel better," said he, finally, raising his head. "Who are you, please?"

"I'm the Toll Gate Keeper, also The Man That People Borrow Trouble From."

"Oh!" said Billy.

"No, I don't owe, I lend, and it's a poor business, for no one ever pays me back. More people owe me a grudge than a Thousand Legger can count on its fingers and toes." [243]

"Aren't you afraid to have so many people owing you a grudge?" asked Billy.

"How can I help it? They borrow trouble from me without asking for it, and anyway it worries them more than it does me."

"This is certainly a topsy-turvy place," said Billy. "What is that sign on the bridge—is it in Greek?"

"Oh, no! that's just because you see the back of it; it's only for people who are crossing, and says, 'Walk your Horses.'"

"Do horses ever cross the bridge?"

"None have so far—it's just put there in case they should. You know if wishes were horses beggars would ride, and, of course, if you put a beggar on horseback he will ride you down. That would make it very unpleasant for any one who was walking if there should ever happen to be any."

"Do many people cross the bridge?" asked Billy.

"I don't know, I'm sure—as they all cross it before they get to it, by the time they get there they have already crossed it, so it's impossible to make them pass through the turnstiles." [244]

"I wish I knew how to get to Never Was," said Billy sadly.

"I can't help you; because what has once been done can't be undone, unless time turns back, and as what you have done was done before you did it, I don't see how you can ever do it."

"No, I'm very sure you can't help me," said Billy. "But of one thing I am certain, I must get to Bogie Man's house."

"You will do well if you do, for no one has ever seen Bogie Man," said the Toll Gate Keeper.

"No one has ever seen him?"

"No—lots of people have thought they saw him but he keeps himself just out of sight."

"I wonder what time it is?" said Billy, pulling out his Waterbury. "I do hate to waste so much time—why it can't be eleven o'clock yet."

"Just half past ten," said the Toll Man, pulling out his sun dial.

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"I wonder what's happened to my watch? I must turn it back," and pressing the spring Billy

turned the hands back to ten thirty. Just at that moment he happened to catch sight of the bridge over his shoulder, and, strange to say, it was almost in touching distance.

"Hurrah!" he cried, delightedly, "here's the bridge right here—now I'm sure to catch it," and he ran backwards as hard as he could, but without getting an inch nearer to it.

"How did it get here, anyway?" he asked.

"I don't know," said the Bridge Keeper. "I noticed it coming up while you were setting your watch back."

"That's it—that's it," cried Billy. "Don't you know, you said that what has once been done can't be undone unless time turns back."

"What has that got to do with it?"

"Can't you see when I turned time back, up came the bridge? Now I am going to turn it back more and get to the other side."

"Don't risk it, don't risk it," cried the Toll Gate Keeper, in great excitement. "If you should happen to be lost between two hours, you might never catch up with time again." [246]

But Billy did not heed the warning, for he knew he could turn his watch ahead again and make up for any lost time that way.

So back went the hands of the watch and, "Spang!" Billy stood in the dark and dismal streets of Never Was.

Far, far off in front of him (this time) was the bridge, and on the other side, waving his arms in despair, stood the Toll Gate Keeper.

CHAPTER XIX.

[247]

IN THE DARK, NEVER WAS.

"At last!" cried Billy, when he found himself in Never Was. "But I'll never again cross a bridge before I come to it—it makes too much unnecessary trouble." And off he started down the street to find Bogie Man's house.

There did not seem to be a soul on the streets. Nearly every house that Billy passed was shut up tight and had a board tacked on the front door reading, "Gone away for life—back next eternity." Each one was signed by the owner—and such a lot of names as he read! One was "Hobgoblin," another "Gnome," another "Bloody Bones," another was "Wicked Giant," another "Cruel Stepmother," another "Boog a Boo," and so on and so on. In fact, almost every one of the things or people that frighten little boys and girls, and even some that used to frighten grown-ups, had left this earth for parts unknown. [248]

"It looks to me," said Billy, "as though Bogie Man was about the only one of the whole lot who is left, and he seems to be pretty hard to find."

"Finders losers, keepers weepers," said a voice, and Billy was surprised to see a little peg-legged man standing in front of him.

"Why!" said Billy, "where did you come from? You are the first person I've seen here, and I began to think I was the only one in town."

"Don't ever get that idea," said the little man.

"What idea?"

"That you are the only one any place; there are always a few more better than you are wherever you are."

"I suppose so," said Billy.

"I don't suppose it, I know it, because seeing is not believing."

"What is the meaning of that?"

"That's a secret; some day perhaps I'll not tell you."

"I never heard such nonsense," said Billy, "and I've heard a great deal the last few days." [249]

"Many a fib is told in jest, you know, but it's not my fault if I do talk nonsense—that is the misfortune of having a wooden leg," and the little man made a dab at Billy's toes with his stump.

"What has a wooden leg got to do with it?"

"Nothing at all. I merely mentioned that it is a misfortune to have a wooden leg."

"I should think it would be hard to bear," said Billy, sympathetically.

"No, because it's already bare. But I shouldn't complain, I make my living on it."

"Your living—how can that be?"

"I guess you don't know who I am?" and the little man struck an attitude.

"No, I don't."

"I am Mumbledy Peg, Bogie Man's Official Potato Masher."

"Ugh," said Billy, in disgust, "how dirty!"

"Dirty—why?"

"To mash potatoes with your wooden leg."

"But I don't; I use a potato masher like anybody else."

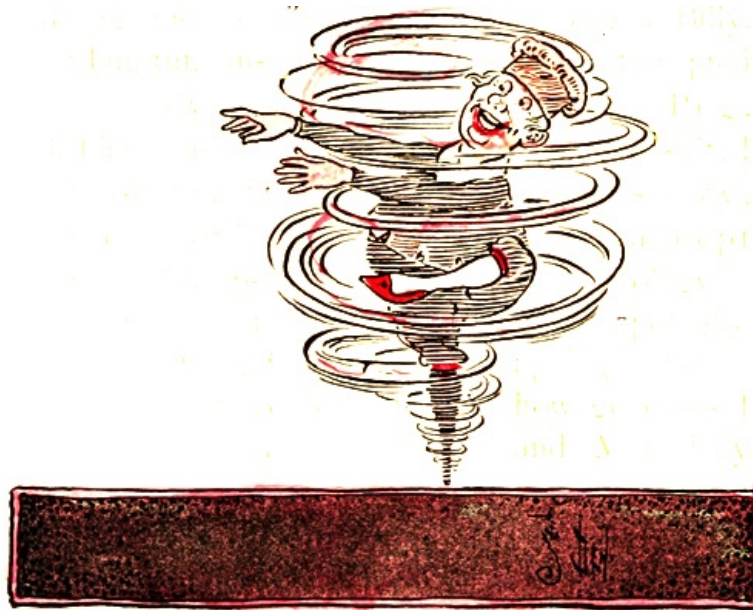
"Then I don't see why you said you made your living with your wooden leg."

[250]

"I didn't. I said I made my living on it, and I do, because I always stand up to mash potatoes." And Mumbledy Peg spun around on his wooden leg in great delight.

"You're making fun of me," said Billy.

"No, you were already funny; I didn't make you so."



Mumbledy Peg.

"If you can't talk seriously and without insulting me——" began Billy.

"Tut, tut," interrupted Mumbledy Peg. "If I have insulted you, you are very sorry, and I sincerely accept your humble apology."

"But I didn't apologize—I had nothing to apologize for."

"Then that shows how generous I am—I accept it anyway," and Mumbledy Peg held out his hand: "Come, we will shake hands and be good enemies again." And he looked so merry and good-natured about it that Billy couldn't resist a smile.

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"Didn't you say that you were Bogie Man's official potato masher?" asked Billy.

"I not only said so, but I am."

"Then you know where he lives."

"Yes, but I've never been there."

"You've never been there?" exclaimed Billy.

"No, of course not. Why should I go there?"

"To mash potatoes, of course."

"Ah! but I said I was the *Official* potato masher—officials never go near the office, we let the servants do that," said Mumbledy Peg.

"And you get a high salary for doing nothing?"

"Yes, of course; the higher the salary the less the work, is our motto, or to be exact, the fewer the higher."

"Perhaps you can direct me to Bogie Man's house."

"Who knows?" said Mumbledy Peg. "I'm willing to try it if you are."

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"I am," said Billy. "I am very anxious to deliver a note to him."

"I'll take it for a dime. I love to read notes."

"But you can't read this."

"If it's typewritten I can, and, anyway, if I miss any words, you can tell them to me."

"But I don't want you to read it, it's not for you," said Billy.

"I'm not particular about that. I could probably find something in it that would amuse me." And Mumbledy Peg held out his hand for the note, just as if everything had been settled.

"No, I'd rather take it myself," said Billy.

"Oh! all right, if you're going to be selfish with your old note, go ahead. But I warn you that you have lost your chance forever to have the note read, for if you should come to me now and beg me on bended knee to read that note, I should refuse. That's the kind of a man I am."

"Don't worry," said Billy, "I shan't ask you."

"That won't help you any, for I won't read it even if you don't ask me." And in high dudgeon Mumbledy Peg started to stump off down the street. [253]

"Hold on," called Billy, running after him.

"I have nothing to hold on to, but don't worry, I won't fall."

"Can't you give a sensible answer to anything?"

"No. I used to do that and people said I had so much common sense I couldn't be very bright. When I began talking nonsense they said it was so foolish it must be very clever, and thus I gained a great reputation for being witty."

"Well, just for once, won't you try to talk common sense?" said Billy. "How can I get to Bogie Man's house?"

"There is just one way and that is to walk. We have no street cars here."

"I mean in what direction shall I go?"

"It makes no difference to me which way you go—see here, Billy Bounce, I know you," said Mumbledy Peg, severely.

"You know me?" asked Billy, in surprise.

"Yes, I do, and I'm not going to help you find Bogie Man's house."

[254]

"Oh! you're not," said Billy. "Well, suppose I find it anyway."

"You can't, no one ever finds Bogie Man unless he doesn't want to find him."

"We will see about that," said Billy, angrily, "and when I do find him and deliver the note, I'm going to tell him just what I think of him."

"He doesn't care what you think of him. Thoughts never hurt any one but their thinkers."

"That is too deep for me," said Billy.

"There it is," said Mumbledy Peg in disgust, "when I *do* say something sensible, you don't understand me."

"Then you won't help me to find Bogie Man?"

"Not an inch, and I will say further that if all our leading citizens had not left for Mars in search of work, you wouldn't be alive in this town for three minutes."

"I'm not trying to harm you," said Billy.

"We won't discuss the matter further. Good night," and Mumbledy Peg drove himself right into the ground and disappeared, leaving Billy alone in the dark street. [255]

"I can't get him back unless I pull him out with my teeth, I suppose," said Billy, "and I'm not going to try that. Now, what am I to do without a guide? It is fearfully dark and lonely, and I seem to be as far from seeing Bogie Man as ever. I wonder what street this is?"

He tried to see the sign on the lamp post. Of course the lamp was not lit, for they never are in Never Was until daylight.

But he couldn't possibly make it out, so he fumbled about in his pockets until he found a match. He lighted this, and by its feeble flame read the sign "The Road-to-Bed."

"The Road-to-Bed," he repeated to himself, "that's a strange name for a street. I wonder if Bogie Man lives anywhere near. Why, of course, he must live in this street, because he is nearly always seen on the road to bed." Now Billy did not exactly mean that Bogie Man *was* seen, because,

although many little boys and little girls have *thought* they saw Bogie Man, have thought they heard him creeping up behind them to seize their shoulders, or was hid under the bed to catch ankles when they hopped into bed—he wasn't really there at all. The fact of the matter is that he had never in his life left Never Was until Billy took—but there, you will learn later what Billy did to him. [256]

CHAPTER XX. [257]

THE WINDOW OF FEAR.

"I wish I had a candle," said Billy, trying to look around him; for it was so very dark he really could not see anything but black shadows and the black shadows of the shadows. Indeed, it had suddenly grown darker than ever before, and the wind began to moan as it sometimes does when a storm is brewing. "Of course I'm not afraid of Bogie Man—but I think I'd rather have a candle with me—just—just for companionship. I wonder if the Singing Tree could help me."

So he sat him down in the middle of the street, planted Barker's bark and told the tree what he wanted.

At once it sang—

"Little Nancy Etticoat
In a white petticoat
And a red nose,
The longer she stands,
The shorter she grows."

And with a low bow handed him a lighted candle.

"That's better," he said; "I seem to feel easier already."

And off he trudged, peering up at the houses in search of "In-The-Dark," Bogie Man's Castle. Of course, he couldn't walk very rapidly, for the candle wavered and flickered, and tried more than once to go out; but he shaded it with his cap and got along very well considering.

And at last he stood before a great black shadowy building, dotted with large windows in all conceivable shapes. Some looked like cruel sneering mouths, others like the hungry open jaws of ogres; others like large staring eyes. In fact, each window bore a hideous, fear-compelling aspect, and all were as dark as a hole in the ground—all but one, from which a blue and yellow light streamed. And this was the most hideous window of all, for it did not look like anything—just a shapeless, nameless, dreadful yellow splotch on the wall. And over it Billy read these words, "The Window of Fear—look not lest ye see terror." [259]

"This must be Bogie Man's house," said Billy. "I—I am sure it is rude to look in at windows, and besides that, ugh! *what* a hideous window—I'll try the front door."

At last he found a wide, low, grinning door, and he had just mustered up the courage to ring the bell, whose handle was the tail of a snake, when the door opened suddenly and out flew a thin, gaunt, pink flannel cat with shoe-button eyes and a long, blue worsted tail. Billy tried to seize this opportunity and enter; but slam went the door in his face, and off down the road went the cat. And at the same moment two large flat things, with waving streamer-like arms, lifted themselves up in front of him and tried to knock his candle out of his hand. Billy stepped back just in time to save it and stood staring at the quivering forms. "What are those things, I wonder?" he exclaimed. "Layovers to catch meddlers," said one of them. "Hands off," said the other, and then they lay down again on the door-mat. [260]

"Then perhaps you can tell me if this is Bogie Man's house," he said.

"It is—now go away," said one.

"This door is only to go out by—it never opens to let any one in," said the other.

Billy thought a minute, and then, hoping he could surprise them into telling him some way of getting in, said, "Then how is that cat ever to get in again?"

"It never will," said the first Layover; "that is Scaredy Cat, and she will never come back."

"What was she running away from?" asked Billy.

"Her tail."

"Her tail?"

"Yes—it is a frightful yarn. Now, go away; I'm through talking."

Billy tried to secure an answer to several more questions, but never a word could he get out of them.

"I suppose I shall have to look through the Window of Fear after all," he said, with just the faintest shiver. And throwing back his shoulders, he made for the window. He had to hoist himself up onto the sill to look in, and when he had gotten up, he sat with his back to the window and his eyes closed, until he could catch his breath and muster up his courage to peep in. Then he slowly turned his head. It is a good thing he had a tight hold on the broad sill, for the sight that met his gaze, froze his blood and almost knocked him off his balance. [261]

There stood Bogie Man in the middle of the room juggling his own hideous head with one hand and a great ball of burning sulphur with the other. Billy saw now what made the blue and yellow light. It was the sulphur, which flashed and sizzled as it went through the air, emitting a million angry sparks and tongues of fire when it struck Bogie Man's hand. And Bogie Man's body—ugh!—as tall as a church-steeple, as large around as a house; as full of knots as an old oak-tree, yet as black and eerie and unformlike as a flying shadow. The hair on the head was long and green, his eyes like two sparks floating in a saucer of water, and his mouth like a shark's. He had a nose like a large ripe apple. [262]

"And I must vanquish him," said Billy in dismay. "I will for Honey Girl's sake—I'm *NOT AFRAID*." As he said this the whole world seemed to take fire with a lurid flash of lightning. "Crash"—a peal of thunder split the heavens and rolled and rumbled through the lonely streets of Never Was.

Then the rain came down in solid sheets, the wind blew a hurricane, and on the crest of the gale rode a thousand shadowy figures, shrieking and moaning and tumbling over and over as they came.

The first touch of the wind blew out the candle, and at the same moment the sulphur ball indoors burst and disappeared. So Billy sat there in the dark, his back to the window and in front of him countless thousands of bitter enemies—Banshees, Wraiths, Ghosts, Sprites, Imps, riding on Crimson Devil's Horses—all the weird and wicked things that claim Bogie Man as their King.

"Billy Bounce," called the voice of Nickel Plate.

"Here," cried Billy, undismayed. [263]



Billy shot a blast of hot air from his pump full in Bumbus's face.—Page 263.

"Hurrah—hurrah—hurrah—howl—howl—shriek!" cried the enemy.

"Caught at last. No hope, no hope for Billy Bounce," said a voice.

"Is that Bumbus?" asked Billy.

"I be," said Bumbus, suddenly jumping onto the sill and trying to push Billy off. But "Swish!" Billy

shot a blast of hot air from his pump full in Bumbus's face and down he dropped.

"Come on," cried Billy; "you *can't* frighten me."

"Your last chance," cried Nickel Plate. "Give up and I will save you."

"Never!" cried Billy.

And with that the battle commenced.

Oh! the countless slaps and cuffs and tweaks he got. My! the hideous din and noise of their cries. Ugh! the horrible faces they pushed right into his. But the harder they fought and tried, the less real harm they seemed to be able to do. Fear, fear was their only weapon, and as Billy's heart grew stout within him, the weaker became their attack.

Billy leaned heavily against the window and worked the hot-air pump desperately. Time and time again the Imps, Sprites and Crimson Devil's Horses renewed the attack. [264]

"On, on!" cried Nickel Plate from a safe place in the rear.

"Buzz-z-z, buzz-z-z! Pluck his eyes out!" cried Bumbus, striking at Billy with his three-edged sword.

"Put him to sleep forever!" cried Drone, waking up in the midst of the combat.

But Billy never said a word. He was holding his breath for the final onslaught, which he felt was now being arranged, so he only gritted his teeth and pumped hot air into and through the frantic enemy. Down went Bumbus again from a blast in the ear. Puff! puff! and away and away sailed an imp never to return again.

"Rally!" cried Nickel Plate.

For a moment there was a lull, and Billy knew the time had come when he must beat or be beaten. "I'm not afraid," he panted to himself, and then with a rush and a wild shriek the enemy hurled itself forward in a solid mass. On they came, yelling terribly, their eyes spitting flashes of light and their mouths and jaws working in horrible grimaces. The foremost imp had just come in striking distance, when Billy leaned back more heavily on the window to brace himself and *crash!* the pane broke and Billy was inside. With the crash all sound ceased. All were as surprised as Billy. Quick as a flash he was up on his feet and prepared to grapple with the hideous Bogie Man that he knew was in the room with him. "Light," he cried, and in a jiffy he had pulled his candle out of his pocket and lighted it. [265]

He looked for Bogie Man. He was gone, and in his place stood a little, old, shrivelled man.

"Where is Bogie Man?" cried Billy, and then stopped and looked again, for the little man was an exact miniature of the big figure he had seen through the Window of Fear. "You are here!" he cried. "I see it now. The window was a magnifying glass. At last, at last." The little man made a move for the door.

"No, you don't; you've got to take the note," cried Billy, forcing it into Bogie Man's unwilling and trembling hands. "And now," he began, but just as he spoke, in through the broken window poured the enemy, intent on Billy's capture. But he was determined to have his talk with Bogie Man and secure his promise that Honey Girl was to be left unharmed. Seizing Bogie Man he cast his eyes about him for some means of escape. He saw a door just behind him. With one bound he reached it, threw it open and was off down the corridor headed for the front door, which he saw dimly outlined at the farthest end. Behind him shrieked the Imps and Sprites, filling the house with their wild, weird cries. The foremost Imp was clutching at his hair, and had almost caught him when he reached the door, flung it open, jumped through, and crashed it to again just in time to catch the Imp fast, half in and half out. "Bing!" and Billy had taken such a leap up into the air as he had never taken before. [266]

CHAPTER XXI.

[267]

IN THE QUEEN BEE PALACE.

On, on and on went Billy, rushing through the air with a speed he had never before experienced: the result of the tremendous leap he had taken in leaving In-The-Dark, Never Was.

Bogie Man squirmed and struggled, scratched and bit and kicked, threatening Billy with the most horrible punishment if he did not release him. But Billy only held on the tighter and answered never a word. For now he knew what a harmless imitation he really was unless seen through the Window of Fear.

Then down, down, down he dropped right into the middle of a great, sweet field of red clover from which arose the continuous hum-m-m-m-m buzz-z-z of thousands of honey-gathering bees.

And before him stood a beehive, the entrance of which he could see was guarded by Yellow Jacket Bee Sentries. [268]

"The uniform of Honey Girl's guard," he cried excitedly. "It must be the Palace of the Queen Bee. Now at last I shall see Honey Girl." Saying this he stepped toward the hive.

"What are you going to do?" asked Bogie Man in alarm.

"Enter that hive and see Honey Girl," said Billy.

"Oh! but don't you see the guard—they will sting us. Oh! don't, don't, don't."

"And you are the Bogie Man everyone is afraid of," said Billy in disgust. "You are a fine specimen, aren't you?"

"But you can't get through that little opening." And here it did look as if there was some reason in Bogie Man's words.

"I can try, can't I?" said Billy.

"Halt—buzz-z—halt!" cried all the Bee Sentries, presenting their sting bayonets.

"I'm coming in," said Billy, preparing to jump.

"You do so at the peril of your life," cried the principal sentry.

"I have done so many things that way lately," answered Billy, "that I've quite grown used to it." [269]

"Halt! Halt! I say."

"Oh! don't. Please don't risk it. Remember I'm an old man and a sting might prove fatal." And Bogie Man trembled like a leaf.

"But I'm a friend of Princess Honey Girl. I'm not going to harm her," said Billy, thinking it was at least worth while attempting a friendly entrance.

"Others have said that and stolen our golden walls and our precious jewelry—even the last drop of food in the larder, so stand back."

Several little boy and girl bees had collected around Billy, attracted by the sound of loud voices and hoping to see a fight. They buzzed at Billy derisively, and one or two even picked up clover tops to throw at him.

He knew that quick action was necessary if he was to get in without a serious fight and at the same time avoid a field brawl. So suddenly he stepped back, made a quick leap directly at the opening of the hive, and dived head foremost through it.

In he popped past the startled sentries, the doorway opening wide to admit him, not even brushing his clothes as he entered. He found himself standing in the centre of a great golden court under a magnificent vaulted dome. Magnificent? Ah! that is too poor a word to describe his surroundings. Billy had dreamed of beautiful things, he had read of glittering gold and showers of precious stones, but had all his dreams and all his readings and all the beautiful things he had ever imagined been sifted and sorted, and only the purest and finest selected, the result would have been poor indeed as compared with the interior of the Queen Bee Palace. [270]

Great diamond arc lights flashed brilliant blue and white rays from the ceiling, and mingled their brightness with the soft yellow glow of topaz lights. Beautiful yellow wax candles added their rich, creamy light. The walls were of the richest gold, and instead of being smooth and hard-looking bore the shape of honeycomb, each cell of which showed a distinctive beauty.

The smooth wax floor, giving just enough at each step to make walking a springy, elastic pleasure, was carpeted down the centre with a strip of soft, hand-woven yellow rosebud leaves, and this carpet led to the throne which was carved from one enormous block of amber. [271]



"Allow me to present Bogie Man."—Page 271.

But when Billy's gaze had travelled this far he had eyes for nothing else. In his sight the lights faded to mere sparks, the golden walls lost their richness, the throne became but a high-backed wooden chair, for seated there before him was Honey Girl, so radiant, so dazzlingly beautiful that mere gold and jewelry were as nothing compared with her.

"Honey Girl!" he cried.

"Billy Bounce!" exclaimed she, and her voice was as full of gladness as Billy's.

"You on the throne?"

"Yes, my aunt the Queen Bee felt that she was growing old, and to protect me further from Nickel Plate and Bogie Man abdicated and made me Queen."

"You need not have feared them," said Billy. "Allow me to present Bogie Man."

"That, Bogie Man?" said the Princess, or rather the Queen, in surprise. "Surely you are mistaken. Why, Bogie Man is a monster." [272]

"Yes, oh Queen," said Bogie Man, humbly, "I used to was. Everybody thought I was a terrible fellow, but now that Billy Bounce has discovered me I'm a broken old man who wouldn't hurt a fly unless it woke me too early in the morning."

"Brave Billy Bounce," whispered Honey Girl.

"What he says is true," said Billy, and then added modestly, "but I am not brave, I just somehow guessed that bad things and the unseen things that people fear are mostly nothing at all when a fellow faces them."

"But few face them as you have done, Billy Bounce, and—" began the Queen, when suddenly a great uproar broke out in the palace. In rushed General Merchandise followed by the Yellow Jacket Guard. Close on their heels came a company of Borer Bees carrying their ground augers at charge bayonets. Then came a brigade of Fighting Ants, their black armor shining in the light; next the fierce Wasp Grenadiers, the tallest soldiers in the army, looking very trim and military with their thin waists and broad shoulders; then in came the Horse Fly Cavalry followed by the Tumble Bug Artillery, each soldier rolling his own cannon ball. And such a fierce buzz as arose from their ranks—officers buzzing orders, orderlies and aides running and riding back and forth. Indeed, had not the Palace been enormous, I can't imagine how it would have held the army and its noise. [273]

"What does this intrusion mean?" asked Honey Girl, rising. "General Merchandise, I await your

answer."

"It means," said the General excitedly, "that our spies, the Mosquito Brothers, inform us that this boy" (pointing to Billy Bounce) "has smuggled Bogie Man into the Palace; and if that be true he dies. Ho, guards, seize him!"

"Hold!" cried Honey Girl.

"Leggo!" cried Billy.

"Hold, I say," said the Queen. "It is true that Bogie Man is here."

"Where! Where!" cried General Merchandise in great excitement. "Ho, guards, seize him if you see him!"

"There he stands," and Honey Girl pointed to Bogie Man. [274]

"That—that Bogie Man? Never!" said the General in surprise.

"It is," said Billy, "but he is guaranteed harmless."

"He looks it," answered General Merchandise. "How did it happen?"

"Billy Bounce did it," said Honey Girl.

"You did? Then you are our friend. Ho, guards, unseize him," and the General warmly shook Billy's hand, while the soldiers saluted and went back to their company.

At that moment a door opened and in walked the sentry closely guarding Nickel Plate, Bumbus, Drone and Glucose.

"What does this mean?" asked General Merchandise.

"Four tramps who called at the kitchen door for a crumb of water and a drop of bread. We arrested them as suspicious characters," said the head sentry.

And tramps and suspicious-looking characters they undoubtedly were.

Nickel Plate, with all the starch gone out of his face, as rusty as an old stove-pipe, his monocle broken, and his patent leather boots bursted and run down at the heels. [275]

Bumbus, with his moustache out of curl, his hat dented and rimless, his trousers baggy at the knees, and his eyes bleary and bloodshot from lack of sleep.

Drone—well, it is hard to say what Drone did look like, excepting that he carried a tomato can over one shoulder, and his clothes showed signs of many nights spent on park benches.

And Glucose was fully as disreputable. All the plating was worn off of her comb, her dress was in tatters, and she bore a big label slung around her neck with these words, "Glucose, by order of the Pure Food Commission."

"Nickel Plate, Bumbus, Drone and Glucose!" cried Billy.

"Grown rusty," said Nickel Plate sadly.

"I be," murmured Bumbus.

"I ain't had a bite to eat for three days," whined Drone. "Can't you give a poor man a dime for a bed?"

"And that's the way I used to look," said Glucose bitterly, pointing at Honey Girl.

"It isn't what you used to be, it's what you put in the bank," said Mr. Gas genially, as he floated in through the open door. [276]

"And now that all of our enemies are here," said General Merchandise, "what shall we do with them?"

"Speak up, Billy Bounce," said Mr. Gas.

"I?" said Billy.

"Yes," said Honey Girl, "you have vanquished them; you shall decide their fate."

"Then my first suggestion," said Billy, "is that Bogie Man get a position as Bogie on the golf links. He will be out of mischief there, and it will give him a decent, honest living. Are you willing, Bogie Man?"

"I'll try it," said Bogie Man humbly. "It's been so long since I made an honest living that it will go hard at first; but one must eat, and I'm out of a job."

"Good," said Honey Girl. "General, take him to one side and bring forward the next prisoner."

Nickel Plate was brought before Billy.

"As to Nickel Plate," said Billy, "I suggest that he go on the stage. He can have all the fun of trying to be wicked without doing any possible harm, and is always sure there to be foiled in the [277]

last act."

"Wise boy," said Mr. Gas. "I couldn't have done better myself."

"Thanks," said Nickel Plate, "you've let me off very easily," and he walked dejectedly to where Bogie Man stood.

"And now for Bumbus," said Honey Girl.

"Are you sorry for your wickedness?" asked Billy.

"I be," said Bumbus.

"You are stout and strong," said Billy musingly. "You haven't a bad heart, and you know something about rough-and-tumble fighting. General Merchandise, could you put him on your Police Force?"

"Certainly," said the General.

"Good," said Billy. "That settles a life job on Bumbus. And now for Drone."

"I don't have to go to work, do I?" whined Drone.

"Indeed you do, and I'm going to get you a position as a truckman among the Bee workers."

"Then I wouldn't be a Drone," whimpered he.

"Exactly," said Billy. "There is no room in this world for Drones. General, let some of your soldiers [278] give him a shave, a bath, a square meal, some respectable clothes, and put him to work."

And Drone was led away feebly protesting, but encouraged already by the promise of something to eat.

"And Glucose," cried Honey Girl, "I shall take care of, ladies," bowing to her court ladies who surrounded the throne. "Glucose will be my understudy. When I feel sick and tired and headachy she will attend court for me, and that she may never again enter into a conspiracy to rob me of my throne, she shall always wear her label, but under her dress."

Glucose fell on her knees at Honey Girl's feet and covered her hands with kisses.

"Let me be always your servant, dear Queen, and I will prove that there is some good in Glucose after all."

Every one was much affected by her repentance, and was convinced that thereafter she would lead a good and useful life. Which I am glad to say she did.

"And now, Billy Bounce, for your reward," said Honey Girl. [279]

"I ask no reward," said Billy earnestly, "except that some day when I am grown up and General Manager of the Messenger Service you will marry me."

Honey Girl blushed and hung her head at this unexpected reply, and then smiling at Billy said, "Maybe."

"Hurrah! Maybe is will be in Beeland," cried everybody, and Mr. Gas shook Billy warmly by the hand and whispered, "That's what comes of keeping your courage up."

Is it looking too far ahead to say that one day Honey Girl and Billy did marry, and of course lived happily all the rest of their days, while Barker with the aid of the soldiers guarded the Palace, and every night barked up the Singing Tree, which with its beautiful music gave much pleasure and delight to Billy and the Princess?

Well, it's true anyway, so we will say so.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BILLY BOUNCE ***

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