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The Near Astronomer.

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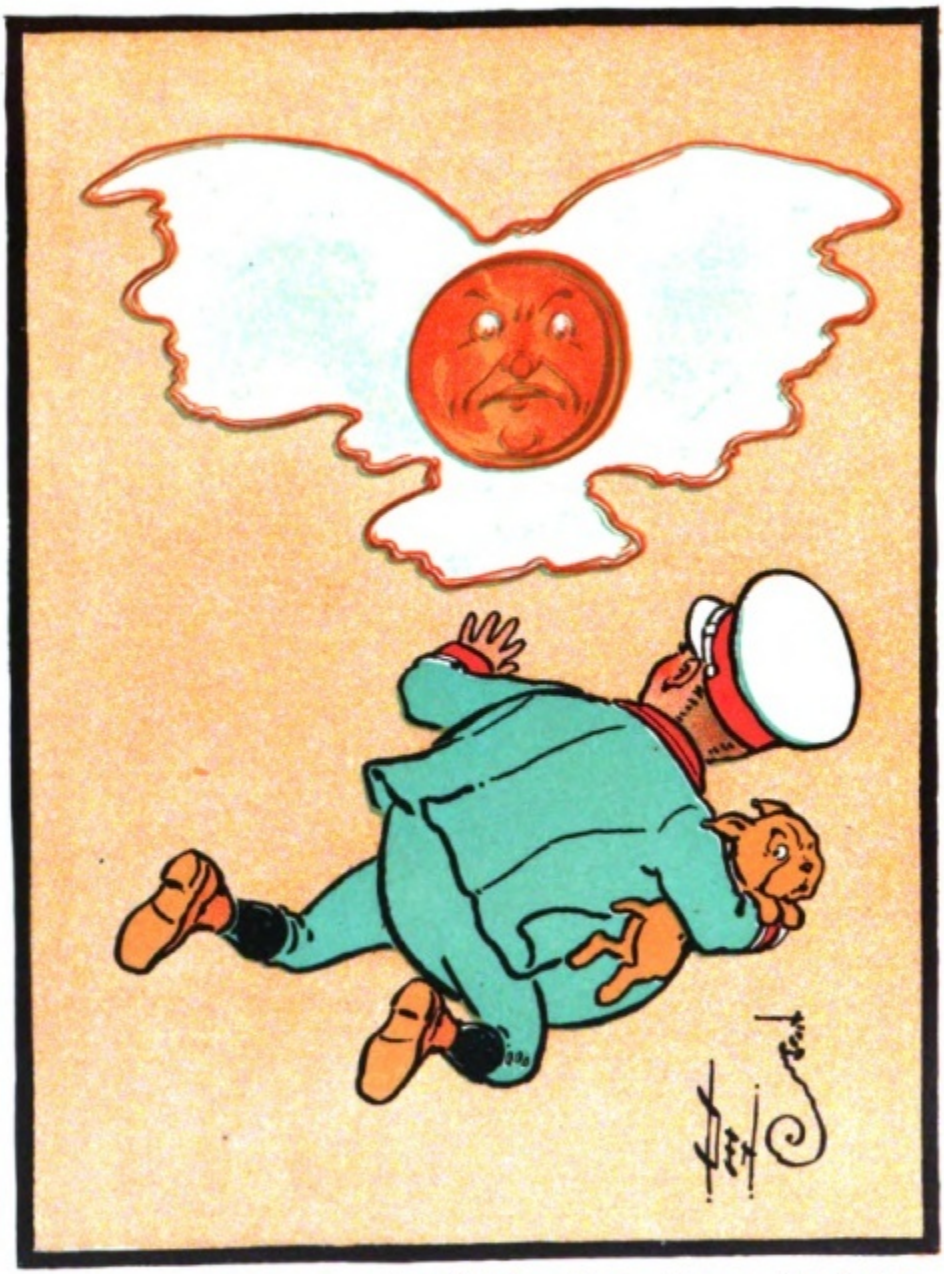

"Why it is, *a large fried egg," said Billy, excitedly.*—Page 47. Frontispiece.

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BILLY BOUNCE

BY

W. W. DENSLOW

AND

DUDLEY A. BRAGDON

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DENSLOW

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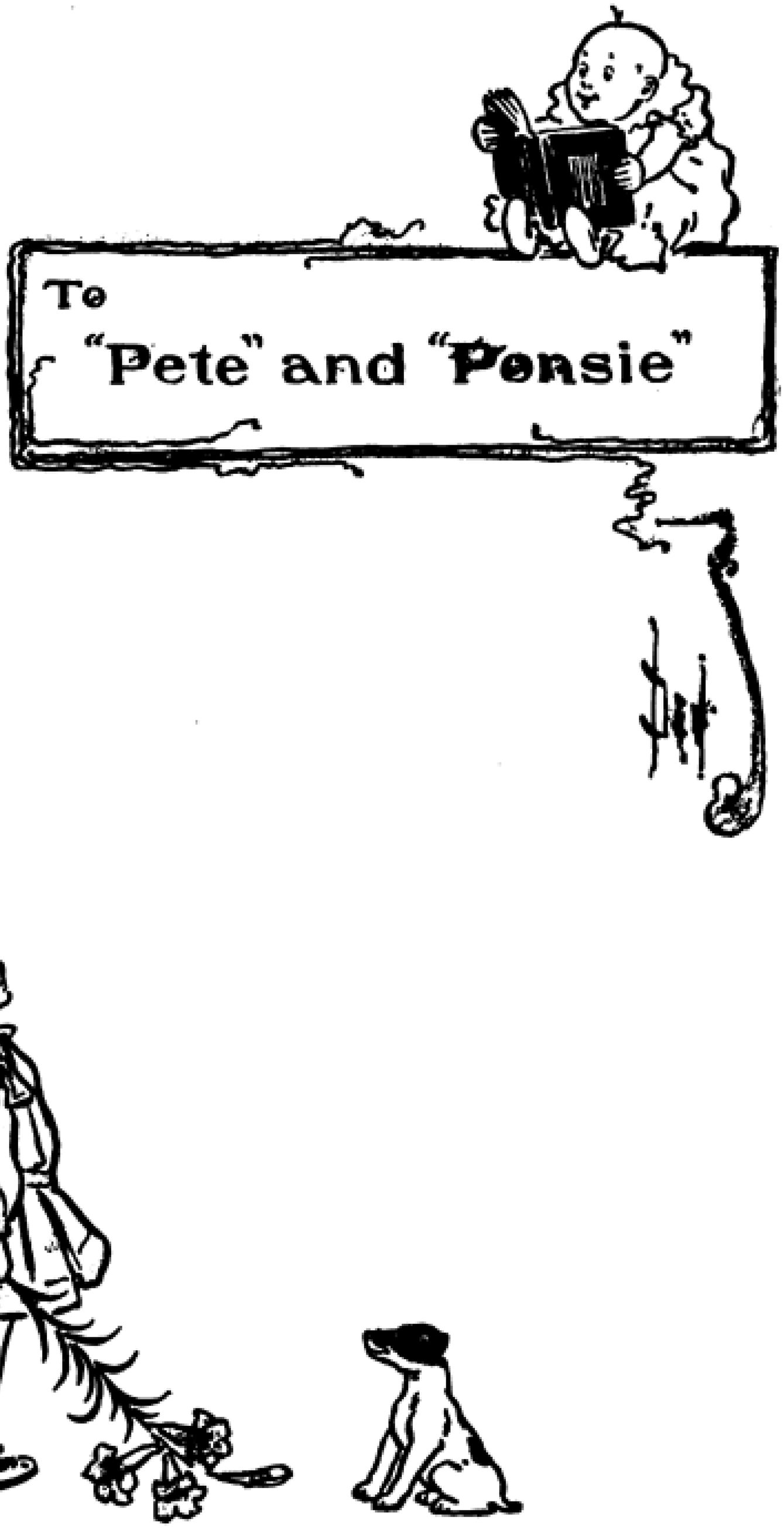

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Barker.

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Col. Solemncholly.

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Preface

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.

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CHAPTER I.

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—

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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."

"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.

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

"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

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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—"

"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."

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"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.

"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."

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

"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."

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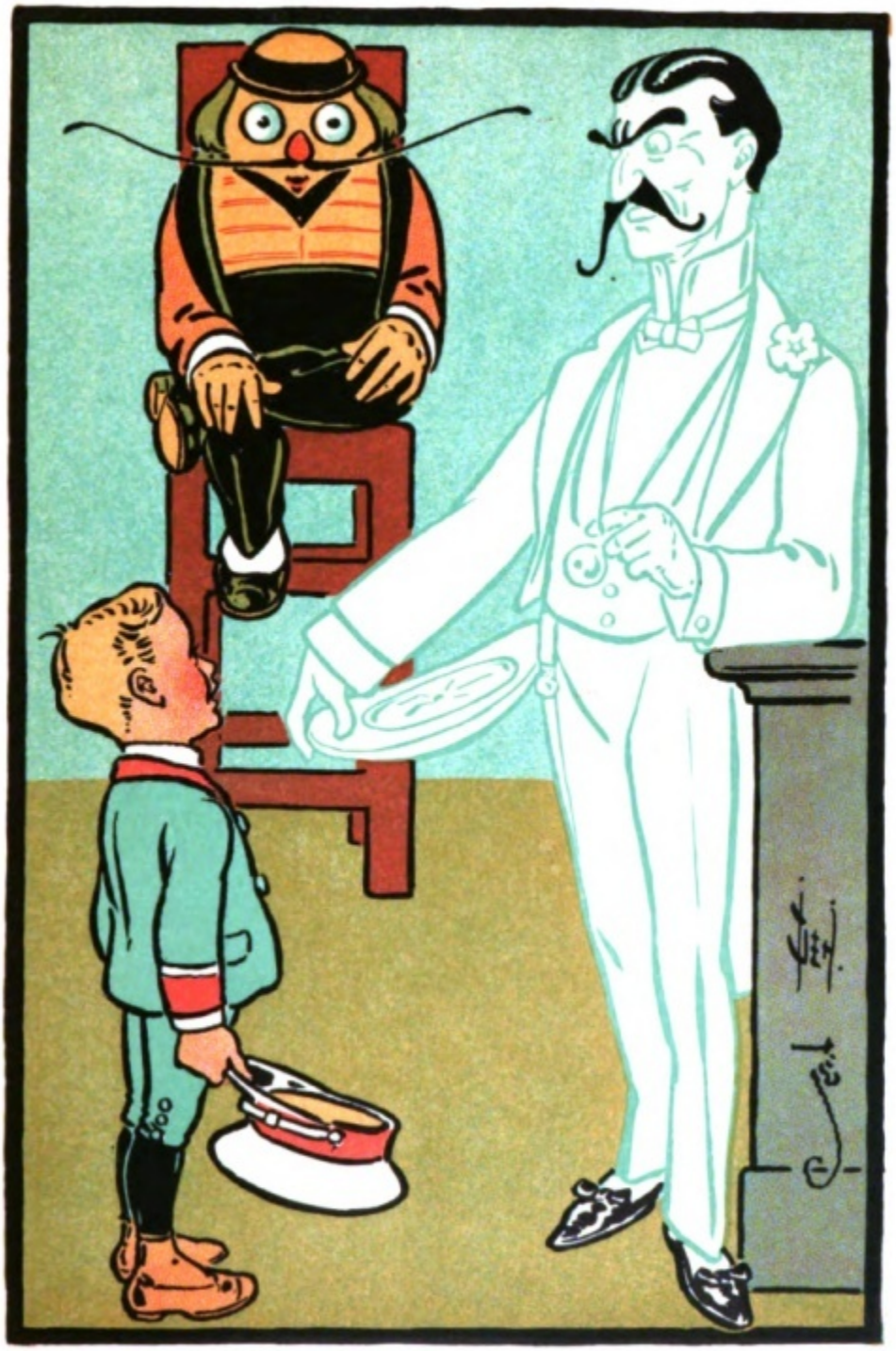

"I can't tell you where Bogie Man lives, it's against the rules."—Page 14.

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

"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,

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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.

"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

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

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old gentleman who was hurrying in the opposite direction.

"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?"

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"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."

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

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."

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"How am I to get there?"

"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

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under?" asked Billy, looking at the tiny animal Mr. Gas held out to him.

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.

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CHAPTER II.

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.

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"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.

"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.

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

"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."

The Near Poet.

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

"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

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us that a gentle answer comes home to roost."

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."

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"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."

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

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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.

"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

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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."

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.

General Merchandise.

"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

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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.

"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 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

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the General. "Just a minute ago he said he was a Beetle Boy. Ho, guard—oh! that's so, you've already ho—d."

"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 Mer-

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chandise upon you, because she set such store by you, but I cannot stand these interruptions."

"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."

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

"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."

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"But why?" said Billy.

"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.

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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.

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"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.

"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."

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"Mi?–so–so," sang the tree, "pause and rest at my bass."

"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.

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

"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.

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

"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,

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

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you're ugly enough. Where are you going?"

"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

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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.

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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."

"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

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grow after me," said Billy to himself when he saw that he was safe from pursuit.

"I wonder what Honey Girl is doing to-day." 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, sepulcheral 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."

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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.

"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.

Private Tear.

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"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.

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"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

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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."

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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

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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."

"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.

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"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.

"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.

Blue Hen's Chicken.

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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.

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"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."

"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.

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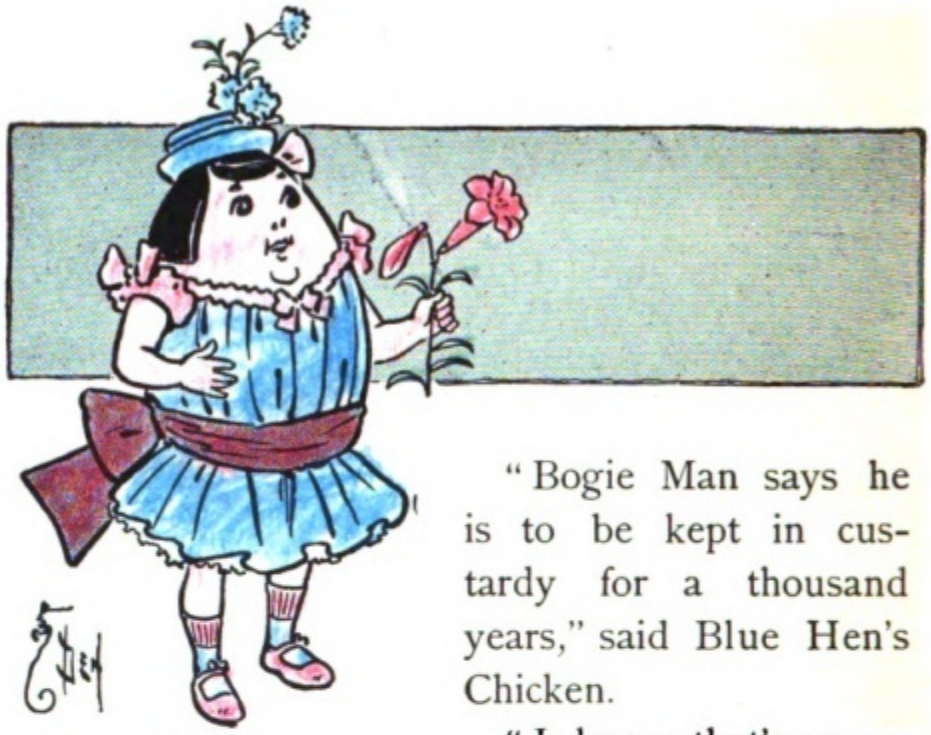

Little Miss Easter Egg.

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

"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."

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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.

"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

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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 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.

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