



8. The Animals' Birthday Party

Birthdays are always important events, but some are more important than others. The most important of all, of course, is one you can't remember at all—the zero birthday, when you were born.

After that, the fifth, I suppose, is the red letter day. A boy certainly begins to appreciate life when he gets to be five years old. Next, probably, would come the seventh, for a boy—or a girl—is pretty big by then, and able to do so many things. In old Bible days seven was supposed to be a sacred number, and even today many people think it lucky. Why, at the baseball games the men in the stands rise up in the seventh inning and stretch, they say, to bring victory to the home team.

The seventeenth birthday is the next great event. By that time a boy is quite grown up and ready for college; and on the twenty-first he can vote. But after that people don't think so much of birthdays until their seventieth or so, when they become very proud of them once more. Perhaps they grow like little children again. Wouldn't it be funny to have, say, eighty candles on one cake? But what cook or baker makes cakes big enough for that?

Marmaduke wasn't looking so far ahead. All he was thinking about was his own birthday, which came that fine day, his seventh; and he was wondering if Mother would put the seven candles on his cake, and if it would turn out chocolate, which he very much hoped.

About three o'clock of this same day, Mother looked out of the window and said "Good gracious!" which were the very worst words she ever said; and Father looked up from the cider-press which he was mending, and said "By George!", which were the very worst he ever said; and the Toyman looked up from the sick chicken to which he was giving some medicine, and said "Geewhillikens!" And whether or not that was the worst he ever said I do not know. I hope so.

What could they be exclaiming about? Marmaduke! He was all alone as far as human beings went, for Jehosophat was putting axle-grease on his little red cart, and Hepzebiah was playing with Hetty, her rag doll, and the rest were busy at their tasks, as we have just seen.

But he had some fine company, oh, yes, he had. He was giving a birthday party for the animals.

And this is the way he persuaded all his noisy quarrelsome friends of the barnyard to come to his party:

First he went to the barn and filled one pocket—you see, he was a big boy now and had pockets—one, two, three, four, five, six, seven—one over his heart, two close by his belt, one on the inside of his jacket, one on each side of his hips, and two in the back of his corduroy trousers. Well, he filled pocket number one with golden kernels of corn from the sack; pocket number two with meal from another sack; and he filled pocket number three with lettuce leaves from the garden; and number four with birdseed from a little box. That

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makes four pockets.

To fill the others, he had to make three more journeys—three very strange journeys, so strange you could never guess where he was going. First he went to the wagon-shed, and there, because it was near the three kennels, was kept the box of dog-biscuits. Six of these biscuits went in the fifth pocket. Let's see—yes, that leaves two more to be filled.

For the sixth, he went into his own little room and got a bottle with a stopper in it, one which he had begged from the doctor that time he was sick. Then he went to the spring-house by the well, and filled the little bottle with milk from the big can.

But the seventh pocket had the strangest load of all. He took his shovel and actually dug some worms from the garden, long, wriggly worms— “night-walkers,” the boys call them—and placed them in a can, and presto! That too went into his pocket, the seventh. And now all the pockets were filled.

And, mind you, he did all this by himself. And when he came back from all these errands he bulged out in such funny places, the places where he had stuffed his pockets, so that he looked as if he had tremendous warts or knobs all over his body.

“Did you ever!” said Mother, and all three—she, the Toyman, and Father—kept watching, trying hard not to laugh. It paid them to watch him, too, for they were going to see something worth-while, better than a “movie,” better even than a circus.

Well, after all the errands were over, Marmaduke collected some shingles, and all the cups and tins in which the Three Happy Children made mud-pies. And he spread them out on the table in the summer-house very carefully.

Can you guess what he did that for? I don't believe you can. I know I couldn't.

Then he took his little scoopnet, and went to the pond and put the net in. Out it came, and in the meshes flopped and tumbled and somersaulted three tiny fish.

These he placed in one of the pans on the table in the summer-house, and then hurried to the rabbit-hutch and opened the sliding door and called,—

“Come, Bunny, Bunny,
An' don't be funny!”

But first we must explain that Marmaduke had a queer trick of making rhymes. I guess he caught it from the Toyman, who used to make lots for the children, just to see them laugh. So Marmaduke got the habit. And making rhymes is just as catching as measles and whooping cough, only it doesn't hurt so much.

Of course, some of Marmaduke's rhymes weren't very good, but he tried his best, which is all you can ask of anybody. Anyway, we will have to tell you them just as he made them, so you can see what sort of a party he had.

So he said,—

“Come, Bunny, Bunny,
An' don't be funny!”

It didn't mean anything much, but he just said it.

And out, hippity hop, hippity hop, came the White Rabbits, making noses at him in the

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odd way of their kind.

Holding out the lettuce leaves in front of their wriggling noses, he coaxed them over to the summer-house, and when they got there, he placed a leaf in one of the dishes, saving the rest for the feast.

And the Bunnies made funnier noses than ever and nibbled, nibbled away at their plates.

Then he called out loud,—
“Here chick, chick, chick,
Come quick, quick, quick!”

And all the White Wyandottes came running. Mother Wyandotte and all the little ones, and all their relatives, hurrying like fat old women trying to catch the trolley car. Even lordly Father Wyandotte himself stalked along a little faster than usual, and I guess the Big Gold Rooster on the top of the barn tried to fly down too, but he was pinned up there tight on the roof, and so couldn't accept the invitation, much to his grave dissatisfaction.

Marmaduke put only one or two kernels of corn from his first pocket, in the plates for the White Wyandottes, to hold them there until the rest of the guests could come. He wanted to get them all together and make a speech to them, the way Deacon Slithers did when they gave a purse of gold to the minister. He was going to present himself with something at that speech. He had it all planned out, you see.

So next he called the Pretty Pink Pigeons from their house on the top of the barn.

“Coo, coo,
There's some for you.”

And the Pretty Pink Pigeons accepted his invitation very quickly, and he tempted them, too, all the way to the summer-house, with a little of the bird-seed from the fourth pocket.

And then he called,—
“Goose, Goose, Goose—”

At first he couldn't think of anything nice for them, but just kept calling, “Goose, Goose, Goose,” over and over until he thought up a bright idea—a fine rhyme,—

“You've no excuse.”

And then to the Turkey,—

“Turkey, come to my party,
If you don't, you're a smarty.”

Sort of silly, wasn't it?—but, no, I guess that was pretty good.

Then he yelled,—

“Here Pussy Cat, Pussy Cat,
You'll have a bite of that.”

And—

“Wienie and Brownie and Rover,
Come 'n over, come 'n over, come 'n over!”

And at last,—

“Here, little fish,

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Is a nice little dish.”

All things considered, he did pretty well, didn't he?

Now he emptied all the different kinds of food, from his seven different pockets, on the little shingles and the little dishes on the table in the summer-house.

There was corn for the White Wyandottes and Mr. Stuckup the Turkey, and some, too, for the Foolish White Geese; and meal for the Pretty Pink Pigeons; and lettuce leaves for the hippity-hop white Bunnies; and milk from the little bottle for the Kitty; and puppy biscuit for the three Dogs; and worms for the Little Fish, all placed very politely in their little dishes.

It was a grand party. No wonder Mother said, “Good gracious!” and “Did you ever!”; and no wonder Father whistled, and said, “By George!”, and the Toyman slapped his overalls, and said “Gee-willikens!”—and perhaps a lot of other things besides.

But there was one serious trouble about this party. Marmaduke couldn't keep sufficient order to make that important speech, which was to have been the event of the celebration.

He stood up on the bench in the summer-house, put his hands in his new pockets, made a fine bow, and began:

“Ladees and gen'lemen an' all others, Mr. Rooster and Mrs. Rooster an' General Turkey”—but he could get no further.

The White Wyandottes were jumping all over the table, and the Pretty Pink Pigeons, who were very tame, were trying to get in his pockets for more of the feast; and Rover and Brownie and Wienerwurst were jumping up and trying to lick his face; and his grand speech turned out something like this:

“Down, Rover! Get away, you crazy Geese! Stop that, Bunny! Stop it, I say—scat!!—scat!!—”

Well, by this time Wienerwurst was biting the tails of the Pretty Pink Pigeons again; and Brownie was chasing the rabbits; and the Geese were flapping their wings and crying, “hiss, hiss!”; and the Pigeons were flying back to their home on the roof; and Rover had his mouth full of White Geese feathers; and Tabby was swallowing the little fish—and—and—Marmaduke was almost crying.

“I'll take it all back,” he yelled, “you're no ladies and gen'lemen you're—you're just mean an' I won't ever ask you to my party again.”

Of course, by this time, Mother and the Toyman and Father weren't just standing still and looking and saying things—they were running—and—saying things!—running straight for that party which had turned out such a grand fight.

They tried to save what they could from the wreck. They spanked little Wienerwurst until he let go of the tails of the Pretty Pink Pigeons, and they got the Bunnies safe back in their hutch, and the White Wyandottes in their yard, and Mr. Turkey in his.

But they couldn't save the poor little fish. It was very sad, but it was too late. Tabby wasn't like Jonah's whale. What she had once swallowed she wasn't apt to give up.

Marmaduke felt very much hurt and very indignant about the way he had been treated.

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As Father said, "it was a grave slight to his hospitality."

However, he forgot all about it when he saw the new skates which Mother and Father had waiting for him, and the grand Noah's Ark which the Toyman had made with his very own hands. There isn't much use telling the colors in which it was painted, because you know the Toyman was sure to put a lot of colors, and pretty ones, too, on all the things he made for the Three Happy Children.

There is one good thing about all the animals in that Noah's Ark. They are very cunning and look like the real thing, but, as the Toyman said, "You can invite them to your house any time and they won't fight, or bite, or scratch, or quarrel. They are very polite and well-behaved."

Marmaduke had many a celebration for them, and made many a glorious speech to them as well, and they listened to every word.

So the birthday party really lasted long after the seven candles had gone out, and the cake had gone, too, every crumb.