

SEVEN O'CLOCK STORIES



Thirteenth Night: The Tall Enemy



It was the first snowfall. The grey sky was filled with little white feathers dancing down—down—down.

“Look at the snowflakes,” exclaimed the three happy children, all in one breath.

“Yes,” said their Mother, “the snow has come. In the spring and summer Mother Earth works very hard. It takes so much of her strength, feeding the millions of plants from her brown breast. By fall she is very tired and in winter she takes things quite easy.

“Then the gentle Rain Fairy feels sorry for Mother Earth. She turns her own tears to snow-flakes, and scatters them over her. They weave a soft white comforter to keep her warm. And it keeps the seed babies, sleeping in Mother Earth’s brown breast, all snug and warm too.”

All that day and all night the snow fell. And all the next day and the next night—and the third day and the third night too.

Then all of a sudden it stopped, and the three happy children woke in the morning, and looked out of the window.

“Why the snow’s most as high as Wienerwurst’s house!” cried Jehosophat.

Then they all trooped in to breakfast.

“We will make forts,” said Jehosophat.

“Hooray!” exclaimed Marmaduke.

“The very thing!” added Mother.

And Wienerwurst, curled up by the rosy kitchen stove, barked, “Woof, woof, woof.”

Seven O'Clock Stories: Thirteenth Night

Now this means a lot of things. But this time it meant, "Good, good, good."

So the three happy children hurried through their oatmeal. They hurried so fast that they had three little pains. Jehosophat had one right under his belt, Marmaduke one in the centre of his blouse, Hepzebiah one under her little red waist.

Mother came in from the kitchen. She looked at the empty bowls.

"What! All gone already! Look out or you'll each have to take a big table-spoonful of the yellow stuff in that bottle."

There it stood, on the kitchen mantel. She pointed right at it. They hated it worse than most anything in the world.

"I'm all right," said Jehosophat; and

"I'm not sick," protested Marmaduke; and

"Pain's all gone," cried Hepzebiah.

It was funny how the sight of that bottle frightened the three little pains away.

Mother smiled. It was a funny smile. Then she said:

"Now, on with your things!"

Jehosophat sat on the floor and pulled on his new rubber boots, which reached almost to his waist. On the stool sat Marmaduke, putting on his, and Mother helped little Hepzebiah with her wee little ones.

Over Jehosophat's head went a red sweater, over Marmaduke's a green, and over Hepzebiah's curls one of blue. Then wristlets and mittens and coats and caps, and out into the deep white snow they tramped.

"Forward march!" said a voice.

They looked. It was the Toyman.

"The enemy is about to attack," he explained sternly.

"Where's the enemy?"

"You can't see them. But they're advancing fast. Up with the fort. Double quick!"

So at double quick they marched to the barnyard, and began work with their shovels.

My! how they dug! Fast flew the snow. And the Toyman packed it down hard, and shaped it into the walls of a big strong fort.

It was odd, too, how the Toyman could find time to help. For he had lots of

Seven O'Clock Stories: Thirteenth Night

work to do. But then the enemy was coming!

Rover and Brownie and Wienerwurst scampered around in the snow. They were not of much help. All they did was to bark—bark—bark.

“Hush!” commanded the Toyman. “We must keep quiet so the enemy won’t know where we are.”

So they dug and they dug and packed the snow hard. Soon the walls were as high as Jehosophat’s shoulders, and the fort was all ready.

The Toyman stopped and said:

“Now for the ammunition.”

“What’s ammunition?”

“Watch.”

The Toyman took a handful of snow and crushed it hard between both hands. When he had finished he opened his fingers. In his palm was a round white ball. Then another he made and another. And the three little soldiers, Jehosophat, Marmaduke, and Hepzebiah, made lots too. They piled them in the corner of the fort, until they had a heap like the iron balls around the cannon in the town park.

“Now,” commanded the Toyman. “March to the barracks and get warm” (he pointed at the house). “I’ll watch and call when the enemy comes.”

Into the house they went, and dried their mittens and warmed their hands. And each had a cup of nice warm milk.

After a while there was a loud knock at the door, and the sound of a horn.

Mother opened the door a little way.

The horn sounded again. Then the voice spoke loudly:

“Fall in,” it said. “The enemy comes!”

Quickly the three little soldiers put on their mittens and caps, and buttoned their coats, and hurried to the fort.

They looked around. They could not see anybody with a horn. And the Toyman was gone.

Over the walls of the fort they peeked.

There stood six soldiers staring at them. The six soldiers stood very still. They were all white, but their eyes were black like pieces of coal, and they stared hard at the three little soldiers within the fort. Over their shoulders were six long round things.

“Guns,” said Jehosophat.

Seven O'Clock Stories: Thirteenth Night

They looked around for the Toyman. He did not come. Their hearts beat fast.

“We’re not afraid,” shouted Jehosophat at the white soldiers. “Come on, you enemy!”

With that they heard a sound far off.

Rat-a-tat-tat. Rat-a-tat-tat. Rat-a-tat-tat.

“What’s that?” cried the smallest little soldier. And Captain Jehosophat answered:

“Drums, drums,

“The enemy comes!”

Then he laughed. He had made a rhyme without thinking anything about it.

But he stopped laughing. It was no time for play. There was hard work ahead. Those six white soldiers in front of the fort were ready to attack. And there were more coming.

“Load!” he commanded.

Each little soldier took up a snowball.

Rat-a-tat-tat. Rat-a-tat-tat. Rat-a-tat-tat .

The drums sounded nearer now.

Rat-a-tat-tat. Rat-a-tat-tat. Rat-a-tat-tat .

Around the house came the sound of the drum.

Over the walls of the fort they peeked—very carefully.

There was a man marching. He looked something like the Toyman. But could it be? No, for he was so changed. The man had a horn around his neck, and a feather in his hat, and his face was stern. He was whistling “Yankee Doodle.” It sounded like a fife, and all the time he was beating the drum with all his might.

Rat-a-tat-tat. Rat-a-tat-tat. Rat-a-tat-tat .

On through the snow the Tall Enemy marched. He reached the six white soldiers who stood so still, with their guns over their shoulders.

He stopped and called out to the three little soldiers in the fort in a loud voice:

“SURRENDER OR WE ATTACK!”

“Never !” was the brave answer of Captain Jehosophat.

“Fire !” he commanded.

Then he let a snowball fly.

He hit the Tall Enemy right in the face.

Seven O'Clock Stories: Thirteenth Night

Then Marmaduke let another snowball fly.

That hit one of the white soldiers and knocked his black eye out.

And Hepzebiah threw her snowball. She tried very hard. But it didn't go very far and didn't do any damage.

Jehosophat looked worried at that. He couldn't depend on Hepzebiah at all. That left but two of them—against so many—and on came the Tall Enemy with the feather in his cap, still beating his drum.

Rat-a-tat-tat . Rat-a-tat-tat . Rat-a-tat-tat .

The little soldiers must fight bravely now.

Fast flew the snowballs.

He was very near.

Then Marmaduke picked up the last snowball. He took good aim for it was the last of their ammunition. Then he let it fly. It hit the Tall Enemy Man right over his heart.

He fell in the snow.

“You've done for me!” he called in a weak voice.

Then the three little soldiers shouted and ran out of the fort.

There in the snow lay the dying enemy.

“You've won,” he said in a sad voice. “I surrender.”

“Hurrah, we've won!” they shouted. Then they stopped. They felt very sorry for the enemy, for after all he had been very brave.

They bent over him.

Then something happened. All of a sudden the enemy seized the three little soldiers in his arms.

And he laughed! Yes, laughed.

And hugged them all at once.

And the three little soldiers laughed happily too. For the Tall Enemy had been the Toyman all the time and the six silent soldiers were only made of snow.

Behind his heels they trudged into the house. But the Toyman had to carry the littlest soldier in his arms. She was very cold and very tired.

But the three happy children ate a very good dinner and a very good supper too, that day, for they were very hungry. And they had earned it after the brave fight in the fort.

“Ting-ting.” He's always on time, that Little Clock. So Good-night!