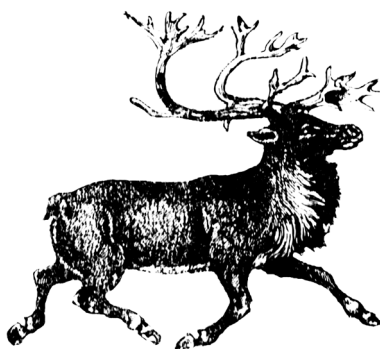


## SEVEN O'CLOCK STORIES



### Fourteenth Night: The Sleigh and the Tiny Reindeer

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Marmaduke had played too long in the snow.

He was very wet.

He was very cold.

And he felt very funny and hot all over.

“Mother, my throat’s got a rubber ball stuck in it,” he said.

Mother looked at it.

“No, dear, there’s no rubber ball there, but your throat’s all swollen and there are little spots in it. You mustn’t get up today.”

Marmaduke lay very still for a while. Soon he heard sleigh-bells tinkling past the window, then far down the road. Father had hitched ‘Teddy, the buckskin horse, to the big sleigh and was going for the Doctor.

Away ticked the clock. After a while—a long time it seemed—Marmaduke heard the sleigh-bells again, at first far off, then coming nearer and nearer, until they jingled before the porch—then stopped. He heard voices and the sound of feet upon the porch, shaking off the snow.

The door opened and into the bedroom came the Doctor. He had a face all rosy from the cold. His eyes were black and so sharp that they looked right through Marmaduke. But they were kind eyes and his voice had a pleasant chuckle in it.

The Doctor came and sat on the edge of the bed.

## *Seven O'Clock Stories: Fourteenth Night*

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"Well, well! How's my little soldier? Wounded in the battle or just playing possum?"

Then Marmaduke opened his eyes.

After the Doctor had talked a while about lots of different things, before Marmaduke knew it, there was something like a spoon or a shoe-horn in his throat and the Doctor was telling him to say "Ah!"

"This isn't school," thought Marmaduke, "why does he make me say that?"

But he forgot to be frightened, for the Doctor was saying so many funny things all the time.

Then he opened his black bag. It was full of little bottles, packed neatly in rows. Marmaduke wished he would forget and leave it behind. It would be fine to play with.

Mother brought two glasses and the Doctor poured some drops from one bottle into a glass, then from another bottle into another glass. And he said something to Mother in a low voice—Marmaduke could not hear what it was—then he patted the little soldier on the head and said good-bye.

Again the sleigh-bells sounded and away he drove.

But the sleigh-bells never stopped. They kept sounding all the night, long after Teddy was back in his stall and the big sleigh was in the shed. You see Marmaduke was very sick and "out of his head."

Seven days passed and seven nights. He began to feel better, but he was very lonely, for Jehosophat and Hepzebiah had gone to Uncle Roger's to stay while he was sick.

Very small he felt in the big bed in the front room, and very, very lonely. He looked out of the window at the big elms. They were covered with white snow like fur. There were many trees standing in rows. The path between them looked like a white road leading up over the hill to the sky.

He wished he had someone to talk to.

Just then he heard a noise at the door.

"Tap, tap, tap"

It opened just a little.

"Who's there?" said Marmaduke.

The door opened wider. And he saw the Toyman's kind face.

"Hello, little soldier."

## *Seven O’Clock Stories: Fourteenth Night*

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“Llo, Toyman,” replied the little boy, and his voice sounded very small and very weak.

The Toyman sat by the bed a while. Then he got up and stirred the fire. Showers of pretty gold and red sparks scampered up the chimney. After that he spread a paper on the floor, not far from the fire-place.

Then his pockets he searched, those big pockets which Mother said were always like five and ten cent stores, they were so full of things.

Out came some pieces of wood. Out came his knife—that magic knife with the five blades. Marmaduke was always glad when he saw that knife for then something nice was sure to happen.

Up came the big blade and snapped back. And the Toyman began to whittle, whittle away. Sometimes he used the big blade, sometimes the small one.

Marmaduke watched him, all eyes.

And as the Toyman whittled sometimes he whistled, and sometimes he sang a funny song in a funny voice. You see he could make rhymes as well as toys.

And this is what he sang:

### THE TOYMAN’S SONG

1

“When a little boy’s sick  
And stays in bed,  
And things feel queer  
Inside his head.

2

“He cannot work,  
He cannot play;  
It’s hard to pass  
The time away.

3

“Don’t make much fuss  
An’ talk a lot;

– 3 –

*Seven O'Clock Stories: Fourteenth Night*

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No questions ask  
'Bout what he's got.

4  
"They'll ask him that  
When Doctor comes,  
So just sit still  
Like good, ole chums.

5  
"An' take your knife  
An' make him toys—  
This knife knows what  
Will please small boys.

6  
"Horses and lions,  
An' tops and rings,  
An' kites and ships,  
An' pretty things.

7  
"We'll paint 'em red  
An' yellor an' blue.  
Work away, ole knife,  
He's watchin' you!"

That's a new song and a very nice one, thought Marmaduke, as he watched the Toyman whittling away by the red fire.

The little white slivers and shavings covered the paper now. He couldn't see just what that knife was making. But that was nice, too, for then it would be a surprise. And there's nothing finer in the world than a real, beautiful surprise.

Then his head grew very tired, and his eyes began to droop till they were tight shut and he fell asleep.

## *Seven O'Clock Stories: Fourteenth Night*

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The Toyman looked at him and smiled.

"Poor little feller!" he said. Then he closed his knife, and picked up the paper and the shavings and the surprise, and out of the room he tiptoed.

Out to the workshop he went, and opened the door.

On the shelves were brushes of different sizes and cans of paint of all colours.

He took down three of the cans, humming to himself:

"We'll paint 'em red

An' yellor an' blue."

"A little brown would go well too," he added as he took down another can.

He worked away with his paint brushes until the surprise was finished. Then he placed it on the work-table to dry.

The next afternoon there was another tap at the bedroom door.

But Marmaduke didn't answer. He was taking his afternoon nap. So the Toyman slipped in and put the surprise at the foot of the bed. After that he sat by the fire, watching the little sick soldier. He sat very still, stirring the embers just once in a while to keep the room warm.

At last Marmaduke opened his eyes, a little at first, then wider.

The very first thing that he saw at the bottom of the bed was a tiny sleigh. The body was bright blue and the runners were red. And what do you think—in front, hitched to it, were two tiny brown reindeer with yellow horns! They looked so much alive that Marmaduke thought any minute they would start running away—away over the comforter, out of the window, and up the snow-covered hill.

The Toyman came over to the bed. Marmaduke curled his little fingers around his friend's hand. The hand was brown and hard, but it was a nice hand, Marmaduke thought.

"We're good ole chums, aren't we?" he said to the Toyman.

"You bet we are," the Toyman answered.