

## SEVEN O'CLOCK STORIES



### Fifth Night: The Toyman

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Farmer Green has a man who helps him plough, feed the cows and horses, and with all the work on the farm. His name is Frank, but Jehosophat, Marmaduke, and Hepzebiah call him “the Toyman.”

Winter nights around the fire he makes wonderful toys for them.

His knife is like a fairy’s wand. With it he whittles boats for Jehosophat, kites for Marmaduke, and dolls for Hepzebiah. He paints them pretty colours too. So I think they gave him the right sort of nickname when they called him “the Toyman.”

He hasn’t many clothes and no house of his own and no relatives of any sort. He isn’t exactly a handsome man. But the three happy children love the Toyman very much.

Yesterday he sat by the edge of the pond. On one side sat Jehosophat, Marmaduke, and big Rover. On the other side sat Hepzebiah, Brownie, and little yellow Wienerwurst.

They were all looking down at the water of the pond. It was very clear.

“Keep still, Wienerwurst,” said the Toyman, “or you will scare the fishes.”

They were swimming through the waters. Near the banks were little baby fishes, hundreds of them, called minnows. They had a nickname too, “minnies.”

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Out farther, once in a while, the children saw a fish shining like gold. It was a sunfish or “sunny” as they sometimes called it. And the Toyman told them all about these fishes and the perch, too, and the long pickerel and the wicked carp, who hunts the other fish and kills them.

Then all at once the Toyman put his hands in his pockets. Mother Green says his pockets are like ten-cent stores. They are so full of all sorts of things.

The three children watched him closely. First came a piece of wood with a fishline wound around it.

Then with his knife he cut three poles and near the top of each a little notch. The fishlines were tied around the poles. At the other end he put little curved fish-hooks, and about two feet above them little pieces of lead, called “sinkers.” The sinkers were to keep the hooks near the bottom of the pond where the fish stay most of the time.

Then from his pockets the Toyman took three pretty things which he had made the night before. They were whittled of wood and shaped like lemons with sharper points. The red and blue one was tied on Jehosophat’s line, the red and yellow one on Marmaduke’s, and the blue and yellow on little Hepzebiah’s.

“What are those pretty things?” asked Marmaduke.

“Floaters,” the Toyman answered. “Watch and you will see what we do with them.”

“Now you keep still, you Wienerwurst, or we will put you back in the kennel,” called the Toyman to the little yellow dog, who felt very frisky and wanted to bark all the time.

By the feet of the Toyman was a tin can. He put in his hand and pulled out a worm. This was put on Jehosophat’s hook, another on Marmaduke’s, and another on Hepzebiah’s.

Then the Toyman threw the three hooks in the water. The two boys held their poles tight but the Toyman had to help little Hepzebiah hold her pole, for her hands were too small.

“Now quiet, everybody!” said the Toyman once more and they all sat watching the red and blue, the yellow and blue, and the red and yellow floaters out on the water.

“When the floater goes under, you will know that a fish is biting at the worm on the hook.”

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The Toyman had no sooner said this than he called out loud:

“Watch ‘er!”

The red and yellow floater was pulled way under the water. The string on Marmaduke’s pole tightened and the pole bent.

Three times the floater went under the water.

Then Marmaduke threw his pole back quickly and the hook came out of the water. On it something wriggled. The thing fell plop into Hepzebiah’s lap. She screamed while it flopped there. It was a little bigger than the Toyman’s hand and round and flat and shiny red and gold. No, it was not a goldfish. It was a sunfish.

After the Toyman had taken the sunfish from the hook and put another worm on it, he threw the line back into the water.

Then all the three children and the two dogs sat watching the little rings in the water around the floaters. Sometimes farther out they saw larger rings, and a fish feeling pretty happy, because of the cool September weather, would jump out of the water and turn a somersault through the air.

Then all of a sudden the blue and yellow floater went under and little Hepzebiah caught a sunfish, too.

Jehosophat felt disappointed because he was the oldest and hadn’t caught any fish at all. But the afternoon was not gone when he felt a big tug at his line. It took him a long time to pull that fish in. When the hook came out of the water a long wriggly thing was on it.

“Oo, oo, it’s a snake,” screamed little Hepzebiah.

“No, it’s only an eel,” said the Toyman, “he won’t hurt you.”

But he had to take it off Jehosophat’s hook himself, the eel was so slippery and wriggled so. Before the sun went down, the children had each caught two fish. There were three sunfish, two perch, and the wriggly eel.

The Toyman cleaned them all. And Mother fried them with butter and flour in a pan. It was a good supper they had that night, for they had caught it themselves. When supper was over three little heads were nodding and soon the three happy children were taking a little sail way on into Dreamland. That is a beautiful place where you would like to go too. So you had better follow them quickly. Perhaps you can catch up with them. Good-night.