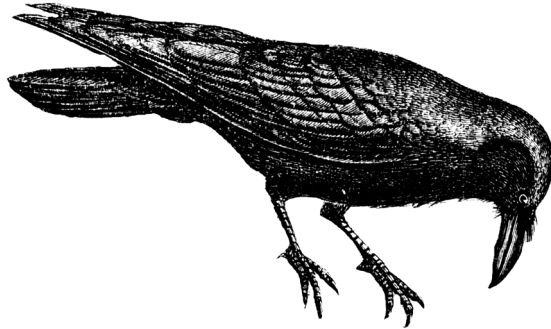


SEVEN O'CLOCK STORIES



Seventh Night: Mr. Scarecrow



Under the big oak by the brook sat the three happy children with Rover, Brownie, and little yellow Wienerwurst. They were watching the Toyman cut the ripe corn.

“Isn’t that funny?” said Jehosophat.

“What’s funny?” asked Marmaduke.

“Wot’s funny?” repeated Hepzebiah.

“Oh! I was just thinking,” said Jehosophat, “how he seems just Frank when he’s ploughing or harrowing or cutting the corn. But when he’s through work and tells us stories or makes us things, why then he is the Toyman.”

“Yes,” his brother agreed. “He looks as if some fairy godmother changed him nights and Sundays.”

But they were rudely interrupted.

“Caw, caw!” said a voice.

It was a rascal’s voice.

“Caw, caw!” said another.

The Toyman jumped. He shook his fist.

“You old thief!” he called.

“Rogue, rogue, rogue!” growled Rover in his deep voice.

“Run, run, run!” barked Brownie.

“Rough, rough—rough, rough!” said little Wienerwurst in his funny voice.

Seven O'Clock Stories: Seventh Night

"There he is," said the Toyman, "Mr. Jim Crow and all his wicked chums. See there!"

All the children looked in the direction in which his finger pointed. Over in the far corner of the field a flock of crows flew up from the waving corn. A white horse, drawing a buggy, was trotting along the road by the side of the cornfield. The driver had scared Mr. Jim Crow and all his chums. They flapped their big black wings as they flew. And they flew very straight, not like the pretty barn-swallows with their dark-blue wings. The swallow is a happy bird and skims and dances in the air like a fancy skater on the ice. But Mr. Jim Crow flies like an arrow. That is because he is always up to some mischief and forever running away when someone finds him out.

"Caw, caw!" he called.

"Caw, caw!" called all his black mates.

The Toyman ran to the fence and picked up a shotgun. It had two barrels that shone in the sun.

"Bang, bang!" went the gun.

One black spot dropped to the earth like a stone.

The Toyman ran out in the cornfield. He bent over until his straw hat was hidden by the waving corn.

Soon he came back. From his hand Mr. Jim Crow hung head downward. He was very still.

"Oo, oo! You've hurted him!"

Little Hepzebiah began to cry.

"Don't cry," said the Toyman, patting her head. "Mr. Jim Crow was a bad fellow. You couldn't teach him any lessons."

"What did he do?" Marmaduke asked.

"He stole all the corn and you wouldn't have any nice muffins if he had had his way. I never shoot the orioles or the robins or the swallows or any of the birds with consciences."

"What is a conscience?"

"Oh a little clock inside you, like the Clock-with-the-Wise-Face-on-the-Mantel. It tells you when it is time to stop," explained their friend.

And Jehosophat and Marmaduke looked as if they knew just what he meant. But Hepzebiah was too little yet to understand.

Seven O’Clock Stories: Seventh Night

“See, Mr. Jim Crow is long and black. He has a bad eye.”

So he buried Mr. Jim Crow under the oak tree while the children watched.

After that the Toyman said:

“I reckon Mr. Scarecrow has fainted.”

“Who’s Mr. Scarecrow?” asked the three happy children. “Is he Mr. Jim Crow’s cousin?”

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed the Toyman. “That is a good one. No, Mr. Scarecrow is the policeman of the cornfield. Let’s go over and set him on his pins again.”

So again he walked through the rows between the cornstalks and they came to a little clear place in the middle of the field.

There, flat on his back, lay Mr. Scarecrow.

He too looked as if he were dead. But he was not.

For his body was only two sticks of wood nailed together like a cross. He was dressed in Father Green’s old blue trousers and the Toyman’s old black coat. His arms were outstretched. But he had lost his hat. His wooden head stuck out.

The Toyman picked him up and stood him straight on his one wooden leg. Then he put the old felt hat on his hard head.

“There, old wooden top,” the Toyman spoke to him sternly. “Don’t leave your beat.”

But Marmaduke was puzzled.

“How could he scare Mr. Jim Crow away like a policeman? He can’t run with that wooden leg.”

“Silly,” said Jehosophat, for he was older than Marmaduke and knew Mr. Scarecrow very well.

“Ha, ha, ha, that’s another good one,” said the Toyman. “Of course he can’t run. But when all the Crows see him standing up in the cornfield they think he is a real man. They are afraid Mr. Scarecrow will shoot. For they know that things that wear coats and hats often have guns. And guns have killed their chums. So they do not come very near when Mr. Scarecrow is around.”

“Caw, caw!” sounded the old rascals again. But the crows were far away. The three happy children could see them way up in the old chestnut tree over on the edge of their neighbour’s wood.

In the fork of two high branches was a great round nest—oh ever so much bigger than the thrush’s and the oriole’s. It was a crow’s nest. Sailors often call

Seven O’Clock Stories: Seventh Night

the little turret built around the mast, where they stand and look out over the sea, a “crow’s nest.” It looks something like that.

But Mr. Jim Crow’s chums didn’t come near the cornfield that day.

At night, when they were ready for bed, Jehosophat said to Marmaduke:

“I wonder if old Mr. Scarecrow is out there now.”

“Course he is,” his brother assured him.

“Let’s see!”

So they jumped out of bed and, in their white nightgowns, tiptoed over the floor to the window. The Old-Man-in-the-Moon was up. He looked as round and fat as a pumpkin in the sky.

He winked at them.

The Old-Man-in-the-Moon made it very bright so that they could see.

Sure enough, way out in the cornfield stood Mr. Scarecrow.

His hat and coat were on and he was standing up like a man, very straight and still. His arms were outstretched to tell Mr. Jim Crow’s chums that he was ready for them.

But though they are thieves, the Black Crows are not night burglars and they were fast asleep in the nests in the wood.

The Man-in-the-Moon winked at them three times, once with his right eye, once with his left eye, then again with the right.

And the three happy children thought they heard him say three times:

“Back to bed, back to bed, back to bed!”

Then they heard the sound of bells. Seven times they sounded. It was from the church over in the town,—the big white church with the long finger pointing at the sky. And the Little-Clock-with-the-Wise-Face-on-the-Mantel, answered back.

So they obeyed the old yellow Man-in-the-Moon and scampered like little white mice back to bed.