

SEVEN O'CLOCK STORIES



Eighteenth Night: The Jolly Clown



Marmaduke was lost. There was such a crowd around those tents! He wriggled between lots of pairs of legs, but nowhere could he find the Toyman's.

Near the door of the tent stood a man with a big black moustache, and a silk hat on his head. He was selling tickets. The Toyman went up to him.

"Howdy," said the Toyman.

"Howdy, pardner," replied he.

"I'd like four tickets. Here is the money. One whole ticket and three half tickets too."

The man counted the money and gave him the tickets. Then the Toyman asked:

"Did you see a little boy 'bout this high, with a little yeller dog?"

The man with the big black moustache and the tall silk hat shook his head.

"Sorry I can't oblige you, pardner. I've seen lots of kiddies but nary a one with a yeller dog."

"Well then," said the Toyman, "will you kindly show these youngsters to their seats while I look for that little lost boy and his dog?"

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“Certainly, be most pleased,” was the answer, for all circus men are very polite on Circus Day.

So the man with the black moustache and the tall silk hat called a man in a red cap. Jehosophat took Hepzebiah by the hand, and the man in the red cap led them into the big tent. He showed them their seats, and they sat down in the very front row.

Outside, the Toyman kept looking, looking everywhere. There was no sign of Marmaduke’s tow head nor of little yellow Wienerwurst.

They were on the other side of the tent, outside too, mixed up with men and women they didn’t know, and hundreds of boys and girls. They could see other men too, with striped shirts and loud voices, standing in small houses. And the small houses looked just like little stores, and on the counters were good things to eat,—popcorn, peanuts, cracker jack, and something cool in glasses, like lemonade but coloured like strawberries. Loud did the men shout, trying to sell those good things to everybody who came near.

But Marmaduke couldn’t buy even one peanut. He didn’t have any money. How was he ever going to get into that circus!

Oh, where was the Toyman?

But he didn’t cry. You know he didn’t. He just shut his teeth hard, and winked and winked.

At last Wienerwurst gave a little bark. He saw a little hole, and Wienerwurst always liked little holes. It was under the tent and just his size. Right into it he crawled. All Marmaduke could see of his doggie now was his little tail like a sausage. The rest of him was under the tent. Thump-thump-thump went the tail. And Marmaduke knew it must be pretty nice inside.

Then the tail, too, disappeared. So down on his stomach went the little boy and crawled right in after his doggie.

The tent had several big rooms and he was in one of them. On every side were big cages with iron bars.

“Girrrrrrrrrrrhhh !” went something in one of the cages.

That wicked runaway tiger!

Marmaduke ran past all the cages very fast until he came to another room. In it were lots of queer funny people.

He heard another voice, not like the runaway tiger’s, but one just happy and pleasant, though very deep.

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“Well, look who’s here!” it said.

That was a funny thing to say, Marmaduke thought, and he looked up.

He had to look up ever so high. There was the tall giant, sitting on a great big chair. Big were his feet and his legs and his hands, and big were his chin and his nose and his hat. Still he didn’t look cross like the giants in the story-books, just nice and kind.

Marmaduke stared up at him and he smiled down at Marmaduke.

It was very hot and the big giant took off his hat to wipe his forehead. He set his hat down. He didn’t look where he put it and it went over Marmaduke’s head and nearly covered him up. He couldn’t see any sunlight. It was all dark inside that hat.

“Let me out,” he shouted. And he heard someone say:

“What’s in your hat?”

“There was a little boy around here,” the giant replied. “Maybe I’ve covered him up.”

The giant leaned down and picked up his hat, and took it off the little boy. Very glad was Marmaduke to see the light once more.

The giant bowed low to apologize and the great chair creaked.

“Very careless of me,” he said. “A thousand pardons, Sir!”

Marmaduke felt very happy. It was fine to be called “Sir” by a great big giant like that.

Then he felt himself being lifted up, and there he sat on the giant’s knee. The giant told him a story and gave him a big ring from his finger. It was so large that Marmaduke could put his whole arm through it.

Then another voice spoke. It was a little tiny voice this time—no bigger than a mouse’s squeak or a cricket’s “Good-night.”

Marmaduke looked down from the giant’s knee.

“Hello, little fellow,” squeaked the funny little voice.

No, it was not Jack Frost. It was a dwarf, all dressed in a crimson velvet gown, with a gold crown on her head. The top of the crown wasn’t even as high as the giant’s knee. My, but she was little!

Marmaduke was just going to say, “Little, huh! I’m as big as you are!” But he didn’t. That wouldn’t have been quite right when all these circus people were so very polite to him.

So all he said was:

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“Good-afternoon!”

And the little tiny lady in the crimson gown gave him something too,—a silver button from her dress. Then the giant handed him over to a lady who sat next. A very funny lady was she, for she had a woman’s voice and a woman’s dress and a woman’s hair, too, but on her chin was a long, long beard, just like a man’s.

The bearded lady kissed Marmaduke. He didn’t like that, she tickled so.

He didn’t go very near the one who sat next. Yet she was a very pretty lady with blue eyes and golden hair, but around her arms and neck instead of necklaces were curled up snakes!

“They won’t bite, little boy,” she said smiling. “Look out for the snakes in the grass, but don’t mind these. They can’t hurt you at all.”

With that she handed him some candy.

Marmaduke’s hands were so full now, with the candy and the big ring and the silver button, that he didn’t know what to do.

Just ahead of him was little Wienerwurst’s tail. The very thing! So he put that big ring over that little tail. That felt so funny that Wienerwurst tried to reach his tail and that round shiny thing on it.

Around and around he went in a circle, trying to bite it off. He looked as if his head and tail were tied together. Like a little yellow merry-go-round, whirling so swiftly after itself, was he. All the strange circus people laughed and cheered and the giant clapped his huge hands till they sounded like thunder.

All of a sudden the ring rolled off Wienerwurst’s tail, and Marmaduke went scrambling after it. It rolled right near the lady—and all those snakes!

Marmaduke didn’t like that. He was glad when he heard another voice call out, very cheerily.

“Here it is, Sonny!”

This was a very jolly voice, jollier than any he had ever heard in the world except the Toyman’s.

The man who owned that voice stood before him, such a funny man, in a baggy white suit, with red spots like big red tiddledy winks all over it. He had a pointed cap all red and white too. And his face was all painted white, with long black eyebrows and a wide, wide, red mouth.

This was the way Marmaduke met Tody the Clown.

They had a long talk together and he seemed to understand little boys, just

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like the Toyman.

"It must be fine to always live in a circus," said Marmaduke. "Wish I did."

"Well, Sonny, when you grow up, maybe you can," replied Tody the Clown.

Marmaduke looked at the wide mouth with its funny smile.

"You're always happy, aren't you?"

Tody nodded and answered:

"Sure—anyway almost always."

"Don't you ever feel cross or have any troubles?"

Tody threw back his head at that and laughed way out loud.

"Sure I do," said he. "A heap of troubles, but I just think of all the little girls and boys like you that I've got to make happy. Then I try hard to make 'em laugh and—"

"An' what?"

"Why all my troubles fly away, quick as a wink," laughed Tody. "Yes, just as quick as I do this." And quicker than a wink he turned a somersault. He turned a whole lot of somersaults and then he took Marmaduke on his shoulder and galloped around the tent and they had a glorious time.

But the music was sounding out in the big tent just next them—drums and horns and bugles and fifes. The circus would start in a minute now and all the fun would be over.

"Where's your ticket, Sonny?" asked Tody.

"I haven't any," Marmaduke explained. "I've lost the Toyman—and he's got my ticket an'—an'—I can't go in."

"Don't you worry about that. You'll have the best seat in the whole circus." And Tody turned another somersault just to make him laugh. Then he looked down at little Wienerwurst.

"But they won't let any doggies in there. We'll just tie him to this pole."

Marmaduke shook his head and tried hard to keep the tears back. Just one little one rolled down his right cheek. But that was on the other side of Tody. Maybe Tody saw it anyway, for when Marmaduke said to him,—"Then I can't go in either, my little pet doggie would feel so badly," the jolly Clown answered:

"Well, we'll just have to fix it up some way. Can y' keep him quiet?"

"Quiet as a mouse," answered Marmaduke, "quiet as Mother Robin when she sits on her nest."

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And Wienerwurst barked out loud just to show how quiet he could be.

Tody spoke to another man. This one had on a bright red vest, red as Father Robin's. He looked at the boy and the dog. His voice wasn't as pleasant as Tody's nor the giant's, but what he said was all right.

It was just "Sure!" and Marmaduke and Wienerwurst slipped inside the big tent, right near the front, where they could see all the wonderful things that went on.

Wienerwurst sat pretty quiet on his lap and together they watched the elephants stand on their heads, and the men way up in the air turn somersaults on little swings, and the ladies in bright spangles gallop round and round the ring, and the monkeys and the clowns do tricks—and everything.

Tody was the funniest and happiest of all, and he made all the children laugh and shout and clap their hands. Even Johnny Cricket, the lame boy, who had come a long way to see the circus, smiled.

Marmaduke and Wienerwurst were so excited that they forgot all about Jehosophat and Hepzebiah and the Toyman.

After a while Tody turned a somersault, a cartwheel, and a flipflop, and landed right near their seat.

"How would you like to ride on an elephant?" he whispered in Marmaduke's ear.

Of course Marmaduke answered:

"Better 'n anything I ever did."

So Tody took him by the hand and led him into the little tent and put a little pointed cap on his head, just like Tody's own. Then he lifted Marmaduke into a big seat on top of Jumbo, the big elephant. And out they marched under the tent and round and round the ring.

Marmaduke could look down on all the rows of people. He was up quite high and their faces looked small, but he could tell Jehosophat, and Hepzebiah, and Sammy Soapstone, and Sophy, Lizzie Fizzletree, and Fatty Hamm, too. And there was the Toyman walking around, looking everywhere for him.

"Llo, Toyman," he shouted, and the Toyman looked up and saw Marmaduke in his little pointed cap, way up on the back of the big elephant.

The Toyman waved his hand and smiled. I guess he was very glad to find that Marmaduke wasn't lost after all.

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But Jehosophat was wishing that he had been lost, so that he could have had that fine chance to be part of the circus.

Suddenly there was a chorus of barks. Marmaduke had forgotten all about Wienerwurst.

He turned around to look for him and leaned back so far that he almost fell flop off the elephant's back. Tody caught him just in time or there would have been trouble.

The trick dogs were coming into the circus now. Some of them were walking on their hind legs.

Marmaduke listened.

There were so many different barks! Just as many as there were dogs,—deep or squeaky, smooth or creaky, rough or happy, gruff or snappy, and one that Marmaduke knew the very minute he heard it.

“Run—run—run—run—runrunrun !”

Yes, he knew that little voice. He could tell little Wienerwurst's bark anywhere. Somehow it was different from any doggie's in the world. There he was, frisking and scampering and biting at the other dogs' tails, just in fun.

“Run—run run—run—runrunrun !”

And that is just what they did, right into the circus ring where the man in the red cap held out big hoops of paper above the dogs' heads.

The first dog jumped through one hoop, and the second dog jumped through another. Then the man in the red cap held up a third hoop bigger than all the rest.

Another dog, a long tall greyhound, got ready to take his turn, but I guess Wienerwurst decided all-of-a-sudden that he wasn't going to be left out. He just gave the tail of that big dog a little nip, and when the big dog turned around to see what was the matter, why Wienerwurst jumped through the hoop all by himself.

So pleased was he that he ran round the ring, looking up at the people in their seats, with his little pink tongue hanging out in delight.

A great doggie was Wienerwurst.

But soon it was all over and the people left their seats, and walked out of the tent to their homes and their suppers.

Tody the Clown just wouldn't let Marmaduke and little Wienerwurst go. He

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invited them and his brother and sister and the Toyman, too, to have supper in the tent.

At a long table they sat, with Tody, and the big giant, and the little teeny dwarf, and the Lady-with-the-Long-Long-Beard, and the Lady-with-the-Necklace-of-Snakes. But she put the snakes away and Marmaduke wasn't afraid at all.

Tody the Clown sat by his side and kept his plate full and his cup full too. He didn't forget little Wienerwurst either. He had a nice big bone all for himself.

But the time came to say "Good-bye," which they did, to one and all of the kind circus people.

Tody the Clown didn't kiss Marmaduke. He just shook hands. Marmaduke was glad of that. He felt like a real man now. For hadn't he been part of a circus and ridden on an elephant! I guess so!

All Tody said to him was:

"Good-bye, pardner, you just keep smiling and make people happy, and you'll be a circus man too, one of these days."

So the Toyman hitched up "old Methuselah," and the three happy children rode home together, falling asleep in the buggy before ever they reached the White-House-with-the-Green-Blinds by the side of the road.

When you visit that place ask Marmaduke to show you the silver button and the big giant's ring. He keeps them still in his little bureau. But the candy was gone, oh, long ago.