

XXII. Joey

Wise children always choose a mother who was a shocking flirt in her maiden days, and so had several offers before she accepted their fortunate papa. The reason they do this is because every offer refused by their mother means another pantomime to them. You see you can't trust to your father's taking you to the pantomime, but you can trust to every one of the poor frenzied gentlemen for whom that lady has wept a delicious little tear on her lovely little cambric handkerchief. It is pretty (but dreadfully affecting) to see them on Boxing Night gathering together the babies of their old loves. Some knock at but one door and bring a hansom, but others go from street to street in private 'buses, and even wear false noses to conceal the sufferings you inflict upon them as you grew more and more like your sweet cruel mamma.

So I took David to the pantomime, and I hope you follow my reasoning, for I don't. He went with the fairest anticipations, pausing on the threshold to peer through the hole in the little house called "Pay Here," which he thought was Red Riding Hood's residence, and asked politely whether he might see her, but they said she had gone to the wood, and it was quite true, for there she was in the wood gathering a stick for her grandmother's fire. She sang a beautiful song about the Boys and their dashing ways, which flattered David considerably, but she forgot to take away the stick after all. Other parts of the play were not so nice, but David thought it all lovely, he really did.

Yet he left the place in tears. All the way home he sobbed in the darkest corner of the growler, and if I tried to comfort him he struck me.

The clown had done it, that man of whom he expected things so fair. He had asked in a loud voice of the middling funny gentleman (then in the middle of a song) whether he thought Joey would be long in coming, and when at last Joey did come he screamed out, "How do you do, Joey!" and went into convulsions of mirth.

Joey and his father were shadowing a pork-butcher's shop, pocketing the sausages for which their family has such a fatal weakness, and so when the butcher engaged Joey as his assistant there was soon not a sausage left. However, this did not matter, for there was a box rather like an ice-cream machine, and you put chunks of pork in at one end and turned a handle and they came out as sausages at the other end. Joey quite enjoyed doing this, and you could see that the sausages were excellent by the way he

licked his fingers after touching them, but soon there were no more pieces of pork, and just then a dear little Irish terrier-dog came trotting down the street, so what did Joey do but pop it into the machine and it came out at the other end as sausages.

It was this callous act that turned all David's mirth to woe, and drove us weeping to our growler.

Heaven knows I have no wish to defend this cruel deed, but as Joey told me afterward, it is very difficult to say what they will think funny and what barbarous. I was forced to admit to him that David had perceived only the joyous in the poking of the policeman's legs, and had called out heartily "Do it again!" every time Joey knocked the pantaloons down with one kick and helped him up with another.

"It hurts the poor chap," I was told by Joey, whom I was agreeably surprised to find by no means wanting in the more humane feelings, "and he wouldn't stand it if there wasn't the laugh to encourage him."

He maintained that the dog got that laugh to encourage him also.

However, he had not got it from David, whose mother and father and nurse combined could not comfort him, though they swore that the dog was still alive and kicking, which might all have been very well had not David seen the sausages. It was to inquire whether anything could be done to atone that in considerable trepidation I sent in my card to the clown, and the result of our talk was that he invited me and David to have tea with him on Thursday next at his lodgings.

"I sha'n't laugh," David said, nobly true to the memory of the little dog, "I sha'n't laugh once," and he closed his jaws very tightly as we drew near the house in Soho where Joey lodged. But he also gripped my hand, like one who knew that it would be an ordeal not to laugh.

The house was rather like the ordinary kind, but there was a convenient sausage-shop exactly opposite (trust Joey for that) and we saw a policeman in the street looking the other way, as they always do look just before you rub them. A woman wearing the same kind of clothes as people in other houses wear, told us to go up to the second floor, and she grinned at David, as if she had heard about him; so up we went, David muttering through his clenched teeth, "I sha'n't laugh," and as soon as we knocked a voice called out, "Here we are again!" at which a shudder passed through David as if he feared that he had set himself an impossible task. In we went, however, and though the voice had certainly come from this room we found nobody there.

I looked in bewilderment at David, and he quickly put his hand over his mouth.

It was a funny room, of course, but not so funny as you might expect; there were droll things in it, but they did nothing funny, you could see that they were just waiting for Joey. There were padded chairs with friendly looking rents down the middle of them, and a table and a horse-hair sofa, and we sat down very cautiously on the sofa but nothing happened to us.

The biggest piece of furniture was an enormous wicker trunk, with a very lively coloured stocking dangling out at a hole in it, and a notice on the top that Joey was the funniest man on earth. David tried to pull the stocking out of the hole, but it was so long that it never came to an end, and when it measured six times the length of the room he had to cover his mouth again.

"I'm not laughing," he said to me, quite fiercely. He even managed not to laugh (though he did gulp) when we discovered on the mantelpiece a photograph of Joey in ordinary clothes, the garments he wore before he became a clown. You can't think how absurd he looked in them. But David didn't laugh.

Suddenly Joey was standing beside us, it could not have been more sudden though he had come from beneath the table, and he was wearing his pantomime clothes (which he told us afterward were the only clothes he had) and his red and white face was so funny that David made gurgling sounds, which were his laugh trying to force a passage.

I introduced David, who offered his hand stiffly, but Joey, instead of taking it, put out his tongue and waggled it, and this was so droll that David had again to save himself by clapping his hand over his mouth. Joey thought he had toothache, so I explained what it really meant, and then Joey said, "Oh, I shall soon make him laugh," whereupon the following conversation took place between them:

"No, you sha'n't," said David doggedly.

"Yes, I shall."

"No, you sha'n't not."

"Yes, I shallso."

"Sha'n't, sha'n't, sha'n't."

"Shall, shall, shall."

"You shut up."

"You're another."

By this time Joey was in a frightful way (because he saw he was getting the worst of it), and he boasted that he had David's laugh in his pocket, and David challenged him to produce it, and Joey searched his pockets and brought out the most unexpected articles, including a duck and a bunch of carrots; and you could see by his manner that the simple soul thought these were things which all boys carried loose in their pockets.

I daresay David would have had to laugh in the end, had there not been a half-gnawed sausage in one of the pockets, and the sight of it reminded him so cruelly of the poor dog's fate that he howled, and Joey's heart was touched at last, and he also wept, but he wiped his eyes with the duck.

It was at this touching moment that the pantaloon hobbled in, also dressed as we had seen him last, and carrying, unfortunately, a trayful of sausages, which at once increased the general gloom, for he announced, in his squeaky voice, that they were the very sausages that had lately been the dog.

Then Joey seemed to have a great idea, and his excitement was so impressive that we stood gazing at him. First, he counted the sausages, and said that they were two short, and he found the missing two up the pantaloon's sleeve. Then he ran out of the room and came back with the sausage-machine; and what do you think he did? He put all the sausages into the end of the machine that they had issued from, and turned the handle backward, and then out came the dog at the other end!

Can you picture the joy of David?

He clasped the dear little terrier in his arms; and then we noticed that there was a sausage adhering to its tail. The pantaloon said we must have put in a sausage too many, but Joey said the machine had not worked quite smoothly and that he feared this sausage was the dog's bark, which distressed David, for he saw how awkward it must be to a dog to have its bark outside, and we were considering what should be done when the dog closed the discussion by swallowing the sausage.

After that, David had the most hilarious hour of his life, entering into the childish pleasures of this family as heartily as if he had been brought up on sausages, and knocking the pantaloon down repeatedly. You must not think that he did this viciously; he did it to please the old gentleman, who begged

him to do it, and always shook hands warmly and said "Thank you," when he had done it. They are quite a simple people.

Joey called David and me "Sonny," and asked David, who addressed him as "Mr. Clown," to call him Joey. He also told us that the pantaloons' name was old Joey, and the columbine's Josy, and the harlequin's Joeykin.

We were sorry to hear that old Joey gave him a good deal of trouble. This was because his memory is so bad that he often forgets whether it is your head or your feet you should stand on, and he usually begins the day by standing on the end that happens to get out of bed first. Thus he requires constant watching, and the worst of it is, you dare not draw attention to his mistake, he is so shrinkingly sensitive about it. No sooner had Joey told us this than the poor old fellow began to turn upside down and stood on his head; but we pretended not to notice, and talked about the weather until he came to.

Josy and Joeykin, all skirts and spangles, were with us by this time, for they had been invited to tea. They came in dancing, and danced off and on most of the time. Even in the middle of what they were saying they would begin to flutter; it was not so much that they meant to dance as that the slightest thing set them going, such as sitting in a draught; and David found he could blow them about the room like pieces of paper. You could see by the shortness of Josy's dress that she was very young indeed, and at first this made him shy, as he always is when introduced formally to little girls, and he stood sucking his thumb, and so did she, but soon the stiffness wore off and they sat together on the sofa, holding each other's hands.

All this time the harlequin was rotating like a beautiful fish, and David requested him to jump through the wall, at which he is such an adept, and first he said he would, and then he said better not, for the last time he did it the people in the next house had made such a fuss. David had to admit that it must be rather startling to the people on the other side of the wall, but he was sorry.

By this time tea was ready, and Josy, who poured out, remembered to ask if you took milk with just one drop of tea in it, exactly as her mother would have asked. There was nothing to eat, of course, except sausages, but what a number of them there were! hundreds at least, strings of sausages, and every now and then Joey jumped up and played skipping rope with them. David had been taught not to look greedy, even though he felt greedy, and he was shocked to see the way in which Joey and old Joey and even Josy eyed the sausages they had given him. Soon Josy developed nobler feelings,

for she and Joeykin suddenly fell madly in love with each other across the table, but unaffected by this pretty picture, Joey continued to put whole sausages in his mouth at a time, and then rubbed himself a little lower down, while old Joey secreted them about his person; and when David wasn't looking they both pounced on his sausages, and yet as they gobbled they were constantly running to the top of the stair and screaming to the servant to bring up more sausages.

You could see that Joey (if you caught him with his hand in your plate) was a bit ashamed of himself, and he admitted to us that sausages were a passion with him.

He said he had never once in his life had a sufficient number of sausages. They had maddened him since he was the smallest boy. He told us how, even in those days, his mother had feared for him, though fond of a sausage herself; how he had bought a sausage with his first penny, and hoped to buy one with his last (if they could not be got in any other way), and that he always slept with a string of them beneath his pillow.

While he was giving us these confidences, unfortunately, his eyes came to rest, at first accidentally, then wistfully, then with a horrid gleam in them, on the little dog, which was fooling about on the top of the sausage-machine, and his hands went out toward it convulsively, whereat David, in sudden fear, seized the dog in one arm and gallantly clenched his other fist, and then Joey begged his pardon and burst into tears, each one of which he flung against the wall, where it exploded with a bang.

David refused to pardon him unless he promised on wood never to look in that way at the dog again, but Joey said promises were nothing to him when he was short of sausages, and so his wisest course would be to present the dog to David. Oh, the joy of David when he understood that the little dog he had saved was his very own! I can tell you he was now in a hurry to be off before Joey had time to change his mind.

"All I ask of you," Joey said with a break in his voice, "is to call him after me, and always to give him a sausage, sonny, of a Saturday night."

There was a quiet dignity about Joey at the end, which showed that he might have risen to high distinction but for his fatal passion.

The last we saw of him was from the street. He was waving his tongue at us in his attractive, foolish way, and Josy was poised on Joeykin's hand like a butterfly that had alighted on a flower. We could not exactly see old Joey,

but we saw his feet, and so feared the worst. Of course they are not everything they should be, but one can't help liking them.