

The Sixth Surprise - KING SCOWLEYOW AND HIS CAST-IRON MAN

Across the mountains at the north of the Valley of Mo there reigned a wicked King named Scowleyow, whose people lived in caves and mines and dug iron and tin out of the rocks and melted them into bars. These bars they then carried away and sold for money.

King Scowleyow hated the Monarch of Mo and all his people, because they lived so happily and cared nothing for money; and he would have sent his army into the Valley to destroy the merry people who dwelt there had he not been afraid of the sharp swords that grew on their trees, which they knew so well how to use against their foes.

So King Scowleyow pondered for a long time how to destroy the Valley of Mo without getting hurt himself; and at last he hit on a plan he believed would succeed.

He put all his mechanics to work and built a great man out of cast-iron, with machinery inside of him. When he was wound up the Cast-iron Man could roar, and roll his eyes, and gnash his teeth and march across the Valley, crushing trees and houses to the earth as he went. For the Cast-iron Man was as tall as a church and as heavy as iron could make him, and each of his feet was as big as a barn.

It took a long time to build this man, as you may suppose; but King Scowleyow was so determined to ruin the pretty Valley of Mo that he made his men work night and day, and at last the Cast-iron Man was ready to be wound up and sent on his journey of destruction.

They stood him on the top of the mountain, with his face toward the Beautiful Valley, and began to wind him up. It took a hundred men a whole week to do this; but at last he was tightly wound, and the wicked King Scowleyow stood ready to touch the spring that made him go.

"One--two--three!" said the King, and touched the spring with his ringer.

The Cast-iron Man gave so terrible a roar that he even frightened the men who had made him; and then he rolled his eyes till they flashed fire, and gnashed his teeth till the noise sounded like thunder.

The next minute he raised one great foot and stepped forward, crushing fifty trees that stood in his path, and then away he went, striding down the mountain, destroying everything that stood in his way, and nearing with every step the Beautiful Valley of Mo.

The King and his people were having a game of ball that day, and the dog was acting as umpire. Suddenly, just as Prince Jollikin had made a home run and everybody was applauding him, a terrible roaring noise sounded in their ears, and they heard a great crashing of trees on the mountain side and saw a monstrous man approaching the Valley.

The people were so frightened they stood perfectly still, being unable to move through surprise and terror; but the dog ran with all his might toward the mountain to see what was the matter. Just as the dog reached the foot of the mountain the Cast-iron Man came tramping along and stepped into the Valley, where he ruined in one instant a large bed of lady-fingers and a whole patch of ripe pumpkin pies. Indeed, the entire Valley would soon have been destroyed had not the Cast-iron Man stubbed his toe against the dog and fallen flat on his face, where he lay roaring and gnashing his teeth, but unable to do any further harm.

Presently the King and his people recovered from their fright and gathered around their prostrate foe, marveling at his great size and strength.

"Had you not tripped him up," said the King to the dog, "this giant would certainly have destroyed my kingdom. Who do you suppose was so wicked as to send this monster to crush us?"

"It must have been King Scowleyow," declared the dog, "for no one else would care to harm you, and the giant came from the direction of the wicked King's country."

"Yes," replied the monarch, thoughtfully, "it must indeed have been Scowleyow; and it was a very unkind act, for we never harmed him in any way. But what shall we do with this great man? If he is left here he will scare all the children with his roarings, and none of the ladies will care to walk near this end of the Valley. He is so heavy that not all of us together could lift him, and even if we succeeded we have no place to put him where he would be out of the way."

This was indeed true; so all the people sat down in a circle around the Cast-iron Man and thought upon the matter intently for the space of an hour.

Then the monarch asked, solemnly, as became the importance of the occasion:

"Has any one thought of a way to get rid of him?"

The people shook their heads gravely and thought deeply for another hour. At the end of that time the dog suddenly laughed, and called out in a voice so loud that it startled them:

"I have thought of a way!"

"Good!" exclaimed the King. "Let us hear your plan."

"You see," explained the dog, "the Cast-iron Man is now lying on his face. If we could only roll him over on to his back, and then raise him to his feet again, he would be turned around, and would march straight back to where he came from, and do us no further harm."

"That is a capital idea," replied the King. "But how can we roll him over, or make him stand up?"

That puzzled them all for a while, but by and by Prince Thinkabit, who was a very clever young man, announced his readiness to undertake the job.

"First, bring me a feather," commanded the Prince.

The royal chamberlain hunted around and soon found for him a long, fluffy feather. Taking this in his hand the Prince approached the Cast-iron Man and tickled him under the left arm with the end of the feather.

"Ouch!" said the Cast-iron Man, giving a jump and rolling completely over, so that he lay on his back.

"Hurrah!" cried the people, clapping their hands with joy at this successful stratagem; "the Prince is a very wise Prince, indeed!"

Prince Thinkabit took off his hat and bowed politely to them in return for the compliment. Then he said:

"Bring me a pin."

So Nuphsed brought him a pin with a very sharp point, and the Prince took it and walked up to the Cast-iron Man, and gave him a sharp prod in the back with the point of the pin.

"Ouch!" again yelled the Cast-iron Man, giving at the same time such a great jump that he leaped square on his feet. But now, to their joy, they saw he was facing the mountains instead of the Valley.

As soon as the Cast-iron Man stood up the machinery began to work again, and he marched with great steps up the mountain side and over into the kingdom of the wicked Scowleyow, where he crushed the King and all his people, and laid waste the land wherever he went.

And that was their punishment for being envious of the good people of Mo.

As to the fate of the Cast-iron Man, he was wound up so tightly that he kept walking straight on until he reached the sea, where he stepped into the water, went down to the bottom, and stuck fast in the mud.

And I have no doubt he is there to this day.