CLASSICS TO GO

HAPPY DAYS

A. A. MILNE

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CONTENTS

INDOORS

LITTLE PLAYS FOR AMATEURS

SUCCESSFUL MEN

MARGERY

I. HER SOCK

I

When Margery was three months old I wrote a letter to her mother:

> *Dear Madam*,—If you have a copy in Class D at 1/10d. net, I shall be glad to hear from you.
>
> I am,
> THE BABY'S UNCLE.

On Tuesday I got an answer by the morning post:

> *Dear Sir*,—In reply to yours: How dare you insult my child? She is in Class A1, priceless and bought in by the owner. Four months old (and two days) on Christmas Day. Fancy!
>
> I am,
> THE BABY'S MOTHER.

Margery had been getting into an expensive way of celebrating her birthday every week. Hitherto I had ignored it. But now I wrote:

> *Dear Madam*,—Automatically your baby should be in Class D by now. I cannot understand why it is not so. Perhaps I shall hear from you later on with regard to this. Meanwhile I think that the extraordinary

coincidence (all but two days) of the baby's birthday with Christmas Day calls for some recognition on my part. What would Margery like? You, who are in constant communication with her, should be able to tell me. I hear coral necklaces well spoken of. What do you think? I remember reading once of a robber who "killed a little baby for the coral on its neck"—which shows at any rate that they are worn. Do you know how coral reefs are made? It is a most fascinating business.

Then there is a silver mug to be considered. The only thing you can drink out of a mug is beer; yet it is a popular present. Perhaps you, with your (supposed) greater knowledge of babies, will explain this.

Meanwhile, I am,
THE BABY'S UNCLE.

P.S.—Which is a much finer thing than a mother.

To which her mother:

My Dear Boy,—It is too sweet of you to say you would like to get Baby something. No, I don't know how coral reefs are made, and don't want to. I think it is wicked of you to talk like that; I'm sure I shan't dare let her wear anything valuable now. And I don't think she really wants a mug.

I'm sure I don't know what she does want, except to see her uncle (There!) but it ought to be something that she'll value when she grows up. And of course we could keep it for her in the meantime.

Her Father has smoked his last cigar to-day. Isn't it awful? I have forbidden him to waste his money on

any more, but he says he must give me 500 for a Christmas present. If he does, I shall give him that sideboard that I want so badly, and then we shall both go to prison together. You will look after Baby, won't you?

I am,
THE BABY'S MOTHER.

P.S.—Which she isn't proud, but does think it's a little bit classier than an uncle.

And so finally, I:

Dear Child,—I've thought of the very thing.

I am,
THE BABY'S UNCLE.

That ends Chapter I. Here we go on to

II

Chapter II finds me in the Toy Department of the Stores. "I want," I said, "a present for a child."

"Yes, sir. About how old?"

"It must be quite new," I said sternly. "Don't be silly. Oh, I see; well, the child is only a baby."

"Ah, yes. Now here—if it's at all fond of animals——"

"I say, you mustn't call it 'IT.' I get in an awful row if I do. Of course, I suppose it's all right for you, only—well, be careful, won't you?"

The attendant promised, and asked whether the child was a boy or girl.

"And had you thought of anything for the little girl?"

"Well, yes. I had rather thought of a sideboard."

"I beg your pardon?"

"A sideboard."

"The Sideboard Department is upstairs. Was there anything else for the little girl?"

"Well, a box of cigars. Rather full, and if you have any——"

"The Cigar Department is on the ground floor."

"But your Lord Chamberlain told me I was to come here if I wanted a present for a child."

"If you require anything in the toy line——"

"Yes, but what good are toys to a baby of four months? Do be reasonable."

"What was it you suggested? A sideboard and a cigar?"

"That was my idea. It may not be the best possible, but at least it is better than perfectly useless toys. You can always blow smoke in its face, or bump its head against the sideboard. *Experto crede*, if you have the Latin."

Whereupon with great dignity I made my way to the lift.

In the Sideboard Department I said: "I want a sideboard for a little girl of four months, and please don't call her 'IT.' I nearly had a row with one of your downstairs staff about that."

"I will try to be careful about that, Sir," he replied. "What sort of a one?"

"Blue eyes and not much hair, and really rather a sweet smile.... Was that what you wanted to know?"

"Thank you, Sir. But I meant, what sort of a sideboard?"

I took him confidentially by the arm.

"Look here," I said, "you know how, when one is carrying a baby about, one bumps its head at all the corners? Well, not too much of that. The mothers don't really like it, you know. They smile at the time, but.... Well, not too many corners.... Yes, I like that very much. No, I won't take it with me."

The attendant wrote out the bill.

"Number, Sir?"

"She's the first. That's why I'm so nervous. I've never bought a sideboard for a child before.

"Your Stores number, I mean, Sir."

"I haven't got one. Is it necessary?"

"Must have a number, Sir."

"Then I'll think of a nice one for you.... Let's see—12345, how does that strike you?"

"And the name?"

"Oh, I can't tell you that. You must look that up for yourself. Good-day."

Downstairs I bought some cigars.

"For a little girl of four months," I said, "and she likes them rather full. Please don't argue with me. All your men chatter so."

"I must," said the attendant. "It's like this. If she is only four months, she is obviously little. Your observation is therefore tautological."

"As a matter of fact," I said hotly, "she is rather big for four months."

"Then it was a lie."

"Look here, you give me those cigars, and don't talk so much. I've already had words with your Master of the Sideboards and your Under-Secretary for the Toy Department.... Thank you. If you would kindly send them."

III

So there it is. I have given the spirit rather than the actual letter, of what happened at the Stores. But that the things have been ordered there is no doubt. And when Margery wakes up on Christmas Day to find a sideboard and a box of cigars in her sock I hope she will remember that she has chiefly her mother to thank for it.

II. HOW WE PLAY THE PIANOLA

[FOREWORD. Margery wishes me to publish the following correspondence, which has recently passed between us. It occurs to me that the name under which I appear in it may perhaps need explanation. I hate explanations, but here it is.

When Margery was eight months old, she was taught to call me "Uncle." I must suppose that at this time I was always giving her things—things she really wanted, such as boot-laces, the best china, evening papers and so on—which had been withheld by those in authority. Later on, these persons came round to my way of thinking, and gave her, if not the best china, at any rate cake and bread-and-butter. Naturally their offerings, being appreciated at last, were greeted with the familiar cry of "Uncle," "No, dear, not 'Uncle,' 'Thank-you,'" came the correction.]

I

Dear Thankyou,—I've some wonderful news for you! Guess what it is; but no, you never will. Well, I'll tell you. I can walk! Really and really.

It is most awfully interesting. You put one foot out to the right, and then you bring the left after it. That's one walk, and I have done seven altogether.

You have to keep your hands out in front of you, so as to balance properly. That's all the rules—the rest is

just knack. I got it quite suddenly. It is such fun; I wake up about five every morning now, thinking of it.

Of course I fall down now and then. You see, I'm only beginning. When I fall, Mother comes and picks me up. That reminds me, I don't want you to call me "Baby" any more now I can walk. Babies can't walk, they just get carried about and put in perambulators. I was given a lot of names a long time ago, but I forget what they were. I think one was rather silly, like Margery, but I have never had it used lately. Mother always calls me O.D. now.

Good-bye. Write directly you get this.

Your loving,
O.D.

II

My Dear O.D.,—I was so glad to get your letter, because I was just going to write to you. What do you think? No, you'll never guess—shall I tell you?—no—yes—no; well, I've bought a pianola!

It's really rather difficult to play it properly. I know people like Paderewski and—I can only think of Paderewski for the moment, I know that sort of person doesn't think much of the pianola artist; but they are quite wrong about it all. The mechanical agility

with the fingers is nothing, the soul is everything. Now you can get the soul, the *con molto expressione* feeling, just as well in the pianola as in the piano. Of course you have to keep a sharp eye on the music. Some people roll it off just like a barrel-organ; but

when I see *Allegro* or *Andante* or anything of that kind on the score, I'm on it like a bird.

No time for more now, as I've just got a new lot of music in.

Your loving,
THANKYOU.

P.S.—When are you coming to hear me play? I did "Mumbling Mose" just now, with one hand and lots of soul.

(Signed) PADEREWSKI.

P.P.S.—I am glad you can walk.

III

Dear Thankyou,—I am rather upset about my walking. You remember I told you I had done seven in my last? Well, this morning I couldn't do a single one! Well, I did do one, as a matter of fact, but I suppose some people would say it didn't count, because I fell down directly after, though I don't see that that matters,—do you, Thankyou? But even with that one it was only one, and yet I know I did seven the day before. I wonder why it is. I do it the right way, I'm sure, and I keep my hands out so as to

balance, so perhaps it's the shoes that are wrong. I must ask Mother to get me a new pair, and tell the man they're for walks.

Now do write me a nice long letter, Thankyou, because I feel very miserable about this. It is right, isn't it, when you have the right leg out, only to bring

the left one just up to it, and not beyond? And does it matter which foot you start with? Let me know quickly, because Father is coming home to-morrow and I want to show him.

Your loving,
O.D.

P.S.—I am glad you like your pianola.

IV

Dear O.D.,—Very glad to get yours. If you really want a long letter, you shall have one; only I warn you that if once I begin nothing less than any earthquake can stop me. Well, first, then, I played the Merry Widow Waltz yesterday to Mrs. Polacca, who is a great authority on music, and in with all the Queen's Hall set, and she said that my touch reminded her of—I've forgotten the man's name now, which is rather sickening, because it spoils the story a bit, but he was one of the real tiptoppers who makes hundreds a week, and well, that was the sort of man I reminded her of. If I can do that with a waltz, it stands to reason that with something classic there'd

be no holding me. I think I shall give a recital. Tickets 10/6d. No free seats. No emergency exit. It is a great mistake to have an emergency exit at a recital.

(*Three pages omitted.*)

Really, O.D., you must hear me doing the double F in the Boston Cake Walk to get me at my best. You've heard Kubelik on the violin? Well, it's not a bit like that, and yet there's just the something which links

great artists together, no matter what their medium of expression.

Your loving,
THANKYOU.

P.S.—Glad you're getting on so well with your walking.

V

Dearest Thankyou,—Hooray, hooray, hooray—I did twenty-five walks to-day! Father counted. He says my style reminds him of "*Cancer Vulgaris*" rather. How many times can he do it? Not twenty-five on the third day, I'm sure.

Isn't it splendid of me? I see now where I was wrong yesterday. I got the knack again suddenly this morning, and I'm all right now. To-morrow I shall walk round the table. It is a longish way and there are four turns, which I am not sure about. How do you turn? I suppose you put the right hand out?

Your very loving,
O.D.

VI

Dear O.D.,—I am rather hurt by your letters. I have written several times to tell you all about my new pianola, and you don't seem to take any interest at all. I was going to have told you this time that the man in the flat below had sent me a note, just as if it had been a real piano. He says he doesn't mind my playing all day, so long as I don't start before eight in the morning, as he is in his bath then, and in listening

to the music quite forgets to come out sometimes, which I can see might be very awkward.

Write to yours affectionately,
THANKYOU.

VII

Darling Thankyou,—I am so sorry, dear, and I will come and hear your pianola to-morrow, and I think it lovely, and you must be clever to play it so well; but you musn't be angry with me because I am so taken up with my walking. You see, it is all so new to me. I feel as though I want everybody to know all about it.

Your pianola must be lovely, Thankyou. Dear Thankyou, could you, do you think, put all the letters we wrote to each other about my walking in some book, so that other people would know how to do it the way I do? You might call it "Letters on Walk

ing," or "How to Walk," or—but you could get a better title than I could. Do!

Your very loving,
O.D.

P.S.—I'm so glad about the pianola and do you mind if I just tell you that I did walk round the table, corners and all?

VIII

Dearest O.D.,—Right you are. I will think of a good title.

Your loving,
THANKYOU.

III. THE KNIGHT OF THE CHIMNEY-PIECE

We don't know his real name, but we have decided to call him "Arthur" ("Sir Arthur," I suppose he would be). He stands in bronze upon the chimney-piece, and in his right hand is a javelin; this makes him a very dangerous person. Opposite him, but behind the clock (Coward!), stands the other fellow, similarly armed. Most people imagine that the two are fighting for the hand of the lady on the clock, and they aver that they can hear her heart beating with the excitement of it; but, to let you into the secret, the other fellow doesn't come into the story at all. Only Margery and I know the true story. I think I told it to her one night when she wouldn't go to sleep—or perhaps she told it to me.

The best of this tale (I say it as the possible author) is that it is modern. It were easy to have invented something more in keeping with the knight's armour, but we had to remember that this was the twentieth century, and that here in this twentieth century was Sir Arthur on the chimney-piece, with his javelin drawn back. For whom is he waiting?

"It all began," I said, "a year ago, when Sir Arthur became a member of the South African Chartered Incorporated Co-operative Stores Society Limited Ten per cents at Par (Men only). He wasn't exactly a real member, having been elected under Rule Two for meritorious performances, Rule One being that this club shall be called what I said just now; but for nearly a year he enjoyed all the privileges of membership, including those of paying a large entrance fee and a still larger subscription. At the end of a year, however,

a dreadful thing happened. They made a Third Rule; to wit, that no member should go to sleep on the billiard table.

"Of course, Sir Arthur having only got in under Rule Two, had to resign. He had, as I have said, paid his entrance fee, and (as it happened) his second year's subscription in advance. Naturally he was annoyed....

"And that, in fact, is why he stands on the chimney-piece with his javelin drawn back. He is waiting for the Secretary. Sir Arthur is considered to be a good shot, and the Secretary wants all the flowers to be white."

At this point Margery said her best word, "Gorky," which means, "A thousand thanks for the verisimilitude of your charming and interesting story, but is not the love element a trifle weak?" (Margery is a true woman.)

"We must leave something to the imagination," I pleaded. "The Secretary no doubt had a delightful niece, and Sir Arthur's hopeless passion for her, after he had hit her uncle in a vital spot, would be the basis of a most powerful situation."

Margery said "Gorky" again, which, as I have explained, means, "Are such distressing situations within the province of the Highest Art?"

When Margery says "Gorky" twice in one night, it is useless to argue. I gave in at once. "Butter," I said, "placed upon the haft of the javelin, would make it slip, and put him off his shot. He would miss the Secretary and marry the niece." So we put a good deal of butter on Sir Arthur, and for the moment the Secretary is safe. I don't know if we shall be able to keep it there; but in case jam does as well, Margery has promised to stroke him every day.

However, I anticipate. As soon as the secretarial life was saved, Margery said "Agga," which is as it were, "*Encore*," or "*Bis*," so that I have her permission to tell you that story all over again. Instead I will give you the tragedy of George, the other fellow (no knight he), as she told it to me afterwards.

"George was quite a different man from Sir Arthur. So far from being elected to anything under Rule Two, he got blackballed for the North London Toilet Club. Opinions differed as to why this happened; some said that it was his personal unpopularity (he had previously been up, without success, for the membership of the local Ratepayers Association) others (among them the Proprietor), that his hair grew too quickly. Anyhow, it was a great shock to George, and they had to have a man in to break it to him. (It's always the way when you have a man in.)

"George was stricken to the heart. This last blow was too much for what had always been a proud nature. He decided to emigrate. Accordingly he left home, and moved to Islington. Whether he is still there or not I cannot say; but a card with that postmark reached his niece only this week. It was unsigned, and bore on the space reserved for inland communications these words: 'The old, old wish—A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.'"

"But what about the javelin?" I asked Margery. (This fellow had a javelin too, you remember.)

"Gorky," said Margery for the third time, which means——

Well, upon my word, I don't know what it means. But it would explain it all.

Meanwhile Sir Arthur (he was in my story, you know) is still waiting for the Secretary. In case the butter gives out, have I mentioned that the Secretary wants *all* the flowers to be white?

IV. THE ART OF CONVERSATION

"In conversation," said somebody (I think it was my grandfather), "there should always be a give and take. The ball must be kept rolling." If he had ever had a niece two years old, I don't think he would have bothered.

"What's 'at?" said Margery, pointing suddenly.

"That," I said, stroking it, "is dear uncle's nose."

"What's 'at?"

"Take your finger away. Ah, yes, that is dear uncle's eye. The left one."

"Dear uncle's left one," said Margery thoughtfully. "What's it doing?"

"Thinking."

"What's finking?"

"What dear uncle does every afternoon after lunch."

"What's lunch?"

"Eggs, sardines, macaroons—everything."

With a great effort Margery resisted the temptation to ask what "everything" was (a difficult question), and made a statement of her own.

"Santa Claus bring Margie a balloon from Daddy," she announced.

"A balloon! How jolly!" I said with interest. "What sort are you having? One of those semi-detached ones with the gas

laid on, or the pink ones with a velvet collar?"

"Down chimney," said Margery.

"Oh, that kind. Do you think—I mean, isn't it rather——"

"Tell Margie a story about a balloon."

"Bother," I murmured.

"What's bovver?"

"Bother is what you say when relations ask you to tell them a story about a balloon. It means, 'But for the fact that we both have the Montmorency blood in our veins, I should be compelled to decline your kind invitation, all the stories I know about balloons being stiff 'uns.' It also means, 'Instead of talking about balloons, won't you sing me a little song?'"

"Nope," said Margery.

"Bother, she's forgotten her music."

"What did you say, uncle dear; what did you say?"

I sighed and began.

"Once upon a time there was a balloon, a dear little toy balloon, and—and——"

"What's 'at?" asked Margery, making a dab at my chest. "What's 'at, uncle dear?"

"That," I said, "is a button. More particularly a red waistcoat button. More particularly still, my top red waistcoat button."

"What's 'at?" she asked, going down one.

"That is a button. Description: second red waistcoat. Parents living: both. Infectious diseases: scarlet fever slightly once."

"What's 'at?"

"That's a—ah, yes, a button. The third. A good little chap, but not so chubby as his brothers. He couldn't go down to Margate with them last year, and so, of course—Well, as I was saying, there was once a balloon, and——"

"What's a-a-'at?" said Margery, bending forward suddenly and kissing it.

"Look here, you've jolly well got to enclose a stamped addressed envelope with the next question. As a matter of fact, though you won't believe me, that again is a button."

"What's 'at?" asked Margery, digging at the fifth button.

"Owing to extreme pressure on space," I began.... "Thank you. That also is a button. Its responsibility is greater than that of its brethren. The crash may come at any moment. Luckily it has booked its passage to the—where was I? Oh yes—well, this balloon——"

"What's 'at?" said Margery, pointing to the last one.

"I must have written notice of that question. I can't tell you offhand."

"What's 'at, uncle dear?"

"Well, I don't know, Margie. It looks something like a collar stud, only somehow you wouldn't expect to find a collar stud there. Of course it may have slipped.... Or could it be one of those red beads, do you think?... N-no—no, it isn't a bead.... And it isn't a raspberry, because this is the wrong week for raspberries. Of course it might be a—By Jove, I've got it! It's a button."

I gave the sort of war-whoop with which one announces these discoveries, and Margery whooped too.

"A button," she cried. "A dear little button!" She thought for a moment. "What's a button?"

This was ridiculous.

"You don't mean to say," I reproached her, "that I've got to tell you now what a button is. That," I added severely, pointing to the top of my waistcoat, "is a button."

"What's 'at?" said Margery, pointing to the next one.

I looked at her in horror. Then I began to talk very quickly. "There was once a balloon," I said rapidly, "a dear little boy balloon—I mean toy balloon, and this balloon was a jolly little balloon just two minutes old, and he wasn't always asking silly questions, and when he fell down and exploded himself they used to wring him out and say, 'Come, come now, be a little airship about it,' and so——"

"What's 'at?" asked Margery, pointing to the top button.

There was only one way out of it. I began to sing a carol in a very shrill voice.

All the artist rose in Margery.

"Don't sing," she said hurriedly; "Margie sing. What shall Margie sing, uncle?"

Before I could suggest anything she was off. It was a scandalous song. She began by announcing that she wanted to be among the boys, and (anticipating my objections) assured me that it was no good kicking up a noise, because it was no fun going out when there weren't any boys about, you were so lonely-onely-onely....

Here the tune became undecided; and, a chance word recalling another context to her mind, she drifted suddenly into a hymn, and sang it with the same religious fervour as

she had sung the other, her fair head flung back, and her hazel eyes gazing into Heaven....

I listened carefully. This was a bit I didn't recognise.... The tune wavered for a moment ... and out of it these words emerged triumphant—

> "Talk of me to the boys you meet,
> Remember me kindly to Regent Street,
> And give them my love in the——"

"What's 'at, uncle?"

"That," I said, stroking it, "is dear uncle's nose."

"What's——"

By the way, would you like it all over again? No? Oh, very well.

V. AFTERNOON SLEEP

["*In the afternoon they came unto a land*
In which it seemed always afternoon."]

I am like Napoleon in that I can go to sleep at any moment; I am unlike him (I believe) in that I am always doing so. One makes no apology for doing so on Sunday afternoon; the apology indeed should come from the others, the wakeful parties....

"Uncle!"

"Margery."

"Will you come and play wiv me?"

"I'm rather busy just now," I said with closed eyes. "After tea."

"Why are you raver busy just now? My baby's only raver busy sometimes."

"Well then, you know what it's like; how important it is that one shouldn't be disturbed."

"But you *must* be beturbed when I ask you to come and play wiv me."

"Oh, well ... what shall we play at?"

"Trains," said Margery eagerly.

When we play at trains I have to be a tunnel. I don't know if you have ever been a tunnel? No; well, it's an over-rated profession.

"We won't play trains," I announced firmly, "because it's Sunday."

"Why not because it's Sunday?"

(Oh, you little pagan!)

"Hasn't Mummy told you about Sunday?"

"Oh, yes, Maud did tell me," said Margery casually. Then she gave an innocent little smile. "Oh, I called Mummy Maud," she said in pretended surprise. "I quite *fought* I was upstairs!"

I hope you follow. The manners and customs of good society must be observed on the ground floor where visitors may happen; upstairs one relaxes a little.

"Do you know," Margery went on with the air of a discoverer, "you mustn't say 'prayers' downstairs. Or 'corsets.'"

"I never do," I affirmed. "Well, anyhow I never will again."

"Why mayn't you?"

"I don't know," I said sleepily.

"Say prehaps."

"Well—*prehaps* it's because your mother tells you not to."

"Well, 'at's a *silly* fing to say," said Margery scornfully.

"It is. I'm thoroughly ashamed of it. I apologise. Good night." And I closed my eyes again....

"I fought you were going to play wiv me, Mr. Bingle," sighed Margery to herself.

"My name is not Bingle," I said, opening one eye.

"Why isn't it Bingle?"

"The story is a very long and sad one. When I wake up I will tell it to you. Good night."

"Tell it to me now."

There was no help for it.

"Once upon a time," I said rapidly, "there was a man called Bingle, Oliver Bingle, and he married a lady called Pringle. And his brother married a lady called Jingle; and his other brother married a Miss Wingle. And his cousin remained single.... That is all."

"Oh, I see," said Margery doubtfully. "Now will you play wiv me?"

How can one resist the pleading of a young child?

"All right," I said. "We'll pretend I'm a little girl, and you're my mummy, and you've just put me to bed.... Good night, mummy dear."

"Oh, but I must cover you up." She fetched a table-cloth, and a pram-cover, and *The Times*, and a handkerchief, and the cat, and a doll's what-I-mustn't-say-downstairs, and a cushion; and she covered me up and tucked me in. "'Ere, 'ere, now go to sleep, my darling," she said, and kissed me lovingly.

"Oh, Margie, you dear," I whispered.

"You called me 'Margie'!" she cried in horror.

"I meant 'Mummy.' Good night."

One, two, three seconds passed rapidly.

"It's morning," said a bright voice in my ear. "Get up."

"I'm very ill," I pleaded; "I want to stay in bed all day."

"But your dear uncle," said Margery, inventing hastily, "came last night after you were in bed, and stayed 'e night. Do you see? And he wants you to sit on him in bed and talk to him."

"Where is he? Show me the bounder."

"'Ere he is," said Margery, pointing at me.

"But look here, I can't sit on my own chest and talk to myself. I'll take the two parts if you insist, Sir Herbert, but I can't play them simultaneously. Not even Irving——"

"Why can't you play them simrulaleously?"

"Well, I can't. Margie, will you let me go to sleep?"

"Nope," said Margery, shaking her head.

"You should say, 'No thank you, revered and highly respected Uncle.'"

"No *hank* you, Mr. Cann."

"I have already informed you that my name is not Bingle and I have now to add that neither is it Cann."

"Why neiver is it Cann?"

"That isn't grammar. You should say, 'Why can it not either?'"

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"Say prehaps."

"No, I can't even say prehaps."