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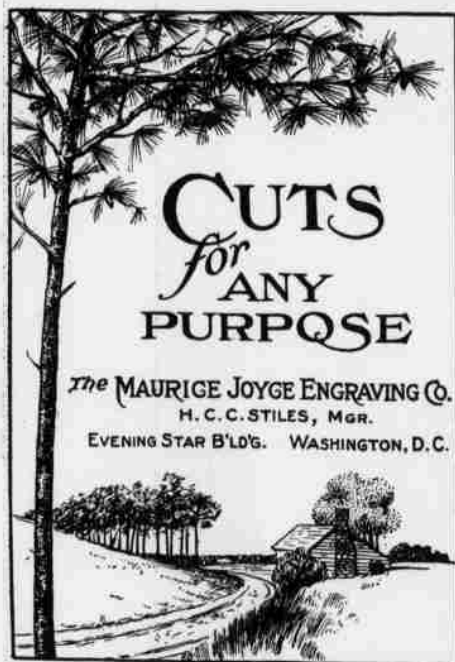
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FOR THE YOUNG FOLKS

The Day Dreams of the Old Toy Balloon Man



I came upon him on a warm day last fall, as he sat a little way back from a short suburban road that leads through a veritable forest of trees and shrubbery. A gray, stubby beard covered his face and from under a limp old cap a pair of pleasant gray eyes seemed to survey the world a bit quizzically. Tied in the worn buttonhole of his coat was a twist of strings, at the other ends of which a cluster of red and blue and green toy balloons collided constantly with gentle impact.

Presently I saw him fingering the tangle of strings in his buttonhole until he had separated one from the rest. Then, holding the string above his head, in a

"Ever think o' that?" he went on discursively, his eyes squinting up at the gray-blue autumn sky. "Ever think how we all got ideas—ideels, I s'pose you'd call 'em—like these here balloons, some of 'em red and fiery, and some of 'em kinda blue and doubtin', and some of 'em green and calm like, that keep a tug-gin' an' tug-gin' at us, till after a while we're just driv into lettin' 'em loose into the world. When once we let 'em go, seems like we ain't got much say-so over 'em. They get bounced about by contray winds, an' get steered into charnels we ain't never meant they should get into, and most times they get stove in right at the start. Funny thing, but it sure does 'pear like the red balloons last longer'n the other fellas, like the idees that got good red blood in 'em, which is the only ones that don't usually get all stove to pieces. The blue fellas an't no good



THE PARROT—They say "Shakespeare never repeats."
THE OWL (disgustedly)—Well, Shakespeare wasn't a parrot.

moment he had let it slip from his grasp, and, throwing himself back on his elbows, he watched the gleaming red ball rise rapidly in the air. His eyes were dimmed over with dreams; his mouth curved in tremulous ecstasy. When he raised himself from his elbows and made as if he were about to go on, I spoke to him. "Isn't it rather expensive," I inquired, "to send your goods up C. O. D. like that?"

"I dunno but 'tis," he replied, a little sheepishly. "I dunno but 'tis. Hows' mever, I ain't missed a day a doin' it for nine year. I ruther go without my supper, days when business is bad, than not to watch my little red craft slip 'er moorin's. Don't she look gay and happy like when she sails up—and up—and up—"

"O' course, sometimes she busts, before she ever gets good and away. But that's only in the nat'ral course o' things. Can't all our balloons sail 'round in the world without gettin' stove in some.

at all—bust up right away, green's got considerable endurance, but just kinda peters out after awhile.

"Huh, I guess," he said whimsically, shuffling his feet slowly among the dry, fallen leaves. "I guess if every ideel that gets busted in the world was a toy balloon, we'd be wading knee deep in pieces of string and little scraps of shriveled up rubber. It's ril sad, sometimes, d' you know, when somebody buys a little shaver one of these here balloons, an' he lets go of her, 'specting to watch her till she hides way up the clouds—little face smilin' an' smilin', mouth open like a red poppy with the dew on it.

"Then before she's cleared the tree tops they an't hide nor hair o' the poor little craft—foundered at the first tap of the wind. Little shaver's smiles all gone—eyes runnin' over with tears—poppy mouth all trembles. Too bad, an't it, now? Mebbe his first lesson in seeing his baby hopes blarsted—like ez not."