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Oliver Optic

The Birthday Party



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Writing the Notes.



The Riverdale Books.

THE BIRTHDAY PARTY.

A STORY FOR LITTLE FOLKS.

BY

OLIVER OPTIC,

AUTHOR OF "THE BOAT CLUB," "ALL ABOARD," "NOW OR NEVER," "TRY
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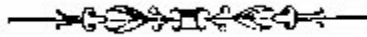
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THE BIRTHDAY PARTY.



I.

Flora Lee's birthday came in July. Her mother wished very much to celebrate the occasion in a proper manner. Flora was a good girl, and her parents were always glad to do any thing they could to please her, and to increase her happiness.

They were very indulgent parents, and as they had plenty of money, they could afford to pay well for a "good time." Yet they were not weak and silly in their indulgence. As much as they loved their little daughter, they did not give her pies and cakes to eat when they thought such articles would hurt her.

They did not let her lie in bed till noon because they loved her, or permit her to do any thing that would injure her, either in body or mind. Flora always went to church, and to the Sunday school, and never cried to stay at home. If she had cried, it would have made no difference, for her father and mother meant to have her do right, whether she liked it or not.

But Flora gave them very little trouble about such matters. Her parents knew best what was good for her, and she was willing in all things to obey them. It was for this reason that they were so anxious to please her, even at the expense of a great deal of time and money.

The birthday of Flora came on Wednesday, and school did not keep in the afternoon. All the children, therefore, could attend the party which they intended to give in honor of the day.

About a week before the time, Mrs. Lee told Flora she might have the party, and wanted her to make out a list of all the children whom she wished to invite.

"I want to ask all the children in Riverdale," said Flora, promptly.

"Not all, I think," replied Mrs. Lee.

"Yes, mother, all of them."

"But you know there are a great many bad boys in town. Do you wish to invite them?"

"Perhaps, if we treat them well, they will be made better by it."

"Would you like to have Joe Birch come to the party?"

"I don't know, mother," said Flora, musing.

"I think you had better invite only those who will enjoy the party, and who will not be likely to spoil the pleasure of others. We will not invite such boys as Joe Birch."

"Just as you think best, dear mother," replied Flora. "Shall I ask such boys as Tommy Woggs?"

"Tommy isn't a bad boy," said Mrs. Lee, with a smile.

"I don't know that he is; but he is a very queer fellow. You said I had better not ask those who would be likely to spoil the pleasure of others."

"Do you think, my child, Tommy Woggs will do so?"

"I am afraid he would; he is such a queer boy."

"But Tommy is a great traveller, you know," added Mrs. Lee, laughing.

"The boys and girls don't like him, he pretends to be such a big man. He knows more than all the rest of the world put together--at least, he thinks he does."

"I think you had better ask him, for he will probably feel slighted if you don't."

"Very well, mother."

"Now, Flora, I will take a pencil and paper and write down the names of all the boys and girls with whom you are acquainted; and you must be careful not to forget any. Here comes Frank; he will help you."

Frank was told about the party, and he was quite as much pleased with the idea as his sister had been; and both of them began to repeat the names of all the boys and girls they could remember.

For half an hour they were employed in this manner, and then the list was read over to them, so as to be sure that no names had been omitted.

Flora and Frank now went through all the streets of Riverdale, in imagination, thinking who lived in each house; and when they had completed their journey in fancy, they felt sure they had omitted none.

"But we must invite cousins Sarah and Henry," said Flora. "O, I hope they will come! Henry is so funny; we can't do without them."

"Perhaps they will come; at any rate we will send them invitations," replied Mrs. Lee.

The next day, when the children had gone to school, Mrs. Lee went to the office of the Riverdale Gazette, which was the village newspaper, and had the invitations printed on nice gilt-edged paper.

By the following day Mrs. Lee had written in the names of the children invited, enclosed the notes in envelopes, and directed them. I will give you a copy of one of them, that you may know how to write them when you have a birthday party, though I dare say it would do just as well if you go to your friends and ask them to attend. If you change the names and dates, this note will answer for any party.

Miss Flora Lee presents her compliments to Miss Nellie Green, and requests the pleasure of her company on Wednesday afternoon, July 20.

Riverdale, July 15.

"Those are very fine indeed," said Flora: "shall I put on my bonnet, and carry out some of them to-day?"

"No, my child; it is not quite the thing for you to carry your own invitations. I will tell you what you may do. You may hire David White to deliver them for you. You must pay him for it; give him half a dollar, which will be a good thing for him."

This plan was adopted, and Frank was sent with the notes and the money over to the poor widow's cottage.

"Don't you think it is very wicked, mother, for rich folks to have parties, when the money they cost will do so much good to the poor?" asked Flora.

"I do not think so, my dear child."

"Well, I think so, mother," added Flora, warmly.

"Perhaps you do not fully understand it."

"I think I do."

"Why should it be wicked for you to enjoy yourself?"

"I don't think it is wicked to enjoy myself, but only to spend money for such things. You said you were going to have the Riverdale Band, and that the music would cost more than twenty dollars."

"I did, and the supper will cost at least twenty more; for I have spoken to the confectioner to supply us with ice cream, cake, jellies, and other luxuries. We shall have a supply of strawberries and cream, and all the nice things of the season. We must also erect a tent in the garden, in which we shall have the supper; but after tea I will tell you all about it."





Flora and her Father.

II.

Flora could not help thinking how much good the forty dollars, which her father would have to pay for the birthday party, would do if given to the poor.

It seemed to her just like spending the money for a few hours' pleasure; and even if they had a fine time, which she was quite sure they would have, it would be soon over, and not do any real good.

Forty dollars was a great deal of money. It would pay Mrs. White's rent for a whole year; it would clothe her family, and feed them nearly all the next winter. It appeared to her like a shameful waste; and these thoughts promised to take away a great deal from the pleasure of the occasion.

"I think, mother, I had just as lief not have the band, and only have a supper of bread and butter and seed cakes."

"Why, Flora, what has got into you?" said her father.

Mrs. Lee laughed at the troubled looks of Flora, and explained to her father the nature of her scruples in regard to the party.

"Where did the child get this foolish idea?" asked her father, who thought her notions were too old and too severe for a little girl.

"Didn't I see last winter how much good only a little money would do?" replied Flora.

"Don't you think it is wicked for me to live in this great house, keep five or six horses, and nine or ten servants, when I could live in a little house, like Mrs. White?" laughed Mr. Lee.

"All the money you spend would take care of a dozen families of poor folks," said Flora.

"That is very true. Suppose I should turn away all the men and women that work for me,—those, I mean, who work about the house and garden,—and give the money I spend in luxuries to the poor."

"But what would John and Peter, Hannah and Bridget do then? They would lose their places, and not be able to earn any thing. Why, no, father; Peter has a family; he has got three children, and he must take care of them."

"Ah, you begin to see it—do you?" said Mr. Lee, with a smile. "All that I spend upon luxury goes into the pockets of the farmer, mechanic, and laborer."

"I see that, father," replied Flora, looking as bright as sunshine again; "but all the money spent on my party will be wasted—won't it?"

"Not a cent of it; my child. If I were a miser, and kept my money in an iron safe, and lived like a poor man, I should

waste it then."

"But twenty dollars for the Riverdale Band is a great deal to give for a few hours' service. It don't do any good, I think."

"Yes, it does; music improves our minds and hearts. It makes us happy. I have engaged six men to play. They are musicians only at such times as they can get a job. They are shoemakers, also, and poor men; and the money which I shall pay them will help support their families and educate them."

"What a fool I was, father!" exclaimed Flora.

"O, no; not so bad as that; for a great many older and wiser persons than yourself have thought just what you think."

"But the supper, father,--the ice cream, the cake, and the lemonade,--won't all the money spent for these things be wasted?"

"No more than the money spent for the music. The confectioner and those whom he employs depend upon their work for the means of supporting themselves and their families."

"So they do, father. And when you have a party, you are really doing good to the poor."

"That depends upon circumstances," replied Mr. Lee. "I don't think it would be an act of charity for a person who could not afford it to give a party. I only mean to say that when we spend money for that which does not injure us or any body else, what we spend goes into the pockets of those who need it."

"A party--a proper party, I mean, such a one as you will have--is a good thing in itself. Innocent amusement is just as necessary as food and drink."

"God has given me wealth, Flora, and he expects me to do all the good I can with it. I hold it as his steward. Now, when I pay one of these musicians three or four dollars for an afternoon's work, I do him a favor as well as you and those whom you invite to your party."

"And I hope the party will make you love one another more than ever before. I hope the music will warm your hearts, and that the supper will make you happy, and render you thankful to the Giver of all things for his constant bounty."

"How funny that I should make such a blunder!" exclaimed Flora. "I am sure I shall enjoy my party a great deal more now that I understand these things."

"I hope you won't understand too much, Flora. Suppose you had only a dollar, and that it had been given you to purchase a story book. Then, suppose Mrs. White and her children were suffering from want of fuel and clothing. What would you do with your dollar?"

"I would----"

"Wait a minute, Flora," interposed her father. "When you buy the book, you pay the printer, the paper maker, the bookseller, the type founder, the miner who dug the lead and the iron from the earth, the machinist who made the press, and a great many other persons whose labor enters into the making of a book--you pay all these men for their labor; you give them money to help take care of their wives and children, their fathers and mothers. You help all these men when you buy a book. Now, what would you do with your dollar?"

"I would give it to poor Mrs. White," promptly replied Flora.

"I think you would do right, for your money would do more good in her hands. The self-denial on your part would do you good. I only wanted you to understand that, when you bought a book,--even a book which was only to amuse you,--the money is not thrown away."

"Riches are given to men for a good purpose; and they ought to use their wealth for the benefit of others, as well as for their own pleasure. If they spend money, even for things that are of no real use to them, it helps the poor, for it feeds and clothes them."

Flora was much interested in this conversation, and perhaps some of my young friends will think she was an old head to care for such things; but I think they can all understand what was said as well as she did.



On the Lawn.

III.

The great day at length arrived, and every thing was ready for the party. On the lawn, by the side of the house, a large tent had been put up, in which the children were to have the feast.

Under a large maple tree, near the tent, a stage for the musicians had been erected. Two swings had been put up; and there was no good reason why the children should not enjoy themselves to their hearts' content.

I think the teachers in the Riverdale school found it hard work to secure the attention of their scholars on the forenoon of that day, for all the boys and girls in the neighborhood were thinking about the party.

As early as one o'clock in the afternoon the children began to collect at the house of Mr. Lee, and at the end of an hour all who had received invitations were present. The band had arrived, and at a signal from Mr. Lee the music commenced.

"Now, father, we are all here. What shall we do?" asked Flora, who was so excited she did not know which way to turn, or how to proceed to entertain the party.

"Wait a few minutes, and let the children listen to the music. They seem to enjoy it very well."

"But we want to play something, father."

"Very soon, my child, we will play something."

"What shall we play, father?"

"There are plenty of plays. Wouldn't you like to march a little while to the music?"

"March?"

"Yes, march to the tune of 'Hail, Columbia.' I will show you how to do it."

"I don't know what you mean, father."

"Well, I will show you in a few minutes."

When the band had played a little while longer, Mr. Lee assembled the children in the middle of the lawn, and asked them if they would like to march.

They were pleased with the idea, though some of them thought it would be rather tame amusement for such an exciting occasion.

"You want two leaders, and I think you had better choose them yourselves. It would be the most proper to select two boys."

Mr. Lee thought the choice of the leaders would amuse them; so he proposed that they should vote for them.

"How shall we vote, father?" asked Frank.

"Three of the children must retire, and pick out four persons; and the two of these four who get the most votes shall be the leaders."

Mr. Lee appointed two girls and one boy to be on this committee; but while he was doing so, Tommy Woggs said he did not think this was a good play.

"I don't think they will choose the best leaders," said Tommy.

"Don't you, Mr. Woggs?" asked Mr. Lee, laughing.

"No, sir, I do not. What do any of these boys know about such things!" said Tommy, with a sneer. "I have been to New York, and have seen a great many parades."

"Have you, indeed?"

"Yes, sir, I have."

"And you think you would make a better leader than any of the others?"

"I think so, sir."

All the children laughed heartily at Master Woggs, who was so very modest!

"None of these boys and girls have ever been to New York," added Tommy, his vanity increasing every moment.

"That is very true; and perhaps the children will select you as their leader."

"They can do as they like. If they want me, I should be very willing to be their leader," replied Tommy.

It was very clear that Master Woggs had a very good opinion of himself. He seemed to think that the fact of his having been to New York made a hero of him, and that all the boys ought to take off their caps to him.

But it is quite as certain that the Riverdale children did not think Master Woggs was a very great man. He thought so much of himself, that there was no room for others to think much of him.

The committee of three returned in a few minutes, and reported the names of four boys to be voted for as the leaders. They were Henry Vernon, Charley Green, David White, and Tommy Woggs.

The important little gentleman who had been to New York, was delighted with the action of the committee. He thought all the children could see what a very fine leader he would make, and that all of them would vote for him.

"What shall we do for votes, father?" asked Frank.

"We can easily manage that, Frank," replied Mr. Lee.

"We have no paper here."

"Listen to me a moment, children," continued Mr. Lee. "There are four boys to be voted for; and we will choose one leader first, and then the other."

"Those who want Henry Vernon for a leader will put a blade of grass in the hat which will be the ballot box; those who want Charley Green will put in a clover blossom; those who want David White will put in a maple leaf; and those who want to vote for Tommy Woggs will put in a--let me see--put in a dandelion flower."

The children laughed, for they thought the dandelion was just the thing for Master Woggs, who had been to New York.

One of the boys carried round Mr. Lee's hat, and it was found that Henry Vernon had the most votes; so he was declared to be the first leader.

"Humph!" said Tommy Woggs. "What does Henry Vernon know? He has never been to New York."

"But he lives in Boston," added Charley Green.

"Boston is nothing side of New York."

"I think Boston is a great place," replied Charley.

"That's because you have never been to New York," said Master Woggs. "They will, of course, all vote for me next time. If they do, I will show them how things are done in New York."

"Pooh!" exclaimed Charley, as he left the vain little man.

While all the children were wondering who would be the other leader, Flora was electioneering among them for her favorite candidate; that is, she was asking her friends to vote for the one she wanted. Who do you suppose it was? Master Woggs? No. It was David White.

The hat was passed round again, and when the votes were counted, there was only one single dandelion blossom found in the hat.

Tommy Woggs was mad, for he felt that his companions had slighted him; but it was only because he was so vain and silly. People do not often think much of those who think a great deal of themselves.

There was a great demand for maple leaves, and David White was chosen the second leader, and had nearly all the votes. The boys then gave three cheers for the leaders, and the lines were formed. Mr. Lee told Henry and David just how they were to march, and the band at once began to play "Hail Columbia."

The children first marched, two by two, round the lawn, and then down the centre. When they reached the end, one leader turned off to the right, and the other to the left, each followed by a single line of the children.

Passing round the lawn, they came together again on the other side. Then they formed a great circle, a circle within a circle, and concluded the march with the "grand basket."

This was certainly a very simple play, but the children enjoyed it ever so much--I mean all but vain Master Woggs, who was so greatly displeased because he was not chosen one of the leaders, that he said there was no fun at all in the whole thing.

About half an hour was spent in marching, and then Mr. Lee proposed a second game. The children wanted to march a little longer; but there were a great number of things to be done before night, and so it was thought best, on the whole, to try a new game.





The Old Fiddler.

IV.

When the children had done marching, Mrs. Lee took charge of the games. Several new plays, which none of them had heard of before, were introduced. The boys and girls all liked them very well, and the time passed away most rapidly.

Just before they were going to supper, an old man, with a fiddle in his hand, tottered into the garden, and down the lawn. He was a very queer-looking old man. He had long white hair, and a long white beard.

He was dressed in old, worn-out, soldier clothes, in part, and had a sailor's hat upon his head, so that they could not tell whether he was a soldier or a sailor.

As he approached the children, they began to laugh with all their might; and he certainly was a very funny old man. His long beard and hair, his tattered finery, and his hobbling walk, would have made almost any one laugh--much more a company of children as full of fun as those who were attending the birthday party.

"Children," said the old man, as he took off his hat and made a low bow, "I heard there was a party here, and I came to play the fiddle for you. All the boys and girls like a fiddle, because it is so merry."

"O mother! what did send that old man here?" cried Flora.

"He came of himself, I suppose," replied Mrs. Lee, laughing.

"I think it is too bad to laugh at an old man like him," added Flora.

"It would be, if he were in distress; but don't you see he is as merry as any of the children?"

"Play us some tunes," said the children.

"I will, my little dears;" and the old man raised the fiddle. "Let's see--I will play 'Napoleon's Grand March.'"

The fiddler played, but he behaved so queerly that the children laughed so loud they could hardly hear the music.

"Why, that's 'Yankee Doodle,'" said Henry Vernon; and they all shouted at the idea of calling that tune "Napoleon's Grand March."

"Now I will play you the solo to the opera of 'La Sonnambula,'" said the old man.

"Whew!" said Henry.

The old man fiddled again, with the same funny movements as before.

"Why, that's 'Yankee Doodle' too!" exclaimed Henry.

"I guess he don't know any other tune."

"You like that tune so well, I will play you 'Washington's March;'" and the funny old fiddler, with a great flourish, began to play again; but still it was "Yankee Doodle."

And so he went on saying he would play many different tunes, but he played nothing but "Yankee Doodle."

"Can't you tell us a story now?" asked Charley Green.

"O, yes, my little man, I can tell you a story. What shall it be?"

"Are you a soldier or a sailor?"

"Neither, my boy."

"The story! the story!" shouted the boys, very much excited.

"Some years ago I was in New York," the old man commenced.

"Did you see me there?" demanded Tommy Woggs.

"Well, my little man, I don't remember that I saw you."

"O, I was there;" and Tommy thrust his hands down to the bottom of his pockets, and strutted up the space between the children and the comical old fiddler.

"I did see a very nice-looking little gentleman----"

"That was me," pompously added Tommy.

"He was stalking up Broadway. He thought every body was looking at and admiring him; but such was not the case. He looked just like--just like----"

"Like me?" asked Tommy.

"Like a sick monkey," replied the fiddler.

"Go on with your story."

"I will, children. Several years ago I was in New York. It is a great city; if you don't believe it, ask Master Tommy Woggs."

"You tell the truth, Mr. Fiddler. It is a great city, and I have been all over it, and can speak from observation," replied Master Woggs.

"The story!" shouted the children.

"I was walking up Broadway. This street is always crowded with people, as well as with carts and carriages."

"I have seen that street," said Tommy.

"Now you keep still a few minutes, Tommy, if you can," interposed Mrs. Lee.

"At the corner of Wall Street----"

"I know where that is," exclaimed Tommy.

"At the corner of Wall Street there was a man with a kind of cart, loaded with apples and candy, which he was selling to the passers-by. Suddenly there came a stage down the street, and ran into the apple cart."

"I saw the very same thing done," added Tommy, with his usual self-important air.

"Keep still, Tom Woggs," said Charley Green.

"The apples were scattered all over the sidewalk; yet the man picked up all but one of them, though he was very angry with the driver of the stage for running against his cart."

"Why didn't he pick up the other apple?" asked Henry.

"A well-dressed man, with big black whiskers, picked that up. 'Give it to me,' said the apple man. 'I will not,' replied the man with whiskers. The apple merchant was as mad as he could be; and then the man with black whiskers put his hand

in his pocket and drew out a knife. The blade was six inches long."

"O, dear me!" exclaimed Flora.

"Raising the knife, he at once moved towards the angry apple merchant, and--and----"

"Well, what?" asked several, eagerly.

"And cut a piece out of the apple, and put it in his mouth."

The children all laughed heartily, for they were sure the man with the whiskers was going to stab the apple merchant.

"He then took two cents from his pocket, paid for the apple, and went his way," continued the old man. "Now, there is one thing more I can do. I want to run a race with these boys."

"Pooh! You run a race!" sneered Charley.

"I can beat you."

"Try it, and see."

The old man and Charley took places, and were to start at the word from Henry. But when it was given, the fiddler hobbled off, leaving Charley to follow at his leisure.

When the old man had got half way round the lawn, Charley started, sure he could catch him long before he reached the goal. But just as the boy was coming up with the man, the latter began to run, and poor Charley found, much to his surprise, that he ran very fast. He was unable to overtake him, and consequently lost the race.

The children were much astonished when they saw the old man run so fast. He appeared to have grown young all at once. But he offered to race with any of the boys again; and half a dozen of them agreed to run with him.

"I guess I will take my coat off this time," said the fiddler.

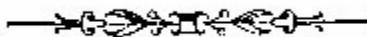
As he threw away the coat, he slipped off the wig and false beard he wore; and the children found, to their surprise, that the old man was Mr. Lee, who had dressed himself up in this disguise to please them.

The supper was now ready, and all the children were invited to the tent. They had played so hard that all of them had excellent appetites, and the supper was just as nice as a supper could be.

It was now nearly dark, and the children had to go home; but all of them declared the birthday party of Flora was the best they ever attended.

"Only to think," said Flora, when she went to bed that night, "the old fiddler was my father!"

LIZZIE.



Mother, what ails our Lizzie dear,
So cold and still she lies?
She does not speak a word to-day,
And closed her soft blue eyes.
Why won't she look at me again,
And laugh and play once more?
I cannot make her look at me
As she used to look before.

Her face and neck as marble white,
And, O, so very cold!
Why don't you warm her, mother dear,
Your cloak around her fold?
Her little hand is cold as ice,
Upon her waveless breast,--
So pure, I thought I could see through
The little hand I pressed.

Your darling sister's dead, my child;
She cannot see you now;
The damps of death are gath'ring there
Upon her marble brow.

She cannot speak to you again,
Her lips are sealed in death;
That little hand will never move,
Nor come that fleeting breath.

All robed in white, and decked with flowers,
We'll lay her in the tomb;
The flower that bloomed so sweetly here,
No more on earth will bloom;
But in our hearts we'll lay her up,
And love her all the more,
Because she died in life's spring time,
Ere earth had won her o'er.

Nay, nay, my child, she is not dead,
Although she slumbers there,
And cold and still her marble brow,
And free from pain and care.
She slept, and passed from earth to heaven,
And won her early crown:
An angel now she dwells above,
And looks in triumph down.

She is not dead, for Jesus died
That she might live again.
"Forbid them not," the Saviour said,
And blessed dear sister then.
Her little lamp this morn went out
On earth's time-bounded shore;
But angels bright in heaven this morn
Relighted it once more.

Some time we, too, shall fall asleep,
To wake in heaven above,
And meet our angel Lizzie there
In realms of endless love.
We'll bear sweet sister in our hearts,
And then there'll ever be
An angel there to keep our souls
From sin and sorrow free.