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The Fool

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Ho! Ho! There was a fool. He was a laughing, mad, and tinsel-garbed son of foolishness. He sat on a sunny knoll and looked over the blue waters of a lake. Through the clear water he saw the fish darting swiftly among the green weeds. In the sky were a few silly clouds that moved slowly and aimlessly over their azure field. The fool blinked lazily, and enjoyed the warmth of the sun. While he thus lounged, and sent his idle thoughts to keep company with the silent clouds, it happened that a soldier passed by and spoke to him.

"Fool," he cried, "Come to the wars, your country calls you, and the army needs you."

The fool turned and looked with twinkling eyes at the soldier.

"Tell me, brave man, why you fight?"

The soldier said, "Because I love my country's honor, and I hate her enemies."

The fool said, "What then is your country's honor, and who are her enemies?"

The soldier scratched his head, and answered, "Why, they're fighting now. Your question is that of a fool." He went his way, while the fool turned back to his clouds.

An artist came to the place, and halting by the fool exclaimed, "Ah! Is not this truly beautiful?"

"What?" said the fool.

"Why, they're fighting now. Your question is and harmony of line, and those most wonderful and glorious shadows,—Ah! Is it not beautiful?"

"I do not know," said the fool.

"Poor fool," said the artist, "let me point out some of the beauties to you."

"Yes," said the fool, "but tell me first, what beauty is."

"Beauty is, er, its,—er, why it's beauty."

"Aye, I thought so," said the fool.

"But beauty is harmony," said the artist, "it is the glorious relation of line to line, of color to color. Think of the ideals of tone and shadow, the pale purple distances of some lonely twilight hour, the slumbering meadows, in their dull, brown, autumn garments, the little tower filled with romance, and the —"

"I do not know what you are talking about," said the fool, and watched a cloud turn from an elephant into a goose.

"You miss a great deal by being a fool," said the artist, and went his way.

A scientist who said that life was a very serious matter, and held that fools were an abomina-

tion, nevertheless drew near and spoke. "Have you ever thought of the rich reward you might gain by patient delving into the store-house of nature?"

"No," said the fool, "what reward?"

"Think of all those myriad facts you might bring to light."

"What good would they be to me," said the fool.

"They might serve to bring other facts to light, and the store of world's knowledge might grow greatly under your hands."

"Humph," said the fool, "what are facts?"

"Facts are truths of nature, everyone must accept as true," said the scientist.

"What, then, is nature?" said the fool.

"Nature is the totality of all the facts of the universe."

"You are sure of that?" said the fool.

"Absolutely," said the scientist.

"I think that totality would weary me," said the fool, "and I am not so sure nature is what you say it is."

"That is because you are a fool," said the scientist, and went his way.

A law-maker, whose business was the upholding of the dignity of convention, stepped forward and said, "Ha! Ha! Fool! What think you of the new laws regarding fools?"

"What, then, is nature?" said the fool.

"Those that will take from you your ancient prerogatives," said the law-maker.

"My ancient prerogatives?" said the fool.

"Aye! Your right to ask foolish questions, and annoy, by your folly, those who know."

"Those who know what?" said the fool.

"Why those who know much in their own departments of study," said the lawmaker, "as for instance the soldier in military science, the artist regarding harmony, and the scientist concerning the awe-inspiring facts of nature."

"Oh," said the fool.

"The law will stop all that nonsense," said the law-maker.

"Which nonsense?" said the fool.

"Why your questions," said the law-maker.

"What is law?" said the fool.

"Law is the safeguard of all liberty. It protects each man from the inroads of his neighbor. It gives to every man a chance for justice. It protects the weak from the strong."

"Does it so?" said the fool.

"It does," said the law-maker.

"I cannot see it," said the fool, and sighed