

BLONDIN'S ADVENTURE.

A THRILLING INCIDENT OF THE TIGHT ROPE.

"ABOUT twenty-five years ago I was called by business to a northern town, and while there Blondin, the celebrated rope-walker, advertised to perform one evening. The place selected was the theatre—the only one in the town—a large building capable of seating about two thousand people.

"Though I had often seen the man before, I went to the theatre that evening in order to while away a few hours, as I was a stranger in a strange place. The house was crowded from pit to dome.

"A rope was stretched across near the stage, between the two topmost side galleries, and made steady by guys, or long ropes which were attached to it at intervals and fastened behind the flies.

"On this narrow causeway the nimble athlete made several journeys, dancing, running, hopping on one foot, crawling on his knees, walking with jugs of water upon his shoulders, and various other things which I now forget.

"But now the crowning feat was to take place. He was to trundle a wheel-barrow across, which was to contain his baby, a little boy of 10 months, I was told.

"This was, in many respects, the most difficult performance he had undertaken. In the first place, both hands would be occupied with the handles of the wheelbarrow, while in his other performances they were at liberty to maintain his balance.

"Before, he had only himself to look after, and now he had another, and that other his own child.

"So, altogether, the audience comprehended this to be an undertaking which above all others would tax his coolness and steadiness of nerves most severely, and our nerves thrilled in sympathy with the daring father as he appeared at one end of the rope. The wheelbarrow was of pasteboard; but the baby was not. A fat, rosy little fellow, who greeted the audience with a laugh of delight as he looked down upon them from his airy perch.

"You might have heard a pin fall, as the saying is, when the couple commenced their perilous passage; not a sound but the cooing and crowing of the baby. Slowly but surely the frail vehicle, with its trusting little passenger, glided along the rope. We held our breath and felt it would be a relief when they effected a safe landing on the other side.

"The tension on the nerves of the spectators was something almost painful. Two-thirds of the journey was made, when suddenly there was a pause—a hitch somewhere—something seemed to impede the single wheel of the barrow. Slowly the man drew it towards him and tried again; but there was evidently something in the way.

"A moment's observation revealed the impediment. One of the guys, where it was attached to the main rope, made a clumsy knot, and over this the grooved wheel refused to pass.

"Again and again Blondin drew the barrow back and attempted to surmount the obstacle, but in vain; while the child, delighted with the seesaw movement, crowed more loudly than ever, little conscious that it was on the very brink of death.

"Finding it impossible to proceed, the man ceased his efforts, and stood perfectly still; that is, he did not attempt to advance, but all his powers were now concentrated on the desperate endeavour to maintain his balance, a thing far more difficult to do while stationary than while in motion.

"Forty feet below, a sea of faces looked up with parted lips and straining eyes, but there was a death-like stillness. I have wondered since that none of the women screamed or fainted.

"It must have been that an instinctive sense of the inevitable result of any disturbing sound on our part kept us all so quiet. No man looked at or thought of his neighbour, but every eye was riveted upon the brave man far above our heads, who stood like a statue, I was about to say, but for the gentle oscillation of his body

from side to side, and the terrible look in his eyes, as though his very soul would leap therefrom.

"Vividly printed on my memory I see him now. On his legs and arms, which were bare, the veins stood out like cords.

"He did not, perhaps dared not, turn his head, while his eyes, which seemed bursting from his head, never left the pathway of rope before him.

"I could not tell whether the swaying of the body was voluntary or involuntary; the former, probably, in order to better maintain his balance. Now was the moment when his long training, his iron nerve, his strength of muscle, his coolness and presence of mind must come to the rescue.

"I wonder what passed in the man's mind; he knew he was powerless to help himself; would or could anyone help him? With every motion of his body we expected to see them precipitated upon the floor below. A hair's breadth more to the right or left and the balance would be lost, the man and babe dashed to the ground. That fierce grasp, that iron nerve, must give way at last.

"It seemed ages that we gazed at that swaying figure with the desperate look in his eyes. Oh, would no one save them? How could they be rescued?

"But help comes at last. All praise to the pluck which conceived the plan, and the strong limbs which carried it out. Slowly and continuously a form comes creeping, creeping, dragging itself full length along one of the guys—the same treacherous rope which had wrought the terrible situation—on to where the child sits laughing in its father's face.

"How gently must the rescuer advance, lest his motion be conveyed to the main rope. Flat upon his stomach, hand over hand, foot over foot, he comes.

"He is within reach of them—he stretches his hand—but here the babe, taking notice of him, laughs and leaps a little towards him; the barrow gives a fearful sway—Blondin almost reels to one side. Merciful God! Will they be killed just as help is near? But no; Blondin recovers himself just as the brave rescuer grasps the wheel with one hand while he hangs suspended with the other to the main rope.

"Carefully, slowly, he lifts it—surely his muscle and nerve equal Blondin's!—places it beyond the bungling knot, and father and child glide swiftly on their way.

"A murmur, like the wind among the trees, goes through the audience, but they wisely refrain from cheering till the few feet of ropewalk are passed over and father and child land safely in the gallery, while their brave rescuer swings himself along the guy to the stage.

"Then such a cheer went up as would have made your hearts leap to hear. Women cried and screamed and went into hysterics, and men hurraed till they became hoarse.

"Blondin stood in the gallery with his child in his arms, bowing to us with a smile on his lips, though his face was white as death.

"I know every woman wanted to kiss that baby, and I felt as though I would like to hug that dauntless father and the brave fellow who came to their rescue.

"He didn't attempt the passage back, as was in his bills, you may be sure, but soon took himself and child from our view, while we dispersed in a rather discomposed, but wholly delighted and excited manner."

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