

GRANDMOTHER'S DAY—LITTLE GIRL BLUE TELLING OUR FORTUNES

BY JANEY CANUCK

HIDDEN somewhere in the granary of their mind, most folk carry around an example of what they consider the most perfect piece of repartee.

Some day, when I get the time and money, I intend giving a party and a prize for the best example of clever replies which have been made on the spur of the moment. To my thinking the cleverest was that which fell from the lips of that master-wit, Alexandre Dumas, when in answer to the question, "How do you grow old so gracefully?" He replied, "Madam, I give all my time to it."

"To grow old gracefully" is no easy task either. Old age has no stronger pang than its own accompanying sensitiveness. Rogers, who was often complimented on being a fine old man, used snappily to reply, "There is no such thing, sir, as a fine old man."

For ourself, we never care for that picture of Whistler's Mother sitting with her feet on a hassock waiting for death. She is artistic looking, no doubt, and of quite refined demeanour but much too shadowy.

Personally, we intend to keep our family worrying over misdeeds till the very end. We intend to be quite headstrong, and nothing shall ever induce us to wear a lace fichu or pale mauve. Most old ladies would look much better in pale pink anyway.

We were thinking about these matters the other day when, in opening a letter, a photograph fell therefrom on our table, showing a line of grandmothers who had gone holidaying together in Alberta, leaving their grandchildren to take care of themselves.

One of the peculiar things about country grandmothers is that they are "always there," meaning, of course, at home. There is no room for grandmother in the car, it is too cold for her, or some such difficulty is always plainly apparent when the younger members of the household go to town or off to a picnic. You must have observed this for yourself.

This is why we looked and looked again at this line of grandmothers who had formed themselves into a party, and had gone for a few days' outing somewhere up in the Watertown Lakes that lie in Alberta's National Park. We could see from the names and ages written on the back of the photograph that the youngest of the seven was sixty-five and the eldest eighty-two. May God bless them every one.

Lulu, a young school teacher was the chaperone of the party, and their hostess at her home in the hills. They called themselves "The Bee-hive Girls" and funny names like that.

It would take too long to tell of the fishing, motoring, feasting, reading, singing and general jinks of "the girls," and how like, mayhap, they found out that at the feast of life, even as at that of Cana of Galilee, the last wine may actually be the best. We have "Mother's Day" in Canada; at Christmastide it might be well to have a grandmother's day, too, just to let her see that she is our very grand mother in deed and in truth.

Once upon a time, there was a little girl who used to pull me by the skirts when we passed the toy tables. I have her toys still—an armless doll, a laundry set, some make-believe paper money, a tea set and a few other "toy friends" like that. It is years and years since little Girl Blue went off with the angels, but every Christmastide in spirit, we spend a day together in the shops when she again pulls at my skirts with her strong little fingers and when I clasp hands with her at the vaulting clowns, woolly dogs and wonderful doll's house that has everything but food, fire and a mortgage.

It was a wise saying of Victor Hugo, that paradise is a place where the parents are always young and the children always little.

The trouble about dolls is in knowing which one to buy. It was different in the good old times when our dolls were made of rags or china. Indeed, many of us had most effective ones which had been

improvised from so humble an instrument as a clothes pin or a feather duster. My own Amesite had black porcelain hair, blue eyes and cheeks of the most pronounced hue. It is true she would stand slight chance in a better-baby contest, in that her beauty ended with her neck line. Besides, she had the lamentable habit of losing an arm, a leg, or even two legs, thereby causing her to shed much blood—that is to say sawdust—and to suffer a consequent shrinkage in size. Still, Amesite was the standard doll and when you had purchased her, your heart was not torn asunder with distraction. There was no temptation to halt between two opinions once you had the price. But, nowadays, it is different. Here is a bisque baby doll with buster-cut hair who can sit in any position. Indeed, so pliable are her joints, she could bite at her toe with as much ease as any other properly constructed baby from the cave days down.

Beside her sits a black Dinah with a face like coal tar and a dress of blue, not a half-hearted blue but a radiant, rampant blue such as one might get from a cake of Reckett's. Hardly is a Kewpie, "undressed exceedingly," and Mary Jane, a dull bovine looking creature with cap and apron. If you lift her, you can see that she has movable arms and legs and head, in which particulars she would seem to have an advantage over the usual Mary Jane of the kitchen. On another shelf we find a can't-crack celluloid doll of the male persuasion who is warranted not to break if sat upon. Doubtless, he will

beautiful, but any one can see she is equally ignorant. There is no doubt of it, she will ultimately marry some prominent official and spell etiquette with two K's. Already she moves with care as if she were accustomed to wearing only white chiffon and orchids.

In truth, as we look upon the endearing young charms of these lady dolls, they all seem so very human we are filled with a sense of guilt as though buying slaves in an Eastern market. "Shall we go back and buy a rubber doll?" I ask of Little Girl Blue, "a Chinese one or an Esquimaux? We can never settle on one of these."

"I'll tell you what to do," she replied with eagerness. "Let us buy a sick doll, ever so sick, and let us play at nurse and Red Cross."

"This is what we'll do, child. 'Tis a play for which we will have joy at the heart strings."

We might have stayed with the dolls for a long while. Little Girl Blue and I, had not Santa Claus appeared on the scene with a pack on his back. Wherever he went we had to follow for he is a gracious and most generous gentleman, the like of whom there never was. "So old! so dear" this is what we said of him, and we kissed our hands to him. When, at last, he disappeared, not on his reindeer, but up the elevator, we found ourselves among the warlike toys which are made presumably for little boys with a bellicose tendency but which afford an almost equal pleasure to their slightly less bellicose papas.

As one considers the diversity of these



Lulu and the Grandmothers

grow up into a football player, or maybe a bill collector.

Tipperary Mary is a round tubby doll who smiles for the lady. Instead of a heart she has a spring which, if pressed upon, causes her to make a noise of the most discordant character. Her dress is of turkey-red with bows of green to match her stockings. Beside her, stands Tipperary Tommy in full regimentals. He is a broth of a boy, Tommy, but I have a suspicion the colleen looks out of the tail of her eye at Robin Hood, that dashing spark across the table, who might almost be cupid with his sheaf of arrows and well-tautened bow. You mind how once, in a song, a little toy-soldier told a tale like this, a sordid story about a doll who

"Turned up her little snub nose at me,
For I was only marked one-and-six,
While he was marked two-and-three."

When we have wandered among these dolls and have almost made a decision, our eyes suddenly catch a shelf of the type known as "sweetly pretty." Here is Babette, a town-bred lady, with a mouth like tilted wings, and yellow mane of hair. Her most conspicuous attribute is a yearning for affection, not that we blame her, while her nearest approach to principles may be charitably termed as finesse. Yes, Babette is pretty enough, but alas she doesn't wash.

Here is a young person, also remarkably

man-killing games, one naturally concludes that the only tame animal in the world is a woman and that even she may scream and scratch upon occasion. The other day I talked concerning this matter of militancy with my esteemed Grand-Aunt, who with the courage of her convictions, combines a wide and keen knowledge of the world, and to whose presence I am wont to repair in times of stress for advice or for consolation.

"My dear," she said. "You must have learned by this time that man is no angel as is shown by some of his tastes and all of his pleasures. This being the case, it is highly foolish on your part to fret and fever because he hies him off to kill another man. Any woman who gives to this subject her patient attention can see that, by allowing the males to slay each other, the world is thus enabled to keep its soul. This is the supreme consolation of war."

"It is so with all living species," continued Grand-Aunt Sophia, "as the males increase the species suffers. We kill off the cockerels, the bullocks, the rams and the gobblers so that the species may be preserved. Among the insects, the females attend to this themselves. For this reason, it is just as well to encourage all warlike movements and games among the youth of our country."

"No one can reasonably doubt that the putting on of armaments by the male child tends to inspire him with martial

ardor. It would seem to have been so in all ages, for Lucian, writing a century after the Christian era said that, in the case of Achilles, the very sight of his armour increased his anger at the Trojans, and when he put it on to try it, he was inspired and carried away with the lust of battle. In this nineteenth century, we have given guns to little boys who have yet their mother's milk on their lips, in order that they may shoot blank cartridges at other little boys supposed to be their enemies.

"Yes my dear, it is just as well for women to encourage all warlike games among the youth of our country, but, possibly, it is more discreet for us to keep silent upon so personal and so delicate a topic."

Bearing this sage instruction in mind, I was, in consequence, enabled to consider these war games with a far greater degree of placidity than on former occasions, for which salving of my feelings, Aunt Sophia shall have my thanks and unbroken praise.

Here is a mechanical armored car which will run straight ahead or in a circle. It is manipulated by as smart a chauffeur as ever ran down a man or a dog. It used to be, in ancient times, that the chief weapons of destruction were fire and brimstone but, nowadays, it is gasoline. As a toy, this car is highly diverting and whatever it cost it is worth it.

Here are grey siege guns, the ammunition for which is dried peas; and, most exciting of all, submarines and dreadnaughts. Here is also the game of storming the citadel, with enough of whetted swords to kill the countryside. There is something so unreflecting about a sword. It is a thousand pities it can't be worked by a spring, too. As Little Girl Blue slashes one around me in the most threatening fashion, first on one side and then on the other, I perforce think of that English duellist who boasted how he carved out his name upon his opponent and killed him with the dot on the i.

Alack and alas! but our contemplation of these weapons have led us into unseasonable meditations, so that it is high time we looked at Noah's Ark and things like that. I quite agree with Sa'di, the Persian, that oxen and asses which carry loads are preferable to men who injure their fellow creatures.

Here is a Noah's Ark with Noah and his wife, and all the animals. The latter show the most irreproachable docility, being arranged in a procession as though they went to dinner. I never meditate upon a Noah's ark without being filled with admiration for the hitherto unrecognized genius who found suitable words to rhyme with "Kangaroo." You mind the lines:

"The animals went in two by two,
The elephant and the kangaroo."

Near by is a modern ark, that is to say a farmyard stable with open doors, into which pass pink necked looking pigs, sheep, goats, donkeys and the perennial purple cow. This habit of making purple cows for children's playthings has not escaped the rhymsters for one has said:

"I never saw a purple cow,
I never wish to see one,
But I can tell you anyhow
I'd rather see than be one."

Little Girl Blue and I cranked up a horse who was not so much a horse as a palfrey, but, while possibly well-intentioned, this handsome appearing equine showed but little persistence, and had all the eccentric movements of a northern trailer. There was a Teddy Bear which said "Wow!" instead of "cuff! cuff!" also froggy-eyed pug dogs with an Union Jack air; china dogs packed with sweets like Samson's lion; chocolate dogs and almost every kind of dog but a husky. Some day, a toy-maker with an insight for business will make a dog train trimmed with ribbons, feathers and little standards of bells. These will be attached to a sled and have the accessory of a long whip of braided leather. Maybe, too, he will make muskrats that will go into a trap, and little scuts of gophers for northern children.

(Continued on page 14)