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BILLY WHISKERS

By FRANCES MONTGOMERY

An advertisement was running in all the newspapers and big signs were out saying that Billy had escaped from the picture studio, and a reward was offered for him, but Billy did not know this. "Why all this fuss about me? I should like to know that," thought Billy, puzzled.

Could he have read, he would have known; and, what is more, he would not have stood just where he did, under a big signboard which read:

The Emmanann Picture Company of Chicago Raises Its Offer of Three Hundred Dollars to FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS For the Return of Its Lost Goat unharmed. He is exceedingly large, has pure white hair, long curved horns, and an extra long beard. He answers to the name of Billy Whiskers.

"I wonder why everyone reads that signboard, looks doubly long at me, and then comes back and tries to catch me," pondered Billy. But presently he found out, for five boys came along on their way to school and they stopped to read the sign, one of them doing so aloud.

"Well, I should think they would stare at me! Five hundred dollars to the person who catches me and returns me unharmed to the Emmanann people! Humps! My price is going up, I see. They got me for nothing and now they are offering five hundred for me. I must have become very useful to them." But Billy's soliloquy was cut short by his having to dodge a lasso that a man tried to throw over his head.

Throws Lasso

He had come up the road on horseback and, unknown to either Billy or the boys, had stopped and thrown the lasso. On his way to the town he had read the sign and seen Billy eating grass under it. There was no question in his mind but that Billy was the goat wanted, for he fitted every item of the description. So he hustled to town, bought the rope and hurried back without giving away his secret to anyone, for fear someone might catch Billy and claim the reward. Now he was back, only to find five boys reading the sign, and he knew that they, too, would be trying to capture Billy for the sake of the reward. So he decided to bluff the boys off, and shouted: "Here, you boys, get out of my way! I want to catch my goat. I can't throw the lasso with you standing there!" "Your goat, is he? I guess not! He is as much ours as yours," said one of the boys, while another one shouted:

An Argument

"How is it, is yours, you have to lasso him? He would go along with you if he belonged to you."

"Young fellow, you have too much to say! Just close your mouth and move on before I lasso you!"—and the man began to swing the rope around his head as if he was going to lasso them that minute. The consequence was that they took to their heels and fled.

Billy Flees

While this was going on Billy quietly slipped under the wooden signboard and squeezed himself through a barbed wire fence. All he left tufts of hair and a bit of skin sticking to the bars, but what was that loss compared to being caught? He knew the man could not follow him with his horse if he once got the other side of the high fence, and if he tried to follow him on foot Billy could easily outrun him. Billy was going to lasso his head as if he was going to lasso them that minute. The consequence was that they took to their heels and fled.

His Plan

"I'll tie my horse and follow him on foot," thought the man. "I'll keep out of sight and hide behind those bushes. He will soon get tired and lie down to sleep, and that will be my chance, for he won't know I am anywhere around. Then I will sneak up and lasso him."

Billy saw the man all the time, but he pretended he did not, and so he slowly grazed along the side of the hill, then went down to the bottom, where a little stream ran through the meadow, took a drink, and slowly grazed up the other side. The man was growing very sleepy, for the day was warm and a gently, soothing little breeze was

blowing—just the kind of a day to make one drowsy. So he soon thought to himself: "I'll just take forty winks while that old hillygoat grazes, for he shows no signs of being either tired or sleepy. Then I'll crawl up close to him, for he will soon be at the top of the hill so I can do so and he won't see me."

Falls Asleep

Consequently the man threw himself on the grass behind the bush where he had been hiding, and fell fast asleep.

Now Billy had expected just this all along, and his one aim had been to tire the man out so he would take a nap. Unknown to the man, his white shirt showed through the bushes and Billy had been watching that white spot with one eye ever since the man had dropped to the ground to sleep.

Billy waited about ten minutes after it had disappeared, and then he kicked up his heels and scooted across the field, jumped the fence the other side, and proceeded down a lovely road he found, with shade trees on each side of it.

Gone!

The man awoke and looked for Billy, expecting to find he had grazed about to the top of the hill, but no Billy was in sight. He leaped to his feet in a hurry and ran for all he was worth down the hill and up the other side nearly to the top. Then he lay down and crawled through the grass on his stomach until he reached the very top, but to his dismay he saw no big white hillygoat in any direction—nothing but an old cow peacefully grazing.

Still After Him

"That old rascal!" the man said to himself. "I believe he saw me all the time and was just waiting for me to get tired out and drop off to sleep. I'll go back and get my horse and ride down to the road that runs along the other side of this field and see if I can't catch him yet."

Billy had thought the man might do this, so he ran as fast as he could until he came to a thick woods with a high rail fence around it. He jumped the fence and hid himself in among the thick trees and shrubs, to watch to see if the man did not follow him.

Hears Horse

Sure enough, he was scarcely well screened by the bushes when he heard the galloping of a horse, and presently in a cloud of dust the man passed by, urging his horse on faster and faster. Billy remained in hiding until the man gave up the hunt and came riding back dejectedly, his horse in a lather and himself hatless and covered with dust. Billy gave him time to disappear down the road, then he came out of his hiding place, leaped the fence, and proceeded down the road. He had not gone far when he came in sight of a large farmhouse, barn and out-buildings, around which he could see cows, horses, sheep, goats, pigs, turkeys and chickens.

Nice Farm

"My, that is a prosperous looking farm! The best I have seen in many a day. I think I will stop there for the night, for if I am not mistaken I see some Angora goats back of the barn. If that is so I should enjoy talking to some of my own kind. It has been a chance to talk to a goat, much less aristocratic ones like the Angoras."

Sees Old Woman

It was fast growing dark when Billy first spied the farm house and its many stables and sheds, and he could see some hired men driving the milk cows into their sheds to be milked, while others were leading the horses to water down to a little spring at the foot of the barnyard hill. An old woman in a sunbonnet was feeding the chickens and turkeys, while a boy with a shepherd dog was bringing in a flock of sheep to be shut in the shed for the night.

(Next time we will find out if Billy was made welcome at the farm.)

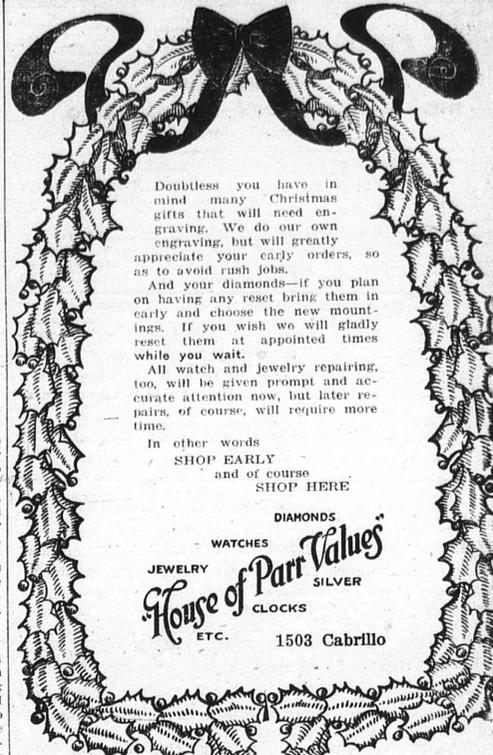
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By Mrs. Thompson

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