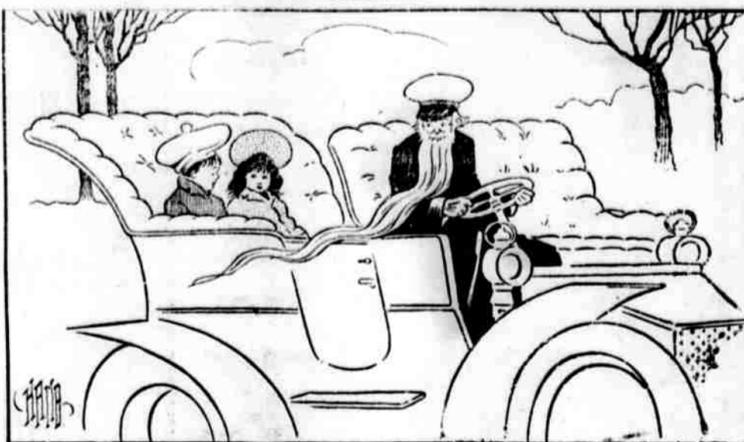


FOR OUR YOUNG FOLKS

Tommy's And Myrtle's Automobile Ride

(By Maud Walker.)
Tommy and Myrtle were very happy indeed. Their papa had brought home a wonderful automobile, all painted a rich dark red and having the most luxurious seats one ever sat upon. And how the great monsterlike vehicle did "chu, chu and chug, chug, chug," as it started to go. And how loudly the horn did "toot, toot, toot" and "honk, honk, honk," as they came near a corner or started round a curve. This was to warn all persons within its track that it was coming.
On the very first day that they had the automobile Tommy and Myrtle went with their papa and mamma for a long ride into the country. The sun shone bright and warm—one of those fall sunshines which makes one drowsy and a bit lazy—and a soft wind was stirring the leafless trees along the roadway. Before they had gone ten miles Myrtle and Tommy were nodding, their eyes seeming determined to close in spite of their mother's voice telling them to sit up and enjoy the scenery along the beautiful highway. But Tommy and Myrtle could no longer hold their own against the Sand Man, who kept blowing sand into their eyes to make them go shut. And after one's eyes are shut one might as well go to sleep, for what can one see without open eyes? So Tommy and Myrtle decided to take a nap before reaching the town, some ten miles further on, where they were to stop for luncheon.
But hardly had Tommy and Myrtle lost themselves in the land of Nod when of a sudden the automobile came to a stop, their papa jumped out and assisted their mamma to the ground. Then he said to Tommy and Myrtle: "You little ones just keep your seats, for mamma and I are just going down over this bank to gather some autumn leaves."
Tommy, still very drowsy, nodded his head and said: "Yes, papa, we'll sit perfectly still while you are gone."

Then he rested his head against the cushioned back and prepared to fall asleep again. Myrtle was still snoring away beside him. After sleeping what seemed a long time to the children they awoke to find their parents still absent from the automobile, which was saying "chu, chu, chu," as though about to start. Then, to the children's amazement, they saw sitting in the chauffeur's place—the seat that their papa occupied—a queer little old man with a long beard and sparkling eyes. He had turned round and was looking at them with a merry twinkle in his eyes, while a smile broadened his toothless mouth. He was so small that only his head showed above the back of the seat he occupied. So the children could not see what sort of a body he had, if, indeed, he had any at all.
"Well, how would you like a ride to the moon?" asked the strange individual, still smiling in the children's faces. "We can get there before dark if we go at a good speed. It's all nonsense for people to think they can't go to the moon—or any other planet they choose to visit. So, if you say so we'll go to the moon."
"But our papa and mamma," faltered Tommy, while Myrtle seemed on the point of crying out with fear.
"Your papa and mamma be hanged," laughed the funny old man. "They don't know anything about driving an automobile. I've been chief chauffeur to the King of Mars and the Man in the Moon, and I know what speed means. So, away we'll go and sup with the Man in the Moon tonight, going tomorrow to Mars in time for dinner, if you say so."
Before either of the children could speak the automobile was going down the road at a terrific speed, the dust flying in a cloud about it. At a sharp curve the machine almost went over, which made the old man cry out and laugh wildly. Then he rose and stood on his knees on the seat, and the frightened children could see that he was a hunchback, and almost a dwarf.



"So away we'll go and sup with the man in the moon tonight."

His clothing was smeared with mud and grime, and showed that he had been walking through bad roads. Scraps of grass and dead leaves clung to his back, and Tommy thought he must have been sleeping on the ground.
But it was little the two frightened children thought about the appearance of their strange chauffeur, for their lives were in danger they knew. The automobile was running at a speed that took their breath at times, and Tommy clung to the side of the seat to keep from being thrown out, while Myrtle clung to him.
"Oh, oh," wailed Myrtle, when she could get breath to articulate. "I'm sure we'll be killed; I'm sure we'll be killed! Oh, why did papa and mamma get out of here and leave us—"
But the wind took her breath, and she did not finish her poor little wail. Tommy, pale and too scared to try to speak, sat holding onto the seat for

dear life, his heart beating wildly in his breast.
"One thousand miles more and we'll be on the moon's great highway, leading straight to the palace of the Old Man in the Moon," shrieked the chauffeur, turning round to let the children catch his words. "Holy Smoke and burning cinders! but we are going some," he went on, again cackling and screaming with delight.
They were now in a road which led up a long and very steep hill, and the automobile panted furiously at the extra work it had to accomplish. Then the little, old man became more talkative, turning in his seat so that he might face the children. "Have you anything in here to eat?" he asked, smiling still till his toothless gums were exposed in a most hideous way.
Then a thought came to Tommy, one which he immediately used.
"Yes, we have a fine luncheon of

chicken and cake, but it is in a basket tied under the machine. If you get out and look underneath, you'll find it. Then we'll all have a nice little feast out here on the road."
"I'll do that, my friends," said the old man. "I'm hungry enough to eat a paid of baked children, if nothing else was to be had." And he laughed in a most diabolical manner as he said this. Then, just as they reached the top of the hill he brought the machine to a standstill, jumping out to get the basket of luncheon. "Right back under the machine," directed Tommy, rising as he spoke and pointing toward the rear end of the automobile. The old man went down on all fours, hunting for the basket, and the moment he did so Tommy leaped over the back of the front seat and took charge of the machine. This was his first ride in their own machine, but often he had ridden with his uncle,

who taught him the way to start and stop the automobile in case he should ever need to know. So, before Myrtle could ask what he intended doing, or the old man could get up from his stooping posture, Tommy had the automobile spinning down the slow grade of the opposite side of the hill, and was keeping it pretty well steered in the middle of the road. Never once did he look behind him to see what their late chauffeur was doing, but Myrtle glanced back from time to time to see the poor old cripple running feebly after them, frantically waving his arms for them to stop, his mouth open and his beard and hair blowing about his face.
Within a few minutes, however, Tommy saw coming toward them a farmer's wagon, and knowing they were now so far away from the old man that he could not overtake them before the farmer should come up, he slowed down the machine, fearing some accident should he go on at his present speed with the wagon coming toward them.
As the farmer drove up opposite the automobile Tommy brought it to a stop; and, holding up his hand to the man, said: "Excuse me, Mister, but will you give me a little assistance in a matter of great importance?"
The farmer drew in the reins of his slow-going horses and looked at the occupants of the great touring auto with much surprise. Without answering Tommy's question, he asked one for himself. "Waal, I'll be durned! What you little chaps doin' in that infernal thing by yourselves?"
The man's question was just the thing Tommy needed, and Tommy very glibly told all about the cause of their present predicament. Then, to the children's horror, the man said: "Why, that little old man, escaped from the insane asylum two days ago, and the whole country is being scoured for him. I'll just drive along and get him; and let him have a free ride to town." So saying, the farmer started his horses at a trot, and within a few minutes

Tommy and Myrtle saw him stop and take the luncheon—against his will—into his wagon and drive on toward town with him.
"Well, I guess if I could come this far without accident I can take the machine back to where we left papa and mamma," said Tommy, turning the automobile around.
About half an hour later, as they went sailing around a curve in the road, they saw, to their great happiness, their parents coming as fast as they could in a small top buggy, which they explained they borrowed at a farmhouse that they might overtake their children, for they had seen from where they were gathering the autumn leaves the little hunchback approach the automobile and jump in, and before they could climb the steep bank which led to the road they saw to their consternation the machine speeding madly away.
"Well, this is all the auto ride I want today," said the children's mamma, as she sat in the back seat of the machine between the children, her arms encircling both. "I never spent such an hour of suspense in my life as this past hour has been."
"Well, what do you suppose we fell behind a crazy man, who had his hands on the lever—if you were so uneasy?" laughed Tommy.
"We felt that we were to sup with the old Man in the Moon," said Myrtle, dryly, suppressing a smile. "And tomorrow we were to dine on Mars. Just think of the disappointment of our chauffeur when he has to return to his room in the asylum and postpone his engagements with people of other worlds! It's really too bad." And everybody laughed, now that the danger was over; and, tying the horses behind the auto, they proceeded merrily homeward, all thankful that Tommy and Myrtle's auto ride had ended so well.
In case San Francisco had to wear sackcloth and ashes it need only provide the sackcloth.

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