The Rubber Plant.

By W. R. ROSE.

When the lady of the house, as Henry always called her, went away for the month of July with little Sumner and littler Elizabeth, she left Henry in charge of the house. She wasn't quite sure she was doing right in putting this responsibility on the boy, but he had proved faithful in little things and she finally determined to trust him. She wanted it aired and opened up, and then she felt that it would be safer to have somebody sleeping there—even a boy. Henry was a good boy and a faithful boy, and she decided to take the chance of his proving an equally faithful watchman.

"You are not afraid to sleep alone in the house?" she asked him when she was leaving the final directions.

"No, ma'am," he laughed. "Not a bit of it. I'm not the sort that scares easy."

"I didn't think you were," the mistress smilingly remarked. "Only it may seem a little lonesome."

"I guess it will, ma'am," he admitted. "I'm country boys are used to being lonesome. I've slept lots of times in our old barn at home with no other company than the bats and the owls."

"You don't think you ought to have a—a revolver, do you, Henry?"

He shook his head.

"No, ma'am. I guess I won't have any use for one. I'll keep my old ball bat under the bed. That's a good enough weapon for me. If I haven't any pistol there won't nobody get shot accidental."

"I am glad you feel that way, Henry," said the lady of the house. "I don't like to think of a revolver lying around loose. Well, I guess I've given you all your instructions. Don't forget them, and—we all don't forget the rubber plant."

She laughed as she said this. The rubber plant was some sort of a joke to Mrs. Harnett but—well, no, she wasn't exactly, for all Henry was to guess what it was to her.

"No, ma'am, I won't," he promised as he helped her into the carriage. "I'll water it regular and keep it in the best of health against your coming back. I'll take good care of it."

The lady of the house laughed again. Its simple earnestness seemed a part of the family joke. For the rubber plant had created no end of amusement for John Harnett and John Hart. It bore the cavitle position of husband to the lady of the house. It had been through so many mishaps. Once John Harnett slid down the cellar stairs with it, and was much the more damaged of the two. It had fallen out of a window during its younger days, and once it was sat upon by John Hart's rich aunt. But it came through its trials heavily, owing largely to the exquisite care that Emily Harnett lavished upon it. It grew and thrived and became quite too heavy for the slender wrists of its dainty mistress. And so John Harnett had—in his jocular way to have—to do with it, the task of carrying it about devolved upon Henry. And it had to be carried a good deal. It was a whimsical plant, if its mistress could be believed, and it needed frequent change of location. And Henry had become quite expert in bearing it here and there, his mistress leading the way and telling him in which room and at which window to deposit it. And John Harnett finally dubbed him the First Lord in Waiting to the Rubber Tree.

John Harnett was in Germany just now, visiting certain great factories. He might return during his wife's absence from home.

"Don't take him for a burglar, Henry, if he comes at night," the lady of the house cautioned the boy.

"I'll be careful, ma'am," Henry replied. "I ain't one that forms a prejudice easy."

Whereat the lady of the house laughed in her delightful way and said that Henry had a fortunate disposition, a statement that filled the boy with much pride.

"And when Mr. Harnett does come, Henry," the lady went on, "you are to take the very best care of him. Don't forget that."

"I won't forget, ma'am," Henry replied. "I'll take just as good care of him as I do of the rubber plant."

It was good to hear his mistress laugh.

"He doesn't need quite so much moving around, Henry."

"No, ma'am. But I'll see that he gets the sun and the air and plenty of fresh water."

"Yes, Henry. And you are to care for his room, too. And, oh, Henry, don't forget to keep the sidewalk and the steps nicely swept. Mr. Harnett is very particular about that."

"I don't expect to forget anything you've told me. Mr. Harnett knows I'm more do'dependable."

"I wrote to him last week that I had decided to let you stay in the house. He will get the letter before he returns."

"Yes, ma'am. It wouldn't be pleasant to have him get back and not know I'm here. He might take me for somebody else."

Then the day of the departure of the lady of the house and her two children arrived. Henry helped them into the carriage and put their hand baggage after them, and said good-by to little Sumner, and to littler Elizabeth.

"Good-by, Henry," said the lady of the house and gave him her hand through the carriage window. "Take good care of everything, and don't forget to water the rubber plant every day."

And the carriage rolled away.

Henry stood by the curb standing after it until the corner was reached. Then he turned and went back to the porch. He suddenly felt lonesome. What a lovely lady his mistress was, and how kind she had been to him. And the children were so bright and clever, even if they did try to plague him. He was glad they were there to plague him, too. It would seem so lone and quiet. He sat on the top step a little while and whistled dolefully. Then he roused up. What a lucky boy he was to have such a home and how proud he should be to think that his mistress would trust him with the care of it. He would prove himself worthy of this confidence. And his master, too. Had he not taken him aside one day and told him that he must look higher than the labors of a boy of all work, and that when he, the master, came back from his present trip he would find something better for him to do—something where he could climb. And the master had suddenly added, in his jolking way, that it wouldn't be a rubber tree either.

Yes, he would carry out his mistress's behest to the very letter of satisfaction. And the moment he went into the house and watered the rubber plant, as he did not need it. And he would lock all the doors and windows for the night, and [illegible] and then would go to bed early and as they were the first true words he had spoken to them.

Then he went back on the porch and thought it over. What would he do with all the spare time? He can't keep busy. And what a chance there would be to improve his reading. He wasn't much of a reader, and his spelling was defiant in frequent spots. He do wanted to make himself worthy of that better place—that place that Mr. Harnett had promised him, he now sadly had. Then he was going to tidy up the cellar, and hang a swing in the attic for little Sumner—there was a smart boy. He could read better than Henry could. Oh, there would be plenty to do. He mustn't forget the rug. He was [illegible] shake and the [illegible] place.

He was [illegible] Hart [illegible] the Harnetts [illegible] lives at her [illegible] home county.

So Henry's life as a caretaker proved a somewhat humdrum one. It's only real episode were the trips to the restaurant, and these began to pall upon his taste. But he conscientiously devoured amusement to the books they were little Sumner's books, and quite delightful when you mastered the art of reading them without the drawback of guessing at certain of the longer words, and Henry was much pleased with his progress.

But he did not forget the rubber plant. How it throve under his attention! And how pleased the lady of the house would be! He toted it—as he called the transplanting operation—from hall to library, and from library to dining room, and from dining room back to hall, and so on through the giddy round again. It had the choicest windows for its outlook and it took the air frequently on the broad porch. And Henry washed off the glossy green leaves from time to time and gave the plant what he called the polishing touches. He couldn't have treated it with more respect had it been a family fetich. And it certainly seemed to show a grateful appreciation of his attentions.

One night the lady of the house had been gone nearly three weeks and Henry was beginning to prepare for her return by redoubled efforts to put everything in the best of shape—the boy was awakened in his little upstairs room by a sudden twitch of conscience. At least that is what it seemed to him as he opened his eyes in the darkness. He tried to think why his conscience had called him. He had omitted some duty, no doubt. That must be it. What was it? He was a healthy boy, and not used to waking until daylight. What could have disturbed him? And then he suddenly wondered if he had forgotten to water the rubber plant.

He remembered carrying it from the library to the dining room, but he couldn't remember bringing the pitcher and letting the stream trickle about the roots. It was funny that a thing like that would awaken him. The plant could wait until morning. It surely wasn't unfavorable. He would go to sleep again. He tried and couldn't. He laughed at himself. Then he decided to get down and look [illegible] for [illegible] it was.

[illegible]

[illegible] Christmas [illegible] Then [illegible] and how [illegible] baseball [illegible] He chuckled [illegible] as he [illegible] the handle. [illegible] cautious.

Then he cautiously felt his way to the back stairs and began to descend. He had gone a half dozen steps when he suddenly stopped. Now he knew what had aroused him. Somebody was in the dining room.

He stood still, his heart beating loudly. And then he heard stir voices and some cautious footsteps. Burglars!

He meekly [illegible] and [illegible] to the [illegible] window and showed an alarm. Instead he crept down the stairs and into the hall, and even close to the dining room door. The door stood ajar and through it he could see two men busy in the [illegible] the [illegible] of [illegible] over the [illegible] [illegible] a dark lantern.

"Since the [illegible] empty?" [illegible] Another voice.

"I [illegible]

[illegible]

He hated to go back in the dark. It would seem so lone and quiet. He sat on the top step a little while and whistled dolefully. Then he roused up. What a lucky boy he was to have such a home and how proud he should be to think that his mistress would trust him with the care of it. He would prove himself worthy of this confidence. And his master, too. Had he not taken him aside one day and told him that he must look higher than the labors of a boy of all work, and that when he, the master, came back from his present trip he would find something better for him to do—something where he could climb. And the master had suddenly added, in his joking way, that it wouldn't be a rubber tree either.

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[illegible]

away for the summer. We can take our time."

"Is this the job Barney means?"

"Yes. He'd had his eye on it for some time. Get the box. There's some good stuff here."

The box was [illegible]

[illegible] Were two of them [illegible] course they were armed. He wished he had that revolver now. Why, he could stand there and watch them, and when they went out he would follow them and give the alarm. That would be the wisest thing for him to do. He wouldn't needlessly expose himself. He wasn't recreant in his trust. If he ran it there and was shot it wouldn't help matters. Yes. He would wait and watch the rascals.

There was a jingling of silver and frequent flashes of light, and the low buzz of two voices. The boy, with straining ears and tense muscles, waited in the dark hallway.

"The other bag," whispered one of the voices.

There was a gentle movement and then a loud crash. It was followed by a gleam of light from the lantern and a smothered oath.

"What's that?" cried the first voice.

[illegible]

"I'm [illegible] a crystal plant! [illegible] it's other bags."

The blood suddenly surged to Henry's head. The scoundrels had knocked over the precious rubber plant! The plant that was left in his keeping! No doubt they had ruined it. The plant that his dear mistress loved so well! The enormity of the thing filled the boy's simple mind. A terrible rage seized him. He thrust the door open.

What's that?" hissed a voice as the lantern was whirled about. The boy, with club uplifted, sprang toward the dazzling spot of light. A pistol cracked, something hot seared the lad's shoulder, and then the stout hickory club fell. There was a crash, a heavy fall, and the sound of running feet. Henry, raging, followed followed to the open kitchen door only to see a dark figure [illegible] the back fence. The lad fired a [illegible] Another [illegible] the fleeing robber and then [illegible] the kitchen door and drew a heavy [illegible] and [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] Thunder [illegible] on the [illegible] Henry knew [illegible] The room was alive. The boy ran to the back hall and came back with two towels and tied the fellow's wrists and ankles lightly.

Then he looked with a sinking heart for the overturned plant. As his eyes fell on the scattered pot and the scattered dirt, the front door bell rang sharply. The boy arose and opened the door and peered out. Two men were standing on the porch. One was his master, the other was a policeman.

The master looked hard at the boy.

"Why, it's Henry," he cried. "What's wrong, Henry? Why was the house lighted up?"

The two men pushed into the hall.

"The lady left me in charge," said the boy fully. His anger had almost subsided and his legs felt strangely weak.

"Did she? I suppose she wrote me about it. But what's the matter, Henry? You are pale and trembling."

The big policeman pushed a little closer.

"The lady told me particularly to take care of the rubber plant."

The master suddenly chuckled.

"Yes. What happened to it?"

The boy's lip quivered.

"The—the burglars knocked it over, sir, and smashed it."

"Burglars! What do you mean?"

And the master strode forward.

But the boy was ahead of him, and stooping over the prostrate plant.

"See, sir, see what they did!" he groaned.

"Look here, officer," cried the master, "what's this?"

The big policeman hustled forward and stooping down dragged the prowler out of the floor into the light.

"Good enough!" he cried. "Here's a chap we've been looking for high and low. He's got a nasty cut on the head. Look at the size of the gun he carries. Did the boy do this?"

"I did it," said Henry. "The knocked over the plant and I gave him a crack with the club."

"Good boy," growled the big policeman. "Look at the swag in the bag. Here, sir, I'll not telephone for the wagon. He can walk. He's a slippery one."

But the master [illegible] on Henry.

[illegible]

[illegible] Sumner had given him [illegible] Christmas [illegible] The [illegible] and [illegible] the [illegible] and how [illegible] baseball [illegible] He chuckled [illegible] as he [illegible] the handle. [illegible] cautious.

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[illegible]

And from [illegible] the [illegible] voice as he called up the stairs.—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

How Washington Looks to the West.

Washington is known as "Pigtarville" among Westerners. It has more pigtails than any other place on the world. Hardly a man [illegible] every third man owns and wears a pigtail. The pigtail is well as [illegible] a year then. Residents [illegible] who [illegible] out, make gain as [illegible] and [illegible] as some kind [illegible] in the Government service. Washington [illegible] Kansas City Journal.

[illegible]

[illegible]

CHILDREN'S DEPARTMENT.

POLLY'S GARDEN.

When Polly makes her garden
In a corner of the lot,
She digs, and smoothly rakes across,
A nice, warm, sunny spot.

Then from her apron pocket
She takes her bags of seeds—
Sweet peas, pansies, poppies—
As many as she needs.

Here beds she cuts in diamonds
With a pen-stick sharp and true,
Then with her fingers digs the holes
And drops the seeds within.

"And now," cries Polly, [illegible]
"I'll [illegible]
Till April [illegible]
[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

FROM A FAIRY STORY.

"Let us reverse things for an hour," said the fairy, "and see what will happen when mortals see each other as they are, and know each other as the fairies know them."

Accordingly he drew a circle about him, and sat down once more to view the sport. The first to appear in the charmed ring was a slip of a girl in a cotton gown, and clasping to her breast a picture of primroses and violets which she had tried to paint and was trying to sell that she might buy fruit for a dying mother. As she stood within the circle her face lost its [illegible] look, [illegible] the [illegible] and [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] Lady [illegible] Yet [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]