

By William Saroyan

Three Armenian Stories



THE priest turned to the man who had stabbed him in the back, studied his face carefully, and, dying, said, "Why do you kill me? I have never done you a kindness."

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A man had a 'cello with one string over which he drew the bow for hours at a time, holding his finger in one place. His wife endured this noise for seven months, waiting patiently for the man to either die of boredom or destroy the instrument. Inasmuch as neither of these desirable things happened, however, one night she said, in a very quiet voice, too, you may be sure: "I have observed that when others play that magnificent

instrument, there are four strings over which to draw the bow, and the players move their fingers about continuously." The man stopped playing a moment, looked at his wife wisely, shook his head, and said: "You are a woman. Your hair is long, your sense short. Of course the others have four strings and move their fingers about constantly. They are looking for the place. I've found it."

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An unhappy boy, visiting the home of his father's friend, was given a toy sword and a toy pistol to drive away his sorrow. The boy raced about the house, destroying enemies of many kinds and making so much noise that it was impossible for his father and his father's friend to talk to one another, which they wanted very much to do. The father asked the boy to quieten down a little if possible.

It was not, however, completely possible, so that, beginning quietly, the small boy gradually returned to his loud slaughtering of the enemy, and was again asked to quiet down.



victoria.

Same result. Quiet for a moment, noisier than ever after a moment. Another request. Same result.

Finally, the father, who had heard that severity is a good thing sometimes with children, not realising that his son was not children, but a personality, a real person, snatched the toy sword and the toy pistol away from the boy and put them out of reach. This irritated the boy and revealed to him that his real enemy was his father, which was a terrible thing to realise, and definitely something to cry about, which he did with great power and some beautifully losing of breath and so on. This, of course, was still worse than the battle racket of the boy.

"Oh, give him back his toys," the boy's father's friend suggested.

"No," the father said.

"Please do," the other said. "How the poor boy cries. My goodness, he is truly broken-hearted."

"No," the father said. "I shall not capitulate this time. I came to talk with you."

"Oh, give him his sword and his gun and let the boy destroy the world if he wishes," the friend said.

"Well, all right, then," the father said.

He offered the toys to the boy,

but now the boy had no use for them. This irritated his father very much.

"Here," he said. "Here is your sword. Here is your gun. Fire away. Cut away."

"No," the boy said.

He began to cry worse than ever.

The friend decided to help out, if possible. The boy was standing at the window, with his back turned, sobbing tragically and vigorously. Six years ago the friend had gone to a carnival and



had tried to win a pearl-handled automatic revolver, but instead had won a kewpie doll. It was made of chalk and was the most ridiculous image imaginable, neither human nor anything else. An absurdity. For some reason he had decided, however, to keep the thing on the chance that it might come in handy some day, somehow.

The time, apparently, had come.

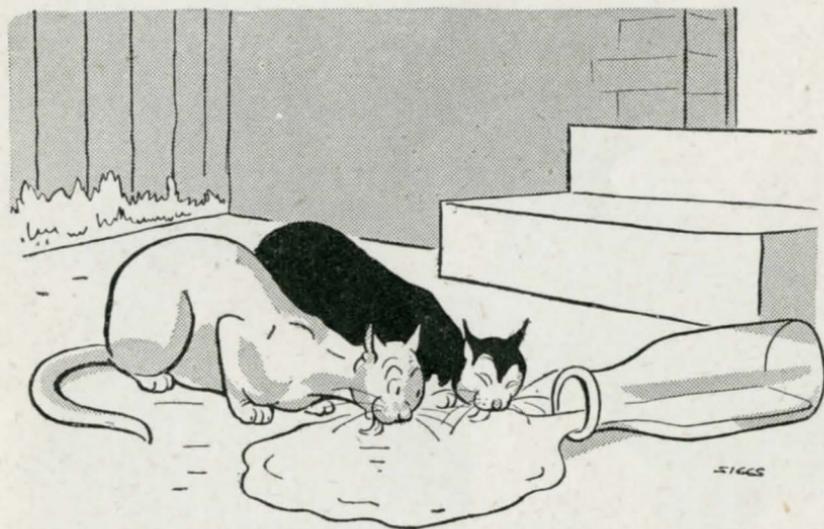
He hurried to the closet in which he kept all the debris that accumulates over the years around a man, and brought out the kewpie. He hurried to the crying boy and said, "Please do not cry any more. If you will stop crying, you may have this."

Here the friend brought the kewpie from behind him and thrust it out to the boy. The boy took the ridiculous doll and stopped crying.

For fully two minutes he studied the doll in absolute silence, while his father and the friend studied

him. The tears dried on his cheeks, he looked up critically at his father and his father's friend and, in the most powerful Armenian in the world he said simply, "I'll take it home and break it."

This last story is my favourite Armenian story, and I tell it as often as possible, both in English and in Armenian, but nobody so far has laughed at it. Therefore, I explain the story. This also gets the story nowhere. Nobody thinks it's funny, that's all. I think it is very funny.



"I suppose by rights we should be crying!"