

The Rescue of Old Glory

by Carolyn Sherwin Bailey

When mother was making plans for a "safe and sane Fourth," Uncle Henry said, "Why not take the children to the park and have a kite party? I'll help them make the kites."

The next morning Harry and Anna were busy out on the piazza with Uncle Henry. By ten o'clock three handsome white kites were drying in a row. Anna called them the "Big Bear, the Middle-Sized Bear, and the Baby Bear."

When the kites were dry, the whole family started for the park—Uncle Henry with the Big Bear and a box of luncheon, Harry with the Middle-Sized Bear, and Anna, of course, with the Baby Bear. Mother carried some sewing and grandmother carried the surprise, something that Uncle Henry had brought home in a flat box. When they reached the park, they found a French society holding a picnic. A tent was up, the band was playing, the older boys were shooting at a target, and the little boys and girls were flying red and blue balloons.

Uncle Henry said, "Ladies first, always," and he soon had the Baby Bear in the air, and the string in Anna's hands. He drove the bobbin into the ground, to make sure that the kite would not get away. Harry insisted upon putting his kite up alone. Then Uncle Henry put up the Big Bear, and when it was up some distance, he asked grandmother to open the box. Then he shook out a red-white-and-blue silk American flag, and the crowd cheered.

Uncle Henry tied the flag to a loop of string, and fastened it to the Big Bear's string. Then he let it out, hand over hand. Up, up, went Old Glory, and snapped in the breeze. The higher it went, the farther out the kite soared, until it hung over the harbor. They were all so busy watching it that they had not seen that the picnic people below were pointing up to the flag; but when the band struck up the Star-Spangled Banner, and the foreign people began to sing, Uncle Henry noticed one dark-skinned boy who sang with a strange accent and great energy, and who kept his big, solemn eyes on the flag that glowed against the sky. But when the boy, whose name was Caspar, saw the others looking at him, he ran down the hill and hid behind the children.

"Any one who can sing the Star-Spangled Banner like that is a good American," said Uncle Henry, as he drove his bobbin into the ground, and prepared to open the box of luncheon.

When the foreigners went in to dinner, Caspar did not follow. He took his sandwiches, frosted cake, and ice-cream, and sat down on the grass, where he could look at the flag.

There was not a child in the whole park who loved the Stars and Stripes as little Caspar did, not even the two American children; for in his own country Caspar had lived in a mission house, where they had told him all about America, and how the Stars and Stripes protected the people, even the poorest of little children. They told him that he must never harm the flag, or allow it to be trampled on. After he came to America, his teacher had taught him to salute the flag.

He had heard the flag song on the big ship, and he felt that it was Old Glory that had brought him safe to one of his own country-women in America, with whom he lived.

Caspar was thinking of all this as he lay on the grass, and saw the flag fluttering in the light wind. He had watched it for some time, when he saw it give a quick little shiver, then begin to sink slowly, and then faster. He looked to the end of the line, and saw that the great white kite was dipping about in a strange manner; then he looked up to the hill and saw the kite man leaping down the slope as fast as he could. The American children were running behind him.

Caspar trembled with excitement. What would happen to the flag? Would it get trampled upon, or would it go out to sea and get wet and spoiled? Oh, he must help them get Old Glory! He ran until he was directly beneath the flag; then he stretched his arms high to catch it if it fell. But a strong breeze came up, and carried the Big Bear over the water, and pulled the flag with it. Caspar ran on to the water's edge.

Caspar did not know what to do next. There were no people on the shore, and no boats were near. The flag had not been trampled on, but it might fall in the water any minute. Where were the people? Did they know that a great calamity was about to happen, to everybody in the park, to everybody in America, perhaps to the mission ladies who had been so good to him? How could the people sit about, eating and drinking, when there was such trouble in the world? He cried out to Uncle Henry and the children, who were now quite near, strange and broken words, and he tried to tell them that he could not swim.

"Good boy, swim for it! You'll get it!" shouted Uncle Henry.

Caspar understood the word "swim," but not the rest. He thought the kite man must be telling him that he could not swim, either. He looked out to the flag; it was surely going into the water; it flapped and dipped, then dipped deeper still, right into the water. Caspar did not wait another minute. Off went his jacket, and with a wild look toward the shore, he ran into the water. His feet slipped on the sandy bottom, and the kite jerked up, then down, then up—but it was always just out of reach.

They watched the boy, who was trying hard to keep the flag in sight.

"Hurry, hurry, Uncle Henry, he can't swim a stroke!" shouted Harry.

Uncle Henry was just in time; Caspar had a firm hold on Old Glory, and came up tangled in its folds.

After Uncle Henry had shaken the water out of the boy, he sat him on his shoulder, where everybody could see him. "Now, one, two, three!" he said, as he waved his free arm. "All cheer for the boy who would not let the flag be lost even if he couldn't swim! Hoo-ray!"

"Hoo-ray! hoo-ray! hoo-ray!" they said; and then they cheered all over again, and crowded round Uncle Henry and Caspar until the pair started home to put on dry clothes.

When little Caspar went home that night, he carried the flag that he had saved. Grandmother had washed and dried it, and it looked as good as new.

Source:

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