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A Premature Fourth. BY PAUL INGELW. INCIPIENT Fourth of July enthusiasm was astir as the Millville academy bell rolled into the depot, discharging a cheery-faced, portly gentleman of 50, carrying a bulging satchel. He came out on the "market street" in time to get a shower-bath from a pack of firecrackers flung by a crowd of urchins, enveloping him in a veritable "blaze of glory."

"Hi! you young lumps!" he roared—but the coterie only grinned, for their victim was chuckling as though he enjoyed the excitement, tossed them a quarter, and laughingly strolled over to the farmers' wagons lining the square. "There's the best-natured man I ever did see!" the occupant of one was remarking as the man sauntered up. "Any of these rigs going down the old Fork Road?" he inquired. "I am," nodded the other—"thirty miles."

"A lift of two will suit me." "Jump in. I say, stranger, you're the beamiest mortal I ever set eyes on; I'd a-chased those bothersome kids with the whip lash."

"Pshaw—was a boy myself once," retorted the traveler. "And—beating? Why shouldn't I be? Just back from the Philippines, easy conscience, some money, and come home to have a jolly Fourth with my best friends."

Rolf Burton, an orphan from an early age, had experienced some hard knocks and single-handed, had fought his way to quite a competency. Two miles from Millville lived the only relatives he knew. They were the Phillips and the Ames families, occupying neighboring farms—his half-cousins. He had drifted down here a few years back, and they had made it very pleasant for him. Especially had young George Ames put himself out to entertain him, and quite naturally wholesome, warm-hearted Alma Phillips discovered a kindred friendship.

A great idea came into Burton's mind; these two were made for one another. They were very young—only sixteen then—but mutually in love. It would be the object of his life to nurture their pretty engagement. They would marry, he would endow George with a farm, suggesting a life-tenancy for himself as a compensation.

Then came up the Spanish war. Burton caught the martial fever—at home—and the real malaria in the Philippines. Now he was coming back to carry out his original plans, and was joyful as a vacation school boy, as he jumped down from the wagon.

"Hello!" he expanded, as he neared the Phillips farm. "Great, old Seth, sure! Hi!" roared the great, bluff fellow, and nearly shook his cousin off the hay rake with the suddenness of his hail. "Well! well!" spoke the farmer, starting. "This is a surprise!"

"Thought it about time for a wedding—see?" rolicked Burton. "So, bobbed down on you—hey?" "Wedding—who's?" muttered Seth, crabbedly.

"Who?" retorted Burton. "Who should it be but George and Alma?" "Shut up!" shouted Phillips, savagely. "Don't mention any Georges, or Ames, or that rascally tribe, to me!" "Eh! what's happened here?" stared the astounded visitor.

"Go up to the house. I'm busy, but I'll hurry through and join you soon. Hold on—say, Burton; you're not going down to see Si Ames?" challenged Seth roughly.



One hundred and twenty-six years old to-day, and feelin' frisky as a kitten, b'gosh!—Minneapolis Journal.

"Why not?" "Then drop me—that's all! I'm through with that rubbish; you can't be my friend and his'n, too?"

"Where?" whistled Burton, trudging on. He sat down by the wayside, finally. His wits were askew. What, indeed, was happening? Things seemed turned all topsy-turvy! He got up as he saw a light buggy approaching, and recognized old Lawyer Russell. There was an interchange of greetings. The attorney stated he was going first to the Phillips farm, then on to Ames' place.

"I'll go with you. Anything valuable here, Squire?" asked Burton, as he placed his satchel behind the seat next to the attorney's document bag. "Nothing but the papers in this pestiferous dispute between Ames and Phillips," answered Russell.

"Because I've got some extra handbombs in my satchel!" half-laughed Burton. "How's that?" "A dozen genuine double-headed Chinese giant fire-bombs. Brought 'em clear from Manila to celebrate Fourth of July with the Phillips kids. Looks, though," suggested Burton, ruefully, "as if there isn't going to be much celebrating around these parts!"

"I fear not," gravely replied Russell. "I suppose you know the bone of contention between these two stubborn-headed old fellows?" "I don't, but I want to know," asserted Burton.

"Well, you remember the eighty-acre strip that lies between the two farms—belongs to the Morris estate. Last year Ned Morris leased it for ten years to Ames. Same time, unknowingly, Lida Morris leased it to Phillips. Both claimed it. Neither wits and dogs over their respective claims. I suggested they use it alternate years. No go. I've got the losses in my document bag there, and I've come down to see if they won't fix the matter up."

When they reached the Phillips farm a joyous brood of children surrounded "Uncle Rolf." He was kept busy distributing newly minted dollars and agreeing to help them shoot off their fireworks, and act the festive old boy generally.

Provided with the means of replenishment, the children set off some of their stock in hand. Meantime, old Seth came in from the fields. Burton sat on the veranda, watching the stubborn-eyed farmer while the lawyer explained that he and Ames must compromise or go to law.

"Law be it!" cried Seth. "I'll never give in." "Bang!" An awful clatter rent the air. The spot where they had left the lawyer's horse and buggy was a maelstrom of fire and detonation. "My double-headed Chinese bombs!" cried Burton.

"My legal document bag!" quavered Russell. "This had happened: The youthful Phillips brood had thrown some crackers into the buggy, fire had communicated to the contents, there had been an explosion, and Uncle Rolf's cherished importations had gone up in smoke!"

"Hurrah for the Fourth of July!" Uncle Rolf waved his hat with a will. "But it isn't the Fourth of July—yet!" piped a tiny nephew. "Hurrah for the third of July, then?" roared the whole-hearted visitor. "Glory! Buggy blown to flinders, horse run away. Lawyer Russell scared to death, but all the same—hurrah!"

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Why He Objected. He—But what does your father see in me to object to, I'd like to know? She—He doesn't see anything in you. That is why he objects.

