

## \* \* The Story Page \* \*

### One of the Least.

There were three of them on the train—two young girls and a young man—and they were evidently on a "lark" as well as on a journey. The three occupied two seats, the girls sitting together and the young man facing them, with their one valise on the seat beside him.

They had looked out of the window until they were tired of that, had chaffed the newsboy and asked the brakeman nonsensical questions until they had earned a sharp answer from each, and were now left with only the other passengers to furnish material for fun.

Their keen eyes roved about, finding little in the quiet, well dressed crowd to excite comment. The bridal party and the baby, those fruitful sources of amusement on the train, were missing, and wit languished.

At the next stop, an old man came in—a shabby, old man. He took a seat near the young man, and they seized upon him as a legitimate object for sport. He took off his battered old hat, and they giggled over the wen on the top of his head, over which his straggling gray hairs were carefully combed. They found material for fun in the whisp of gray beard on the aged face, and in everything he wore, clean down to the cracked shoes on his feet, from which a knitted blue sock was trying to peep.

The old man's eyes were bleared and red, and he leaned heavily on his cane as the conductor came in. His voice was cracked, and shrill, too, as he asked questions, while the official punched his ticket and looked at him as if he would gladly send him into the second class car if his ticket were not first class.

The roar of the train dulled his hearing, and he held his trembling hand behind his ear to catch the conductor's answer, which was crisp and unsatisfactory. The poor get little of that ready courtesy which well-to-do people exact as their right from train officials; and even the silly young man, with his high collar and low stock of good sense, met with more respect from the conductor than this aged man.

The old man was intensely funny to the trio on the lookout for amusement, and wit, such as it was, circulated freely at his expense.

The young people were to change cars at the next station, riding a few hours on a branch road, and the train was slowing up. They pushed rudely past the old man, who was evidently preparing to change, too, acting as if time were of the greatest importance. They stood on the platform as he descended from the car, going toward the baggage car with feeble steps.

A little, old fashioned, hairy trunk, studded with brass nails, stood in the baggage car, and the baggage man gave it a vicious fling out upon the platform. The old winced as the trunk struck the platform, and he hastened his steps as if to protect it. Too late! Like the old man, it was weak with age, and its sides parted at the shock, and the cover flew up from the back as the hinges broke.

A groan burst from the old man's lips, and with trembling hands he began to fumble helplessly at the garments, which loosened from their close packing, had rolled out upon the platform.

"That your trunk, daddy? Sorry I busted it for you; but Ta! there, he'll fix it up for you good as ever," cried the baggage man. He was not a bad fellow, when he was not in a hurry, and was really sorry.

"Going up the branch, hey?" said the station master at the office. "Well, just you wait a minute—there's plenty of time—and I'll get a rope. Jim's a little too fresh when he gets hold of an old piece of baggage, but we'll have it all right in a jiffy."

The young people stood by, quite convulsed with merriment, as the old man bent over his scattered property, tears of distress stealing down his aged face. A woman's faded wrapper, an old bonnet with black satin strings, each carefully rolled up and pinned, and a pair of shoes even more worn than those upon the old man's feet, lay on the platform, and he was trying to fold up a faded plaid shawl when the baggage man came back with the rope.

"Here, let me do this, pappy," he said, kindly. "You're all unstrung, and I'm used to this kind of business." He would have taken the shawl, but the old man resisted.

"I can't," he said, his cracked voice trembling with emotion. "Mother had it round her shoulders when she died. You're kind, mister; but it seems like I can't let nobody touch her things but me. We lived together forty-nine years; just one more would a been our golden wedding, though we ain't never had much gold or silver in our lives; but the good Lord took her, and these clothes is all I've got left of her. We took this trunk with us on our wedding journey, and I thought it would last to carry her things this last time. Seemed like 'twouldn't be all right to put 'em into a new, strange trunk that didn't know her."

The merriment had all gone out of the faces of the two

young girls, and the young man turned away and walked to the end of the platform.

"Going to live with somebody, sir?" asked the baggage man, wiping his eyes, apparently on account of a cinder or something of the kind, which had lodged there.

"Yes. I've a daughter, sir; just like her mother, and her husband is kind, too. I'm taking these clothes to her, and she'll vally 'em beyond everything. He had the faded bonnet in his hand and was patting it tenderly.

"I remember, sir, the day I bought this 'ere bunnet. She hadn't had a new one in five year, and, sir, she was so pleased when I brought it home that she kissed me. Yes, sir, kissed me, and we'd been done with that sort of thing for years. Not that we didn't love one another, but seems like our love run so deep that there wa'n't no froth nor bubbles on the surface; no need of kissing and such, you understand."

The baggage man nodded. He wondered if his love for a bride of a year would ever run so deep that it would not seek outward expression, and he waited patiently while the old man folded and tucked the worn garments into the little old trunk.

"There you are, sir," he said, respectfully, after the strong cord was wound round and round and the trunk was made as secure as possible. "There's half an hour yet to wait. Come in to the lunch counter and have a cup of hot coffee with me."

The young girls walked away, arm in arm. "I never felt so ashamed in my life," said one, as she wiped away a tear with her embroidered handkerchief. "That poor old soul, and we laughing at him!"

It happened that the four were seated near each other again in the train going up the branch. The old man was weary, and he tucked his old hat into the corner of the window frame, and, drooping his head upon it, was soon asleep.

Though the day was chilly, he had no overcoat. One of the gay young girls—she who had had the grace to be ashamed—slipped off her handsome fur-trimmed cape, and, rising, gently laid it around his shoulders.

Her companion did not even smile, nor did the young man; and the train rattled on toward its destination.—Youth's Companion.

### The Nodding Chinaman

BY IDA T. THURSTON.

"Rachel, it is time for you to go," said Rachel's mother, gently.

The child was curled up in the wide window seat absorbed in a book of fairy stories. When her mother awoke she closed the book and, with a long sigh, slipped down from the window.

"I wish I didn't have to go, mother," she said soberly.

"But since you do, run up stairs and put on your clean gingham. Aunt Elizabeth won't like you to be late."

Rachel went up stairs, but she did not hurry. Her mother heard her moving about in her room, and presently she came slowly down. She had brushed her hair and put on a fresh blue and white checked gingham, with a sunbonnet to match.

"Good-by, dear," her mother said as she tied the bonnet strings under the round chin and then kissed the sober little face. "We must always do what is right you know, even if we don't really want to."

"Yes'm," answered Rachel, gravely.

Through the window her mother watched the little figure as it went slowly down the road.

"She doesn't intend to get there too soon," the mother said to herself, with a smile.

But, though she walked so slowly, it seemed to Rachel only a few minutes, before she came to a big white house set quite a distance back from the road. She went up the path and around to the kitchen door. As she opened the door she smelled the sweet, sickish odor of boiling fruit. Mary, the "hired girl," was doing up preserves. She looked up as the child entered.

"Oh, its you, is it?" Your aunt is in the sitting-room."

Rachel walked silently across the big kitchen and through the hall to the sitting room. Aunt Elizabeth sat in the big rocking chair by the window. She was a tiny old lady; with snow-white hair and very black eyes that seemed to Rachel as sharp as needles.

"You're late," she said, as the child pushed open the door. "Why didn't your mother send you earlier?"

"She did. I—I—guess—I didn't walk very fast," answered Rachel, her cheeks getting very hot.

"Well, well, now you are here take off your sunbonnet and get the book and read to me. There it is on the table."

With a sigh the child obeyed. She knew what the book was—it was Fox's Book of Martyrs, and Rachel hated it. She would not look at the dreadful pictures,

but she stumbled on through the reading, her aunt frequently correcting her pronunciation.

At last the old lady said, "There that will do. I must go and see if Mary is cooking the fruit as it ought to be." She rose and, glancing about the room, added, "You can look at the china in the cabinet there while I'm gone, but remember not to touch a thing."

"Yes'm," answered Rachel, softly.

She put the big book back on the table and walked over to the cabinet. It was full of queer cups and plates and vases from China and Japan. Rachel had often seen these things. She did not care much about them. If she could only go into the parlor, she thought, and see the funny nodding Chinaman, in the big cabinet there.

Then her eyes opened wide in delighted surprise, for there on the second shelf stood the nodding Chinaman himself, only he was not nodding at all; but he looked as if he wanted to, Rachel thought, and she knew just how to make him do it. She stood up on her tiptoes and reached out her chubby forefinger and gently touched the bald china head. Instantly it began to nod, the tiny pink tongue had begun to waggle, and the little china hands to dangle up and down in the funny way she remembered so well.

Rachel laughed delightedly. When the Chinaman's head had almost stopped she touched it again. She had quite forgotten that she had been forbidden to touch anything in the cabinet. She had just reached out to touch the mandarin for the third time when she heard her aunt's voice in the hall. It startled her so that her hand slipped, and the next moment the Chinaman lay on his back, his hands waving helplessly in the air, while his queer bald head rolled off by itself, the little pink tongue feebly quivering for a moment before it disappeared in the open mouth.

For an instant Rachel stood staring with terrified eyes at the headless body of the queer little nodding man, then she turned, snatched up her bonnet, and dashed through the front hall as fast as her feet could carry her.

But as she ran up the road her pace began to slacken—the run became a walk and the walk grew slower and slower until at last she stopped short and threw a hasty glance over her shoulder towards the big white house.

"Oh, I can't!" she moaned, her heart beating hard and fast. "I don't know what she'd say."

She stood in the middle of the road, her frightened blue eyes shining out of her little white face, the sun-bonnet, which she had forgotten to put on, dangling from her hand.

Suddenly her mother's words seemed to sound again in her ears, "We must always do what is right you know, even if we really don't want to."

Rachel shivered. "I can't!" she whispered, and two big tears rolled down her cheeks, and made two wet dark spots on her clean gingham dress. But after a moment she drew herself up and set her lips together hard.

"I s'pose—I must," she said aloud, and then turning she ran back as fast as she could go. She didn't dare go slowly for fear her courage would fail.

Once more she pushed open the kitchen door and, unheeding Mary's amazed, "For the land's sake!" burst into the quiet sitting room. Aunt Elizabeth was in her big chair again, and her eyes looked harder and sharper than ever, Rachel thought.

"Well, well!" she began, sternly but Rachel interrupted her, speaking in little frightened gasps.

"Oh, Aunt Elizabeth—I broke—the nodding Chinaman and—I'm so sorry. I didn't mean"—Then the troubled voice quavered into sobs.

The old lady peered through her glasses at the trembling little figure and the white, frightened face. Without a word she rose and walked over to the cabinet and looked at the mandarin lying on the shelf. Rachel had followed her. Aunt Elizabeth picked up the mandarin and set him on his feet, then she picked up his head and slipped it into the hole between his shoulders, and, lo, there was the funny little man nodding away as if nothing had happened to him.

Aunt Elizabeth turned with a stern reproof on her lips, but the sight of the joyful relief in the little maid's face hushed the words on her tongue.

"There, there, child," she exclaimed, hastily, "I guess you won't touch my china another time."

And Rachel was very sure she never would.—The Congregationalist.

### The Cuckoo in Jamie's Pocket.

"What has happened to my clock, Jane?" cried Mrs. Peck.

Jane, the housemaid, came running into the library. The little Swiss clock that hung on the wall was trying to strike eleven with a hoarse, rasping sound. The small door, from which the bird used to make his appearance, crying, "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" eleven times at this hour, was open; but no bird was there. "Deed, and I'm 'fraid them boys have been after it."

Just then a little boy came bounding into the room. "Mamma," he said, "Aunt Anne came by the gate in her victoria just now, and took Charlie up on the driver's seat. They are going to Cold Sulphur Springs, and won't be back till night; but she said she knew you wouldn't mind."

"Do you know where the cuckoo that belongs to my clock is, Jamie," asked his mother.

"No, mamma," he answered opening his blue eyes very wide. "I didn't know that it was gone."