

HALF-PAST SEVEN STORIES



9. Dr. Philemon Pipp, the Patient Medicine Man

Uncle Roger lived in town, quite a distance from the home of the Three Happy Children. When they walked, Marmaduke's short legs took one whole hour to reach it; Jehosophat's, forty-five minutes; though the Toyman's long shanks could cover the ground in fifteen. But then he could go ever so fast. However, they usually rode, and horses can always go faster than men. Even Old Methusaleh could trot there in twelve, and he was spavined and a little wind-broke, while Teddy and Hal, who were young and frisky, could get there as quick as a wink.

On this particular day Uncle Roger and Aunt Mehitable had a family party. It was a fine one, you may be sure, but we are not going to tell you about it, when something even more interesting happened that night.

At half-past eight the last horn sounded and the party was over. Mother and Hepzebiah climbed in the surrey, and, with them, two great-aunts, Sophronisba and Abigail. Aunt Phrony weighed more than three hundred pounds, but Aunt Abby only a hundred; and they were planning to visit the White House With the Green Blinds by the Side of the Road— "for a week," they said, but the boys heard Father whisper to Mother, as he piled their baggage under the tailboard,— "From the size of those bags it looks like a year and a day." The boys wondered what that extra day could ever be for—probably to move all that baggage.

Now Teddy the Buckskin Horse was hitched to the surrey; and in the shafts of the buggy stood Hal the Red Roan. And that night the boys particularly wanted to ride behind Teddy. They liked to watch the black stripe that ran down his yellow back skim ahead of them over the road, just like a snake. And they liked the surrey, too. It had a fringe all around the top, and high mudguards, and a whip with a tassel and ribbon on it. But now that the great-aunts were in, Aunt Abby's side rose way up in the air, she was so light, but Aunt Phrony's sank down until the steel springs of the carriage groaned and scrunched on the axles. The surrey looked like a boat when all the passengers rush to one side to see who has fallen over.

There was no room for the boys, so they had to climb in the buggy. But, after all, the Toyman was to drive, and that quite made up for it. He might even let them drive, or tell them stories—about Ole Man Pumpkin, or the stars, or the cowboys out West, or any one of a number of wonderful things. So they were quite content as the Toyman said "Gee-dap," and they drove off through the night.

They had gone but a short distance when they saw a light. It was different from all the lights in the houses and the street lamps on the corners, which shone steadily and all the while. This one flickered and flared like a fire in the wind; and it smoked rather badly, too.

Jehosophat and Marmaduke tried to guess what it was, but neither was right. When they

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reached the corner of the street and got out of the buggy, they saw a lot of boys, big boys and little boys, and men, too, crowding around a wagon. The horses which had brought it there were tied to a hitching post a little way off, and a man stood in the back by the tail-board. The light which they had seen from afar shone over his head, a strange sort of torch, and was fed with oil by a little metal pan with a tube running to it. And it flickered oddly up and down, and from side to side, throwing funny shadows on the man, who looked queer enough himself.

He had long black hair like Buffalo Bill, and a long black coat—very long, with a fur collar on it.

Marmaduke whispered to the Toyman,—

“Can’t you cure the man’s coat? It’s got the mange.”

And the Toyman replied,—

“No, money is all that can cure that, and pretty soon he’s going to get plenty from these people’s pockets.”

Marmaduke’s eyes bulged.

“Is he a robber?” he asked in an awed whisper.

The Toyman laughed.

“Well, some folks might call him that without being sued for libel, but I ‘spose he’s within the law.”

Marmaduke wondered how he could be in the law and in the wagon at the same time, and the Toyman had to explain that he meant that the strange man ought to go to jail, but probably wouldn’t. Just why, he told them to “wait and see.”

But, oh, we forgot—what was most important,—on the man’s head was a tall silk hat. It looked as if it needed the mange cure quite as much as did the fur collar of his coat. And it was tipped on the side of his head, like a crazy old mill Marmaduke had seen once, that was about to fall in the river.

Behind the man was spread a banner with the man’s name on it, Dr. Philemon Pipp, and a big chart like those the teachers used in school.

“Whew!” whistled Jehosophat, “look at that ole bag of bones!”

For on that chart was a big picture of a skeleton, and, by the side of the skeleton, other pictures, of a man with his skin taken off, which showed his bones, and his muscles, and all his insides—very prettily painted in blue and yellow and red.

That wasn’t all there was on that wonderful wagon. Behind the chart, they saw lots of bottles filled with nice black juice. It looked like licorice water, and it made anyone’s mouth water just to look at it!

But the man, Dr. Philemon Pipp, was talking.

And as he talked, he made queer gestures with his arms, as if he wanted to scoop up all the people—or something the people had—into his wagon. Perhaps it was their money he wanted to scoop up, though he said nothing—as to that, just,—

“Now, gents, step up a little closer, pleeze.”

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Then he tilted his hat on the other side of his head, and put one hand across his chest, the middle finger between the buttons of his vest, and all in a very grand way.

“Tonight,” he went on, “for youah entertainment, I will oferrr this distinguished audience a marrvelous programme—an extrahorrrrdinary exheebeeshun of tricks and sleight of hand meeraculs such as nevah befoh were puhfomed by human hands.

“Now watch, ladees, and keep yuh eyes peeled, gents—and mebbe youall kin learn the secret.”

Then he had to stop for a minute, for the small boys were climbing on the hubs of the wheels.

“Heah, young man,” he shouted, “have youall fohgot yuh mannaahs? Do not futhuh disturb muh discourse.”

Of course, Jehosophat and Marmaduke couldn’t understand all these magnificent words, but they sounded quite splendid. No wonder the hat was so big, when it had to cover a head with such long words inside.

Now Dr. Philemon Pipp had turned to the crowd.

“Have any of you gents got a quatah?—Thank you, sah,” he said to a man who handed him the money.

Then he took the silver quarter and asked a little boy to step up on the wagon. Jehosophat wished he had been asked, so that he could have learned the wonderful trick.

And now Dr. Pipp showed the coin to the little boy.

“You see it, young man?” he asked.

“Yes sir, yes sir,” said the little boy, all excitement.

Ah, but the man was wiggling his hands through the air, saying,—

“Now you see it and now you don’t.”

And presto! He took that very same quarter which had been in his hand, out of—where do you think?—why, right out of the boy’s mouth. That wasn’t all, either, for next minute he took it out of his cap, then out of his ears. There had been one quarter before—now in his hand there were—five—shiny—quarters! It was a wonderful trick!

But now the strange man, Dr. Philemon Pipp, was speaking again.

“Now that you all understand the trick,” he declared, “I will pefohm another foh youah entahtainment.”

The funny thing about it was that no one understood it at all—except the Toyman.

“Do you really?” the boys asked him, and he replied,—

“Pshaw! That’s easy, but watch, sonny, and see what he’ll try next.”

Meanwhile the man had taken off his tall silk hat.

“You see this hat, ladees an’ gents? Just a simple piece of headwear that has seen many suns and rains. No false bottom or top.”

And he tapped the hat to show them it was just an ordinary hat. Still, Marmaduke thought it was very much out of the ordinary. Never had he seen such a grand one—not even on Deacon Smithers.

“Now peel yuh eyes—careful—watch—everybody ready? Presto, chango—and here we

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are.”

And believe it or not as you may, out of that hat he drew a white rabbit—a real live white rabbit. He held it up by its ears for all to see.

And again he said,—

“Now that you all undahstand this simple little trick, I will—”

And again no one understood how to do it but the Toyman.

However, they just had to listen, for it was a wonderful speech.

“Ladees an’ gents and fellow citizens of—” the strange man paused, coughed, then leaned down to his helper. “What’s the name of this burg, Jake?” he whispered to him. “Ah, yes, fellow citizens of the glorious ceety of Five Corners—”

And Jehosophat whispered to the Toyman,—

“How does he know it’s so glorious when he can’t even remember the name?”

The Toyman chuckled and replied,—

“Oh, he’s a remarkable man, the Doctor, a very remarkable man. But listen, boy, listen, you’ll never hear the like again.”

So of course they listened—with all their ears, and their eyes and their mouths, too.

“I will introjooce to you,” went on the grand speech, “the famous Indian”—yes, that’s just what he said,—“the famous Indian, Chief-Afraid-of-a-Rat. Come on, Chief, don’t scare the ladies, and don’t scalp the little boys as long as they’re good.”

Then up on that wagon stepped a big Indian with moccasins on his feet, and a dress of deerskin with beads embroidered on it, and a headdress of many feathers and many colors too. He opened his mouth wide, and said something that sounded like a speech and yet like a song:—

“Ging goo, ging goo, ging goo!

Tunk-a-tin, tunk-a-tin, tunk-a-tin!

Geegry goo, geegry goo,

All-a-man lissen!”

That’s what the Red Indian with all the feathers said, and it sounded very impressive.

As it was so hard for anyone who didn’t know the real Indian language to understand, the man with the long hair and tall silk hat, this wise Dr. Philemon Pipp, explained it.

“The noble red man, the last of his tribe, Chief-Afraid-of-a-Rat,” said he, “is a great medicine man. He says that from his native soil he has distilled a wonderrful medicine that works like magic.”

Then, wetting his lips, he leaned over and picked up one of the big bottles that was full of black juice like the water the children used to make from licorice sticks.

“If yuh have a pain or an ache, a misery in yuh back, if yuh suffah from stomach-ache or tooth-ache, or an ache in the head; if yuh feet burn and blister; if yuh tongue evah feels thick; if yuh feel a leetle inclined to dizziness—in fact, if yuh have any ache or trouble in the world, this medicine will cure yuh, will bring instant relief.”

Then he took another bottle and said some more:

“One bottle of this medicine is worth five dollahs. Who would not give a paltry five dol-

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lahs for to be cured of his miseries? But—ladees and gents, because I was once born in your beautiful ceety I will sell—”

“Why, he even forgot its name,” whispered Jehosophat.

“Shush,” whispered the Toyman right back at him, “don’t give him away.”

But, instead, of Jehosophat giving him away, it seemed Dr. Pipp was going to give something away himself, for he was saying in his speech,—

“Because I was once born in your beautiful ceety, I will give away—for this night only—a whole bottle of this magic medicine for the trifling sum of fifty cents!”

That was very generous, thought the boys, and they said so to the Toyman, but again he told them to “wait an’ see.”

And then Dr. Philemon Pipp turned to the crowd of men and boys and hollered real loud like the minister at camp-meeting,—

“Who’ll be the first to be cuhed? Who’ll be the first to be happy again?”

And one by one the silly people went down in their pockets, and brought up their fifty-cent pieces, and handed them up to the man on the wagon.

You see, every one must have had at least one of the kinds of pains and aches Dr. Pipp talked about, for he mentioned every one in the world.

Marmaduke thought that black medicine would be fine for the Toyman.

“Toyman,” he said, “buy a bottle, an’ it will cure you of that bad rheumatism.”

“No,” replied the Toyman, “that won’t cure even chilblains. That old codger’s not telling the truth. And the people are fools to believe him.”

But all this time Dr. Pipp was handing out the bottles with one hand, and collecting the fifty-cent pieces with the other, and the Red Indian was singing his funny song,—

“Ging goo, ging goo,
Hunk-a-tin, hunk-a-tin, hunk-a-tin,
Geegry goo, geegry goo,
All-a-man lissen!”

And the light nickered on the funny pictures of the skeleton and the man with his skin off, and then on Dr. Philemon Pipp with his long black hair and tall silk hat, and on the feathers of the Red Indian, as he danced up and down singing that funny song.

At last something stranger still happened.

The Toyman had just muttered to himself,—

“They’re fools, they are, but I guess I ought to stop him.”

And just as he said this, Dr. Philemon saw him in the crowd. The Doctor must have felt hurt because the Toyman hadn’t bought any of his bottles, for he pointed a finger with a great long nail right at the Toyman and said:

“Yuh sah, aren’t yuh willin’ to be cuhed?”

Now the Toyman was forever saying funny and surprising things, but he never said anything funnier and more surprising in his life than what he told that patent-medicine man.

“No, thank you, Mr. Steve Jorkins”—that’s just what he called him, not Dr. Pipp at all— “that medicine of yours isn’t magic. It wouldn’t even cure a chicken of the pip.”

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Then all the men crowded around the Toyman, calling him by his old name.

“Do you know him, Frank? Is he fooling us?”

“You bet he is,” replied the Toyman, “and he’s got all your hard-earned money in his jeans.”

Then he called to the boys to “come quick,” for he thought there would be trouble, and there was.

For all those men and boys in the crowd climbed up on the wagon—and they grabbed Dr. Philemon Pipp by his fine fur collar—and they made him give back their money, every last cent of it. Then, while some of them held him, the others smashed all his bottles until the black juice ran over the tailboard like a dark waterfall, and they hurled his high silk hat on the top of the lamp-post, yelling,—

“You git out of here, quick! Come, skedaddle!”

And since, in his fright, he didn’t “skedaddle” fast enough to suit them, they threw beets and all sorts of vegetables at him, vegetables that had been ripe a very long time. So at last the tall Doctor with his fine fur collar—but without his silk hat—hitched up his horses with trembling fingers, and he and his helper Jake and the Red Indian drove out of town “lickety-split.” You could hear the wagon-wheels rattling away long after he turned the corner.

Then the Toyman “tucked” to Hal and they drove off, too.

“How did you know him?” Jehosophat asked, after they had trotted a little way.

“Oh, I used to know him out West. He didn’t remember me, but I did him . I bought one of his bottles once.”

“Is he a robber?”

“Well, he calls himself a patent-medicine man, but I’d call him a ‘fakir.’”

“What’s a ‘fakir,’ Toyman?” put in Marmaduke, very sleepily.

“Oh, a man who pretends to be something he isn’t, and who sells folks something that’s no good, and takes all their money for nothing. But”—and he laughed— “some folks like to be fooled.”

“It’s too bad!” sighed Marmaduke.

“What’s too bad, sonny?”

“Why, to smash all those big bottles and waste all that lovely licorice water.”

But he soon forgot all about the bottles and the licorice water, and the bad Doctor Pipp with the tall hat and the fur collar, and the Red Indian, too, for, as they rode along by the River, the Moon was up, and seemed to be riding along with them—never getting ahead or behind, just keeping even with Hal the Red Roan. And Marmaduke loved to go riding or walking with a great yellow moon. Besides, the Toyman told them a story, as he had promised—and a nice one it was—so the little boy fell asleep.

But I wouldn’t say that they never dreamed about that fur collar, and the tall hat, and the Indian, and all those bottles.

It’s just possible that they did.