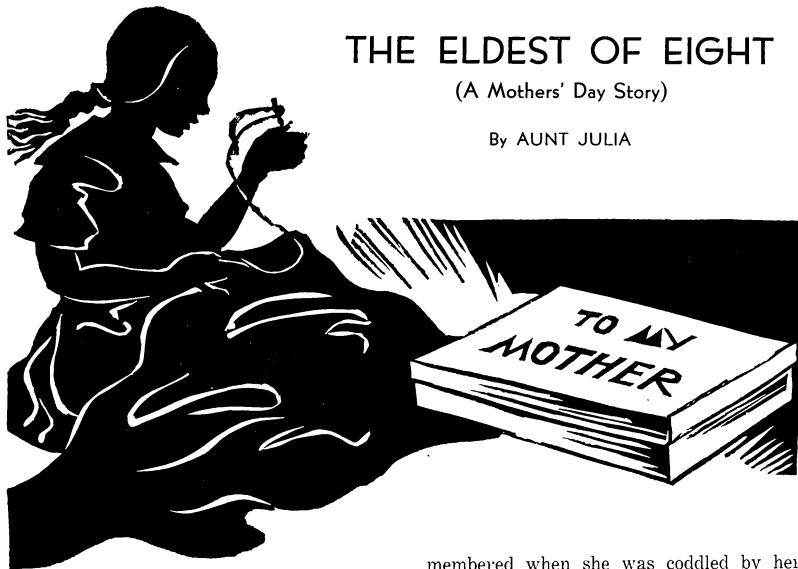


THE ELDEST OF EIGHT

(A Mothers' Day Story)

By AUNT JULIA



SIONING had never been separated from her mother. The oldest of eight children, she did most of the work in the house. Although she went to school, she had no time to prepare her lessons. Very early in the morning when she enjoyed her sleep most, her mother, *Aling Sion*, would be heard saying,

"Sioning, do you suppose it is still midnight?" Uttered in a stern tone, this rebuke always startled Sioning.

Sioning would get up to prepare the breakfast. While her younger sister set the table, she spread the clothes on the grass to bleach. She had hardly eaten her breakfast when she would find it was time to go to school. When she arrived home in the afternoon, she had to clean the house, cook the supper, wash the little boys and girls who were as dirty as kittens after a day's romp.

She had no time for herself, no time for play, no time for friends. She never re-

membered when she was coddled by her mother or petted by her father. How could she have the chance to be petted when babies came every year?

At school every holiday was observed. Children read stories and poems about Thanksgiving Day. They were enjoined by teachers to be thankful to God for His innumerable blessings. Sioning wondered for what she should be thankful. There was no Sunday for her, no Thanksgiving Day, every day was one of drudgery.

Mothers' Day was to come about a week after Thanksgiving Day. Programs were being prepared to celebrate the day. The girls in Sioning's class were embroidering handkerchiefs and making household linen for their mothers. Sioning wanted to make something only because it was the fad. She could not get any money from her mother without an explanation about the object of expense. Besides, she honestly could not see any particular reason why she should give her mother a gift. Didn't she work at home as no other girl in her class did?

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RUFO'S CHRISTMAS GIFT

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He was very sad, but his mother was very much sadder. Little Rufo had to enjoy his Christmas only by looking at the toys displayed on the show-windows. He could only look at, and wish for them; but he could neither touch nor have them.

It was already getting dark, when the mother and the son returned home. Rufo was sad but glad at having seen the many things that he saw which he knew he could never have for Christmas.

"Mother," said Rufo, "next Christmas I shall have some toys. I shall try to earn some money to buy that automobile."

"Yes, you shall have it, son," said his mother.

They ate their supper which *Aling Ines* was able to buy with her thirty centavos. Rufo was very tired so he ate with great appetite.

Before going to bed, however, he told his mother,

"Mother, I wish some fairy would bring me something while I am sleeping. I don't care what it is, mother, just so it is a toy."

Aling Ines did not say a word. She pretended not to hear her son. She started to work in order to prevent the tears from flowing from her eyes. But when Rufo was already asleep, she began to cry not for herself but for her little son. She cried for sometime. Gradually she began to be aware of the fact that within her small nipa hut she was crying and very unhappy while outside the whole town was in full merriment—music and gladness. She could not be happy even if she wanted to because her little Rufo, now sleeping, could not have the toy which his little heart had desired.

She was still crying when she thought of Mrs. Cruz. Mrs. Cruz had always been very kind to her. Why couldn't she help her now? Why did she not think of Mrs. Cruz during the afternoon? She could have borrowed thirty centavos from her to buy that toy for her son. It was not too late yet. Perhaps Mrs. Cruz was not yet in

bed and the stores were still open.

Before she knew what she was doing she was already in the street, more running than walking, and soon she was at the house of Mrs. Cruz. She was very glad because Mr. and Mrs. Cruz and the children were still wide awake decorating their Christmas tree.

"Why, *Aling Ines*, why are you here?" asked Carmelo, who first saw the night visitor.

"Come in," said Mrs. Cruz. "Has anything wrong happened to you and Rufo? Why come so late?"

"Nothing wrong has happened. Mrs. Cruz. I just came to ask you if you could advance me thirty centavos to buy an automobile toy for Rufo," *Aling Ines* told Mrs. Cruz. She told her also about her promise to her boy, and their walk at the Escolta.

Mr. and Mrs. Cruz knew how good a boy Rufo was. He had been an obedient boy and a great help to his mother. Carmelo liked him so much that he and Rufo often played together when he and his mother come to get the laundry.

It was Carmelo who spoke first when *Aling Ines* finished her story.

"Mother, do you remember that automobile toy I got from school last Saturday? It is exactly like the one Rufo likes to have. Why don't I give that to him?" Without waiting for an answer from his mother he went to get the automobile. Soon he returned.

"Here, *Aling Ines*, give this to Rufo for his prize."

Aling Ines could hardly believe her eyes seeing the toy and her ears hearing the words of Carmelo. She remembered the words of Rufo as he went to sleep about some fairy that might give him the toy. *Aling Ines* thought she was dreaming. For a while she could not talk.

"Yes, *Aling Ines*. Take it and give to your boy," said Mrs. Cruz. "And tomorrow you will come here to get a Christmas dinner for you and your son."

Aling Ines was very happy. She thought she was the happiest mother that evening because she knew that

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Of course, she loved her mother, but she nursed in her heart a deep resentment at the joylessness of her life.

On the Friday before Mothers' Day, Sioning, with two other girls, was asked by her teacher to call on a classmate who had been absent. Lolita Ruiz was the richest girl in Sioning's class. She went to school in a big car. Her dresses were always distinctive and her purse was always full of "just pin money."

Sioning and her companions hesitated to knock at the gate. The big house, so quiet and imposing, was set far from the street. The gardener admitted them into the grounds. Another servant opened the door to them and conducted them to a beautifully furnished bedroom.

"It is so kind of you to visit me," Lolita said as the girls timidly entered the room.

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Rufo would be the happiest boy when he woke up in the morning. She took the automobile and after thanking Carmelo and Mrs. Cruz and after greeting them with a "Merry Christmas," she left.

Rufo was still sound asleep when *Aling Ines* arrived. She looked at the little boy and she looked at the toy. Her face beamed with happiness.

She woke up earlier than her little boy. She placed the toy on the pillow in such a way that when the sleeping little boy opened his eyes, it would be the first thing he could see. She could hardly wait to see the happiness of her boy when he would see the toy. Soon Rufo opened his eyes and saw the automobile. He took it and showed it to his mother.

"Mother, I dreamed that there was a fairy who brought me this toy. She told me it was my prize for being a good and an obedient boy."

"Yes, Rufo, you have been a good and an obedient boy, that is why the fairy, God, and Carmelo

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"The teacher sent us," Sioning answered.

"I have been very lonely," Lolita complained. "I wish I were a member of a family like Sioning's." Lolita finished with a sigh full of longing.

"What? Like mine?" Sioning asked in great surprise. "You don't know what it means to be the oldest of eight children."

"I do not know. Just the same, I would rather be one of eight than the only one and without a mother." Lolita returned.

"But you have your father who is very rich and very liberal to you."

"Oh, I have no complaint against my father. He is the best of fathers. But there is something very big that is lacking when there is no mother."

"You have servants to look after you," one of Sioning's companions remarked.

"You think that is fine. On my part, I would rather do all the housework and wait on my mother if only I had one." Lolita retorted in all earnestness.

"I feel I could bear all poverty and hardships if I could taste a mother's kiss." Lolita continued.

"My mother kisses me when I leave for school and at my arrival. We kiss also before we go to bed." Sioning's companion said with pride.

"My mother does not kiss me." Sioning thought.

"I thank you again for coming. I shall try to be present on Monday. By the way, Sioning, I have a piece of silk which I intended for a Mother's Day gift."

"A gift? For whom? You have no mother." The three callers asked in surprise.

"I make-believe that I have one. I even planned to embroider it. But now, I cannot carry out my project. You may have it Sioning, for your mother."

Sioning accepted the gift. The next day, while her mother was out, she made a lovely negligee with it and embroidered it with dainty sprays of lazy-daisy stitches.

CHRISTMAS

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Friends we surely have no right to be happy. Surely everybody can give something—a gift, a greeting, or a wish—"A Merry Christmas."

On Christmas we wish everybody joy, happiness and goodwill because it was on the first Christmas Day that God gave his best wishes, a gift to us—Jesus our Master and Saviour.

"And there were in the same shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

"And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone around about them; and they were sore afraid.

"And the angel said unto them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

"And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped

When Sioning placed her gift over her mother's pillow very early on the morning of Mothers' Day, there was no more resentment in her heart. There was only a wish that her mother might kiss her even once.

ANSWER TO THE LAST MONTH'S CROSS-WORD PUZZLE



THE SPIRIT OF GIVING

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You may have a schoolmate or a playmate whose parents you know will not be able to buy him a gift for Christmas. You have many good things of which your friend or companion has none. Will it not make you happy to give him a little of what you have? If your heart is truly kind, you can't bear to see someone suffer while you have more than enough to satisfy yourself.

Dear children, let me add one more thought about the spirit of giving. To feed the hungry, to clothe the ragged, to help the needy, or to give others costly gifts, is not enough. Your heart, full of willingness and love, should go with your gift or act of charity. I would value more a small loaf of bread given to me with the giver's goodwill. If you would share at all what you have with others, do so willingly and gladly. A poet says, "A gift without the giver is bare." Let us not think that what we give now is lost to us forever. Somehow or sometime good acts will be rewarded. Today the good things of life may be ours to enjoy; tomorrow we may lose them all. Those whom we have helped and even those whom we have not, may then do us a good turn. Giving with all one's heart and giving for the joy of it, is the true spirit of love for mankind. Such is the spirit of Christmas.

in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly host praising God, and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men."

Our gifts, our *fiestas*, our candies, our toys, our music, and all things we do to celebrate the Christmas Day are nothing unless they really and truly give glory to God, make peace on earth, and bring goodwill toward one another.

"A Merry Christmas to Everybody."