

The "Baby"

By EDWARD L. RECKARD

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Mr. John Lloyd suffered the guilt of an eavesdropper, and for the moment was deeply and regretfully conscious of his crime.

He mechanically removed from his mouth an unlighted cigar, and pressed his lips determinedly. There could be no mistaking the words spoken in Mrs. Melton's soft, motherly voice.

"Martha is coming with the baby tomorrow on the 12 o'clock train from Albany," Mrs. Melton was saying. The rustling of note paper revealed her source of information to Mr. Lloyd as plainly as if he were in the sitting room itself.

"And to stay a whole month!" cried Miss Edith, the one remaining member of the Melton family who as yet had escaped, through no fault of her own, the matrimonial halter. Mr. Lloyd tolerated Miss Edith because she was in the house when he took up his residence with the Meltons a year ago.

Next to babies, Mr. Lloyd abominated spinsters of certain age out of pure fear of their possible designs upon innocent and unsuspecting bachelors.

"They can have the big spare room, and—"

Mr. Lloyd did not wait to hear the conclusion of the sentence, spoken in Mr. Melton's hoarse tones. He stepped quietly out of the wide, old-fashioned hallway into the twilight and moodily walked toward his law office, adjoining the courthouse at the other end of the prosperous little county seat where he had won a name for himself in the few years he had resided in Blairville.

The spare room was across the hall from Mr. Lloyd's own ample and handsomely furnished snugery. So "Martha and the baby" were to go in the spare room, were they? The doors were to bang, the baby was to bawl and all of the members of the household were to run up stairs and down again forty times an hour for eighteen hours a day and, from Mr. Lloyd's unsympathetic and pitifully deficient understanding as to babies, eighty-one hours a night, waiting on "the baby," making life miserable for the starboard and supposedly delightful for everybody else? Not if John Lloyd knew it!

He would return to the hotel in the village at which he had been a central figure until the day he had gone with the Meltons in their big, rambling home on the hill among the maples. Hotel life had its drawbacks, but the proprietor had been under contract not to room doting mothers and leathery lunged infants within hearing of Mr. Lloyd's apartment.

The next morning at breakfast Mr. Lloyd's silence and gloom were in marked contrast with the animated conversation regarding the visitors who were to arrive that day. He had tried a dozen times during the meal to tell them that he was to give up his room and return to the hotel, but each time the words stuck in his throat. He finally decided that he would quietly return to the house during the morning, put his things in order and later send for them with a polite note of explanation at the suddenness of his departure.

True to his resolution, Mr. Lloyd crept into the house unobserved and placed his effects in some semblance of order for removal. With every sound from below he fancied he distinguished agonized squeals in infantile treble, mingled with the chorus of adult voices in soothing efforts to quiet the tempest. Warm and flustered for a dignified bachelor of thirty-five, Mr. Lloyd slipped down the side staircase, out on the little porch to which led the short cut up the hill from the railroad station.

None of the family had observed his burglarious entrance or hasty exit, but shades of Blackstone, a woman was coming along the narrow path over the rear lawn, directly up to the little porch—a woman in a neat traveling gown and carrying a suit case!

"Caught!" groaned Mr. Lloyd aloud, and he felt a hot glow of shame and vexation sweep over him. "Here's Martha, by all that has to do with babies, fat or lean, squealing or cooing!"

The feminine gender in the traveling gown paused at the foot of the steps, gazed in amazement at Mr. Lloyd's stern and heated features and displayed from beneath a big hat the rosy face of a very pretty girl. Mr. Lloyd had not seen her profile because of the hat, and now that it came into full view he looked again and did not remove his eyes from the roguish ones that sought his so inquiringly.

"Martha, I suppose?" he ventured, impolitely, scornfully and audibly.

"Sir!" The red lips parted laughingly, and the trim figure straightened perceptibly in the traveling gown at the strange salutation.

"You're Martha, Mrs. Melton's sister, of course, but where's?" Mr. Lloyd's voice dropped out of hearing as suddenly as his courage.

"I'm not Martha," she answered sharply.

"To be sure you are," insisted Mr. Lloyd, very firmly. "Where's the—the baby?"

"The what?" cried the young lady wonderingly.

"The baby—Martha's baby. Where is he, she or it, or whatever you call 'em?" Mr. Lloyd was desperate; but, as boy babies and girl babies all looked alike to him, his mixture of gender was excusable.

An unmistakable girlish giggle of a girl rippled from the shadow of the big hat, and its owner let the suit case drop to the porch. It landed squarely on Mr. Lloyd's toes and brought the tears to his eyes.

"I'm 'the baby,'" she laughingly said as she stood for a moment on the threshold of the door taking him in from head to foot, striving to fix the identity of her mysterious cross-examiner. "I am 'baby' still, despite my advanced age and the centuries of futile protest at my mother's tender forgetfulness. Did I not do well for an infant"—this very sanely and boldly—"to travel way from Albany to Blairville all alone, only to meet a severe interlocutor harrangue the entrance to my aunt's home?"

"But Martha?" was all Mr. Lloyd could say.

"Is my mother, who will arrive tomorrow, I came ahead. Does this satisfy you, Mr. Impertinence? Please remove your foot from beneath my luggage and carry it into the house. Babies, you know, must have attention and attendance."

Mr. Lloyd extracted his foot with alacrity, though he did not obey the command. He had fought and won many hard legal battles, but here was a golden opportunity to prove that there are times when discretion is the better part of valor. He fled, or, to be truthful, he limped abruptly down the little path toward the village. As he collected his thoughts, being a good lawyer and a wise jurist, he decided to revise and to overrule his previous judgment as to babies.

"Girl babies eighteen years of age and upward, with rosy cheeks, laughing eyes and fluffy hair and saucy dimples," mused Mr. Lloyd, smile playing round the corners of his mouth, "do not come within the purview of the precedents you have heretofore cited to support your case. Judgment is accordingly rendered for the infant defendant, with costs to the belligerent plaintiff. Case dismissed."

Mr. Lloyd returned to the Melton household to dinner as placidly as usual. As time progressed he learned whether his decision as to one girl baby in particular was to be affirmed by a higher court, from which there is no appeal.

Winter Fishing.

Winter fishing has one merit, which all true sportsmen will recognize as such—namely, considerable uncertainty. One day you may fish certain waters—whether deep or shallow, whether weedy or free—and well nigh draw a blank, while the very next day the same waters will give rich finny returns. What is more strange is that not seldom on the same day there will be good luck in different depths and varying waters of the same lake or pond, and observation through the clear black ice of early winter or late autumn has convinced the writer that these mystic fishy moods of biting in winter are almost or quite independent of the movements of the schools of "bait" fish. About all that can be said on such points in the way of general suggestion is that winter fish bite usually better on a mild day than a cold one, best of all during a gentle thaw; that they take the bait more freely—than after the ice has thickened, and that they appear to be quite unaffected by noise, such as the rumble of skates or the gentle thunder of the "settling" ice. It is certain that some of the best strings of a lifetime have been taken when the fun of skating could be joined with that of watching the lines.—Outing Magazine.

Old Mirror Superstitions.

The mistrust of the ghostly mirror is so old and so far spread that we meet with it in the folklore of every land. An old tradition warns us that the new moon, which brings us such good fortune when we look at it in the calm evening sky, carries a message of evil to those who see it first reflected in a looking glass. For such unlucky mortals it is said that the lunar virus distills slow poison and corroding care. And, again, it is declared that the friends who glance at their reflections standing side by side are doomed to quick dissension. In Scandinavia the Swedish girl who looks into her glass by candlelight is told that she risks the loss of her lover. One superstition in this connection that seems to be almost universal is that it is very unlucky for a bride to see herself in a mirror after her toilet is completed. If she be discreet she will turn away from that fair picture which pleases her so well and then draw on her glove or have some tiny ribbon, flower or jewel fastened to her gown and the sour fates may be appeased and evil turned away from the threshold.

Friendship Among Fishes.

The sea cucumber, with long body and mouth fringed with tentacles in a feathery circle, gives lodgings to smaller forms, which have been called its messmates, which actually live within its body and swim in and out at will, thus finding a welcome shelter and also feeding on the half digested food of their hosts. In similar way sea anemones, attached to a rock and furnished with a circle of feelers or tentacles, with which they catch and hold their food, make friends with little fishes which swim fearlessly within their grasp and are constantly infolded for a few moments in what to the prey of the anemone would be a living tomb, but very soon the tentacles unclose and allow the playful little prisoner to escape at will. In similar fashion fish have been seen living and sporting within the arms of tropical starfish.

A QUEER ANIMAL.

Peculiar Toadlike Creature That Is Found in Surinam.

In Surinam there is a remarkable toadlike creature the female of which carries the young in a series of cells in the thick skin of the back, which assumes a strange honeycomb-like appearance. When this lady toad is carrying her nursery about with her she is a very repulsive looking object. Single handed she would be quite unable to cope with the important question of placing eggs where they will be most favorably disposed for hatching, and for this she has to rely on the good services of her mate. Soon after the eggs are laid they are taken up by the male and pressed, one by one, into the cells in the thickened skin of his partner's back. There they grow until they fit closely to the hexagonal form of their prisons, each of which is closed above by a kind of trapdoor.

After a period of some eighty-two days the eggs reach their full development and produce, not tadpoles, but actually perfect little toads. The reason of this is that the tadpoles, which require to breathe the air dissolved in the water by means of their external gills, could not exist in the cells, and consequently this stage of development is passed through very rapidly within the egg. In due time the young toads to the number of 80 or 100 burst open the lids of their cells, poke out their noses and make their entrance into the world. The mother toad rubs off the remains of the cells against any convenient stone or plant stem and comes out in a brand new spring outfit.

"HIS HIGH MIGHTINESS."

One of the Titles Proposed For the First President.

One of the embarrassments of the new office of president was in regard to title—how the chief magistrate of the United States should be addressed. The subject had occupied the attention of congress, and a joint committee from the two houses had been unable to agree. The newspapers had taken the matter up and discussed it freely. With some "his excellency" was thought the proper appellation, others wished a longer and higher sounding title, and a few favored the appellation given to rulers in Holland—"high mightiness." It was finally decided to the satisfaction of all parties that Washington should be called simply the president of the United States.

While these controversies were at white heat Speaker Muhlenberg was one day at a dinner given in honor of Washington and was asked by the president elect what he thought of the title of "high mightiness."

"Why, general," replied Muhlenberg, laughing, "if we were certain that the office would always be held by men as large as yourself or my friend Wynkoop (a large sized gentleman from Pennsylvania sitting at the table) it would be appropriate enough, but if by chance a president as small as my opposite neighbor should be elected it would become ridiculous."—Washington Post.

Leprosy.

From reliable statistics we draw the conclusion that leprosy is generally contracted between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five or that in a very large number of patients the disease shows itself at about eighteen; that it develops very slowly, so that the patient does not require much medical aid before the disease has run four years; that the majority of lepers die within five years of their admission to the hospital, and that the average length of life of a patient after he has developed leprosy is nine years.—Pearson's Weekly.

Odd Marriage Belief.

An unmarried man or woman of marriageable age is something that is rarely seen in the Fiji Islands. The reason of this is not far to seek. The natives believe that if a person dies while in an unmarried state his or her soul is doomed to wander about through endless ages of eternity in an intermediate region between heaven and hades. At the end of each moon they are allowed to look into heaven, but are never permitted to enter.

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He—Do you remember the night I asked you to marry me? She—Yes, dear. He—For a whole hour we sat there and not a word did you speak. Ah, that was the happiest hour of my life!—Translated For Tales From Echo de Paris.

Pain Through Ignorance.

All our misery, all our pain, is traceable to ignorance and misuse of our forces. Enlightenment is the sovereign cure alike for physical and moral ills.—Horatio W. Dresser.

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