

Just a Little Story About a Little Tot, and How it Caused the Years to Roll Back for the Old People.

THE BABY

BY LEONE GALE

They Just Cried Together, Not With Grief, Only With a Longing That Was Like the Hope of Heaven.

OUR niece Millicente is only 22, and to see her with her baby in her arms is considerably like watching a wax doll play with a kitten, or a wittily give attention to a butterfly. No one can think how tenderly we observe her—Peles and I, who are seventy and are supposed to be concerned with far sorer matters. In reality we know none of the sweet surprises of experience and even of wisdom that so confirm our joy in life as the sight of our niece Millicente with her baby.

It chanced that when the baby was but a few weeks old the young father, was called to The Hague upon some government business—a state of affairs for which it really seemed to Peles and me that the United States should be called to account. For experience shows that the government will go irresistibly forward, but Millicente's husband can never be compensated for that absence; and I would like to have any one object who can believe differently.

For all his impatience to see whether the little maid had really grown to womanhood in those six weeks or so, he was obliged to report at Washington immediately upon his return. Consequently, when the steamship was almost due, our niece Millicente found that she could wait for him to see the baby's amazing improvement not one day later than that upon which his boat was to arrive. So she took train somewhere in Vermont with that very little child and arrived at our house a few minutes before her telegram, in a sad state of collapse and almost burning up with fever. She has no nurse-maid. They are very young married people indeed.

The night that Millicente and her baby reached us, Peles and I had been sitting for an hour in the dark of the drawing room. We were happy enough, and yet it was one of the nights when all the little shadows that live so very near to us creep forth, each made bolder by the others. And when one is seventy there are many shadows—though kept back for the greater part of the time, mind you, and never so much as allowed to show their faces. But somehow that night all the shadows had arranged a rendezvous, and Peles and I were sitting in a very circle of them.

"We dreamed it differently, Ettare," Peles had said slowly. "I knew what he meant. Have we not all dreamed it differently? And then we sat thinking of the Great Dream that we had and lost—a dream so bright that it was in our hearts, and though we are seventy now, and many bright vistas are closed to us, there was a time—when Peles could still model and I could write so that a few were deceived—that the Great Dream for one radiant year was in our hearts, and went away when little Cedric died. For years since then we have gone wondering where he may be now, without us. For he was so very little when he left us—he could hardly walk, a step alone even by clinging to my finger and Peles's, and we laughing with all our might. And so, lest he may still be needing us as he needed us then, we are never very far from him in thought, and that night we talked long of him, and one by one all the other little-shadow-dreams went away in the presence of this dream that was no shadow, but something far more beautiful and terrible."

So we were sitting with "Do you remember?" and "But do you remember?" on our lips when the door bell rang and Nichola, our old servant, came grumbling up the stairs to answer it. We wondered a little for we have few visitors and no small excitements. We wondered the more when the drawing-room door was thrown open and on the threshold appeared Nichola, bearing in her arms a white bundle that wore long and alarmingly fluffy skirts. "Nichola!" we both cried in a dutter—for you do not know how pleasant it is when the days grow colorless to have something happen which you yourself did not bring about! "Nichola! What is it?"

"It's a baby," Nichola informed us grimly, and laid it in Peles's arms—face downward, as he told me afterward. Then she beckoned me to the hall and I went barely able to stand for I was certain that it had been left in a basket on the steps with nothing but a lock of hair, and whatever were we to do with it? "Nichola!" I panted, "whose baby?"

Nichola was bending over the bench in the hall, and there sat poor little Millicente, her face flushed with fever, crying helplessly. "N—nobody told me," she sobbed on my shoulder, "what it would be like to travel with a six-weeks-old baby. She cried every m—mile of the way here—and she's a good baby, too! Bless the little mothers! I have never yet known one who would not assure you, though in the presence of a child exhibiting a most dreadful temper, that her baby was 'usually so good, too.'"

Together, though I suppose that I hindered far more than I helped, Nichola and I got Millicente upstairs and put her in bed—poor, nervous little thing, hardly more than a white herself for all her wise use of the most advanced baby terms.



She Did Stop Crying, Though She Looked at Their Humble Pyrotechnics Somewhat Haughtily.

Nichola hurried downstairs for something hot, and bustled back after a few minutes' absence with a steaming bowl of some mysterious compound—how do some people always know what to bring you, hot and savory, in a bowl? If I had gone down to the kitchen I am sure that I could have devised nothing but eggs. Nichola insisted upon feeding Millicente—the impudent old woman has noticed that when I am excited my hands tremble. But whose hands? As for Nichola, as I have often told her, she could not tremble if a giant were to walk in the front door, instead of fear, Nichola's way of emotion is always anger, and I dare say he would fairly remind such a giant of the purpose of the door-mat.

"You'd best," said Nichola to me over her shoulder, "go downstairs and see after that—baby." Nichola's scorn was scathing. Nichola handles a great many things, but the greatest of these is babies. When she passes one in its perambulator I have seen her take the extreme edge of the walk.

Nichola's scorn was scathing. Nichola handles a great many things, but the greatest of these is babies. When she passes one in its perambulator I have seen her take the extreme edge of the walk. "I never didn't a bone in 'em," she once explained. "When you go to pick 'em up, they slimpse."

I remembered this failing of Nichola's as I hurried downstairs to Peles, but I was chiefly concerned to know how he had got on in my fifteen-minute absence—Peles, who will not even hold my Persian cat. No sound came from the drawing room. I crossed the hall quietly and opened the door. Peles had managed to turn on the lights, and furthermore he had contrived to take off the baby's cloak and hood and veil—though usually he could as easily embroider a thing as he could get it, save after a long time. And there sat Peles on the sofa, with the baby in one arm, and he was gravely holding a lighted match a foot from his face.

As I looked he threw the burned match in the grate, soberly lit another, and repeated the performance. Evidently he construed some movement of the baby's face to be an answering smile; at all events, Peles's own face took on a most tender and inane expression, and he said clearly: "Well—tol, tol, toly toll! Yes!" and then added in a tone to convince all the jurors of the world: "Of course!"

He hurried forward laughing at him, for all the sudden lump in my throat. It is said for Peles to be nobody's grandfather when he looks so precisely like a grandfather for Peles!"

I had almost dozed, that little tender ruddling brought me back so hurriedly that I could hardly tell which was mine or of that other little boy when the baby's food must be warmed, and I was I who did this, for Peles's old familiar helplessness in this little presence delighted me beyond measure. And when she grew impatient and the little Peles valiantly lighted matches before her and she fell silent and even smiled and slept again. At five o'clock she had to be warmed, and I recall it as a mere matter of habit, and I meantime I had not slept for a moment. For there had come thronging back a company of memories, such a very flight of the angels of old delight as our wonderful year when there was Cedric, that the world had no room for sleep at all. Sleep! I do not suppose that anyone would chide me for being wakeful at a ball! And nothing to me as were those hours when the little head lay upon my arm.

Sometimes after daylight she would Cedric had been wont to lie quietly as long as ever I would, but Millicente's baby for it was Millicente's baby for all our pretending—awoke and played with her fists. Then a fancy that hovered over me all the night took shape, and I told it to Peles. "Dear," I said, "you know the things in the bottom drawer in the closet?"

"Yes," said Peles at once, "I have been thinking about them." "Suppose," I suggested, "that we were to—try some of them on the baby?"

"I have been thinking them through," said Peles. It was deliciously comfortable in the room—we had kept the hearth alive all night. When we were warmly wrapped and had drawn chairs before the fire, Peles brought from the bottom drawer the box filled with the tender, velvet muslins, and the socks that Cedric had worn such a little while. I chose the lace cover that had made a really goodly stitch; and over her little muslin gown we put on Millicente's baby's shoes. She was very good, and laughed and nestled; and so we found the long white cloak that I had embroidered; and I bought that I had made. And Millicente's baby's arm doubled up in a ball when I tried to put it in the sleeve—and I suppose that there never was a baby's arm that did not do this under similar circumstances, but I have known one or two that did. And the pink hand came peeping through the cuff Peles caught it and kissed it. I had not thought for years how he had been used to do that!

"Now," I said, "Peles—look, now!" Millicente's baby sat on my knee with her back to us both. The little bent back in that white coat, the collar crumpling up about the neck in spite of me, the same little bonnet with the flower in the back and the lace around the crown. Peles laid his cheek against mine, and we cried together. I am not ashamed for I did not cry with grief; only with a longing that was like the hope of heaven.

I did not hear Nichola coming with our coffee. So she opened the door and saw the box on the floor and the things scattered all about. She knew what they were. She was with us when little Cedric was here, and she had not forgotten. She stood for a moment, and then set the tray down on the table. "Drink your coffee!" she cried sharply, and was out of the room before we could speak.

At that moment, when I could—and by my side, Millicente's baby cried then—laid her in Peles's arms and went out to tell Nichola to bring more milk. And there in the passage, leaning against the bureau, stood Nichola, her eyes wide, crying as if her heart would break. "Go on away!" she said, shaking her old gray head, "go on away!"

Miss Anxiety: It is a bitter confession for our sex to make, but we have to admit that the real best cure of the complexion and general appearance has the best chance of getting a good husband. You should not be so careless about those blackheads and large unclean pores below your eyes. If you wish to get rid of these troubles get an ounce of Anoxolin from your druggist and dissolve it in a pint of cold water and add 2 teaspoonfuls of glycerine. Stir briskly and let stand. Apply as you would any complexion cream. I have had friends tell me it was splendid for removing wrinkles. It is unexcelled for massaging, and will leave the skin smooth and pliant. The cream contains no oil or anything that will promote a growth of hair on the face, and I recommend it for chapped face and hands, also for removing tan and freckles.

James J. Ecema: All rheum, rashes and similar itching skin diseases are terribly annoying. The best remedy I know of is made in this way: Get from your druggist a ounce of tuxor and mix with 4 tablespoonfuls of alcohol and a half-pint of water. Shake bottle, pour small quantity upon affected surface and let it repeat treatment until eruptions disappear and skin is restored to healthy condition. In general, this remedy has proven very effective.

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