

What do You know about a Baby?



A Camera Study by the Cornquist Studio, Auckland

"BABY"

By G. E. B.

THE GREATEST PLEASURE--THE GREATEST INFLECTION

"SAY! What do you know about a baby?" Why, most things! I know that one minute it can be a rigid few inches of crimson fury, screaming with lungs as strong as a black-smith's bellows; tearing and scratching with ten little fingers whose nails are like bits of glass, while your thoughts become murderous, and in the next minute it can break into such adorable smiles through the crystal tears swimming in its heavenly blue eyes, and it can say "goog-goog" so entrancingly that your anger is wiped out completely by a wild rush of love through your heart.

It (dear mother, it is not your baby we are speaking of, so do let us say "it") it can, with unspeakable daring, seize on the hair or nose of the head of the house, at 6.30 a.m., unrebuked. In this it has no competitors--no other living thing would risk its reception at that hour, having nothing more important to chronicle than "goog-goog." It has even been known to open a closed eye, with a gouging little finger of one hand, while, with a scratching little finger of the other, it has felt for its recumbent father's "toosie-pegs" while the giant lay in helpless slumber. It can cause that same giant to walk the floor in turn with the lesser giantess, hour after hour, on a bitter frosty night; also, it can make them mutter, through clenched teeth, "This will be the very last," and, strange to say, father is the most emphatic. Then father says bitter things to mother about allowing it to eat things during the day which causes them all pain through the night. Yet mother, gentle mother,

answers father back, and rudely tells him "not to talk rot"; he knows as well as she does it's just teeth.

It can be the means of making father's bare foot and a sharp little bit of coal meeting and parting angrily as bitter enemies in the night. And after three hours of exhausted slumber it can awaken first, bright as a bee, at its usual 6.30 a.m.; and it can get wholehearted forgiveness by simply sitting up in its cot and prettily waving its dimpled hand, saying "ta-ta": its latest stunt. And after a diabolical night it can set its worn-out parents an example of sweet, fresh good-temperedness, which, as father says, "beats the band."

It can flatten at one blow the high spirits of its parents as they come gaily back from the pictures at 11.30 p.m. and hear the maid or auntie call out cautiously: "Baby's been very restless." Then father and mother disrobe in various distant parts of the house, and not daring to light even a candle, creep like stealthy Indians to their couch. And when in less than ten minutes a little voice pipes out "dinkie-dinkie," how deep mother breathes to show the depth of her slumbers--what an excellent snore father produces to show how dead to the world he is. How luxuriously auntie or the maid snuggles into her pillow: her night watch is over. Then when "dinkie" is in danger of becoming a crescendo, mother bangs up and mutters something about "its being all very well." With great perversity it says "Ta-dad-dad" and mother answers with her best martyred air "No

precious--dad-dad is fast asleep. Only poor mum-mum can wake up for her own baby."

Decked with engaging smiles, it can amuse and delight a whole carriage-full of people. Yet the same night on a long train journey, it can make those same people wish they had never been born.

It can transform an ordinarily sane, common-sense man into a pestiferous, boasting father, primed with baby anecdotes, till his old friends hide when they see him coming. It can fix its fancy on an old bachelor make dabs at him and flirt with him, till he nearly dies with embarrassment.

It can draw a whole family together with refreshed bonds of love. It can reach out tiny hands, and pull the slackening heart strings of parents towards each other.

It is not always a reward for the deserving--nature's plans are inscrutable. The childless wife besieges Heaven with tears and prayers and yet is denied. To the ringless maid it comes as a terrible punishment. Born in secret disgrace, it lives triumphantly; even a night on a door-step cannot kill it. And often, most often, in these cases it is beautiful enough to make the blue-blooded Lady Hermione shed tears of bitter envy.

When all else is gone it becomes the anchor to keep the frail barque of matrimony from dangerous shoals.

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