

# Melissa's Better—Best Baby

BY AGNES LIDDELL

"What tomfoolery will those women be up to next?" Grandfather Tompkins, slumped in the big red rocker, was reading the local paper.

Melissa, mending a pile of grain bags by the door where she could watch Danny outside, longed dumbly to be one of those despised women who dared to "be up" to things besides hard, grueling labor. But she kept discreetly silent. Grandmother Tompkins didn't care what the women did. It was sure to be something silly, always something to coax the dollars out of your pocket but never anything to put a penny in. She sniffed contemptuously and went on looking over beans.

"They better stay at home and take care of their own young ones," Grandfather Tompkins looked up from his laborious spelling down the column to say. "Not but what some folks could learn something on baby tending if they had a mind to," he glanced meaningfully through the door to where Danny played contentedly on the porch. "But they better learn from their folks at home than brought up four to healthy and buried three."

"Oh! Something about young ones, now, is it?" Grandmother Tompkins was interested at last. "I wondered what they'd do when they couldn't come around showing us how to make bread and can tomatoes. They're going to try their hands at raising babies now are they?"

"The Baby Special," Grandfather Tompkins read it over. "That's a special car the car company let those women take to kite round the country weighing and measuring babies. What on earth do they want to run around weighing up a lot of young ones for?"

"Well, I never!" Grandmother Tompkins sat and stared. "A body'd think it was your hogs. Who cares how much baby weighs? You ain't going to get any money for them." "They're actually giving them the use of that car!" Grandfather Tompkins exploded. "Lighting it and heating it and furnishing two men to run it, to say nothing of the electricity it will waste. Giving all that just to weigh up a bunch of kids and then trying to raise the fares on us. That's the government thinking of? Taking us at every turn and then letting the Provincial Board of Health waste all that money on a pack of ornery young ones."

"But the babies are going to be men and women," Melissa ventured. "A pure-bred man worth as much as a pure-bred cow?"

"Could you sell that baby for five hundred dollars like I got for that better last week?" Grandfather Tompkins demanded witheringly. "Who'd pay you fifty cents for that spindle-shanked? Ain't even fat as he would be if you'd take Ma's advice and feed him pork grease and potatoes."

"Maybe 'twould be a good thing for some folks to have their baby weighed," Grandmother Tompkins put in. "They might see then that other folks knew something about baby-raising."

Melissa caught up her baby and hurried from the room. Get five hundred dollars for him? No amount of money could buy him from her! His theory little smile, his sunny little ruggies which she chose to consider his utter dependence upon her were all that made life worth living. Compare her baby to a Holstein calf! What wouldn't her boy be worth when he was a man if she could only do right by him?

And right she would do, if she could find out what was right. She never could fight for herself. They might slight her and overwork her and she hadn't the courage to complain. But Danny was different. He should have his rights if he had to fight the whole world. And to get those rights she had fought her own small world—her husband's family—ever since Danny came.

How she ever got the courage to do it was as much a mystery to Melissa as to everyone else, none of them having read "The Female of the Species." A quiet, dun little creature from babyhood, she had never before found courage to say Boo! to a wren. From her childhood, up, everyone had felt at liberty to snub her and ridicule her. She had grown into young womanhood accustomed to thinking of herself as "nobody but Old Jed Larkin's girl," and she took it as a matter of course that she should never have things as other girls had.

When Dan Tompkins, son of the wealthiest farmer thereabouts, first teased Melissa home from church, the town considered it just one of Dan's side-splitting jokes and obligingly laughed about it all the week. Next Sunday Dan appeared again with Melissa. A twice-told tale loses its flavor and this time there was only a quiet smile. When the third Sunday Dan knocked Bill Smith down for sneering at Melissa and took her home in his new car—wherein never girl had ridden before—the town sensed that it was Melissa's turn to laugh. But Melissa didn't. She was too overcome by the grandeur of it to do more than sit and listen while Dan rattled on and on about himself, his car, his stock, and the money he was going to make. It was all so new and wonderful.

Dan married Melissa. She was too stunned to have said "No" had she

wanted to. For weeks the country talked of nothing but "that dowdy Larkin girl's good luck," a view which humble Melissa piously shared. None of them thought for a moment that Dan was the lucky one. Melissa's patience, devotion and loyalty, her housewifely skill—there wasn't a better cook nor a neater housekeeper for miles around—were as nothing when tumbled into the scales against Dan's acres and pure-bred stock.

It must be said that Dan was not inexcusable to his good fortune, though he credited to his own shrewdness in picking out a wife. Melissa had cooked for him and his father during the one month his mother had ever permitted herself to be sick, and Dan had a lively recollection of the firm white leaves, the flaky, juicy pies, potatoes dry and mealy, and ham and eggs cooked just to the turn. He was a calculating, cool young chap, not to be tricked, when it came to picking out a wife, by emotions directly traceable to a saucy eye, a bobbing curl, or a trim, slim ankle. He had seen too many chaps pick them that way and eat soggy bread the rest of their lives. However, he never thought it worth while to mention any of Melissa's good points to her. Why spoil a faithful servant with praise? Melissa was a fine cook and a satisfactory wife. She knew her place as a Larkin born, a full octave down the scale from the Tompkinses, and she never tried to climb. No use starting her to thinking she was giving as much as she got.

All went well until Danny's arrival. Melissa accepted whatever treatment was accorded her in the same dumb way she had taken everything else dealt. She was so dazed at her own good fortune that she felt Mother Tompkins' slights were her just due. Any mother would feel bad to have a son like Dan pick out a Larkin when he might have gotten the best going. So she meekly did all the heavy work, ate the chicken wings and was very thankful.

Melissa began when Danny was eight and Mother Tompkins wanted Melissa to get up and help with the washing. Melissa refused! The older woman could not believe her ears. That the timid creature she had driven about for two years should actually spunk up and say she wouldn't do anything she was told to do was beyond belief. Father Tompkins was hastily summoned and added his voice to the demand. It was unheard of that a healthy woman should keep to her bed more than a week in confinement. Melissa merely turned her back on the couple and held the quilts tightly under her chin.

Clamorous ringing of the bell summoned Dan from the field to put down the rebellion. He strode into Melissa's room determined to show her she couldn't play tricks with him. He'd already lost fifteen minutes of daylight by her foolishness.

Melissa for once was first to speak. "You needn't say one word, Dan Tompkins," she said. "I ain't going to get up and touch that washing. And what's more, I ain't going to get up for six days longer. The doctor says it will be better for the baby for me to stay in bed two weeks and I'm going to stay."

That was her last word. Dan stormed wildly but Melissa neither spoke nor moved. She had said her all and besides the doctor had told her that getting excited was bad for the baby. It turned her milk to poison, and what mother wanted to poison her own child? She finally turned her face to the wall and closed her eyes. Dan would tire of it after awhile and go back to work. She was making a blind fight for her Motherhood.

Dan's contemptuous certainty that he could quickly "bring Melissa to time," slowly turned to doubt. He considered lifting her out of bed and forcibly dressing her, but remembering an experience he once had with a faithful horse he thought better of it. The horse and Melissa had some points in common. Each had drawn over-heavy loads for years without complaining and then suddenly balked. All attempts to make the horse move failed. When these quiet ones got set they were terribly so. He decided that perhaps Melissa was right about not getting up, and so he went back to the field.

Melissa kept to her bed two weeks and then went about her usual work as though nothing had happened. Mother Tompkins gave her first orders tentatively but finding them obeyed she picked up her old dictating ways. To outsiders Melissa seemed still the same patient drudge, but Mother Tompkins knew when to order. She did not need to be told that young Danny came first, and that if his well-being would be disturbed by any of her commands they would be ignored. So she kept her semblance of authority by wisely choosing the right time to speak.

To do the right thing by Danny became Melissa's religion. It brought out the cold perspiration to think that some act of hers, no matter what love was behind it, might spoil his whole life if it wasn't right. The busy doctor, sensing that here was a mother who would do what she believed right, in spite of relations and neighbors, crowded all the advice he could into the few visits he made after her confinement. Proper feeding was his hobby, but usually his teachings fell on deaf ears. The average woman argued that mother and grandmother and great-grandmother had fed everything to their babies, and some of them lived or there wouldn't be anyone here now!

Melissa was among the few who listened. She absorbed all he told her and wore out with much reading the feeding bulletin he gave her. A stray copy of a mother's magazine fell into her hands and she begged Dan to sign for it for her. He only laughed. There were more papers coming into the house now than any two women could read—three live stock journals and a poultry paper. She didn't need a paper to tell her how to bring up a baby. Any woman who had one could tell her all she needed to know. Melissa would have signed for it herself, but she had not the dollar.

But now the Baby Special was coming and there would be nurses and maybe doctors from the city with the very latest knowledge about taking care of babies. Everybody would be there, babies from all over and Danny should be among them.

Her planning was suspended by the arrival of Dan's youngest brother Dick, with his wife and a baby about Danny's age. Dick was out of work and came home to visit until something turned up. There was nothing new in this, it was the fifth time it had happened since Melissa had been a Tompkins, but the older Tompkinses were as elated as though Dick had just returned from the trenches.

Dick's home-coming at this time proved a godsend to Melissa. Ruby Muriel, the baby, had been brought up in the good old way to eat whatever and whenever she chose, or more properly speaking, to eat whatever a doting older sister gave her. Her bottle, sometimes filled with milk, sometimes with tea or coffee, and again with sweetened water, was seldom out of her mouth, even when she was asleep.

But in spite of everything, Ruby Muriel was fat, a flabby, soft sort of fat which passed with her grandparents for beauty. As they were allowed to feed her whatever they liked, she came at once the pet of both. It was on the second day after her arrival that Grandmother Tompkins remembered the Baby Special.

"When was it those women were coming along with that Special?" she asked Grandfather Tompkins at breakfast.

"Don't know," he lowered his saucer of coffee long enough to say. "Better ask Melissa." She's planning on walking in with Danny.

"We've got something worth showing now; we might all drive in," Grandmother Tompkins said as she handed Ruby Muriel a generously sugared doughnut. "When's it going to be, Melissa?"

Melissa, eyeing the doughnut with horror, was slow with her answer. "Next week Tuesday," she finally replied. "Ain't you afraid those greasy things will make her sick, Carrie?"

"If they're good enough for me I guess they won't hurt her any," Carrie scoffed. "A little grease might fatten Danny."

"What is this Baby Special?" Carrie asked. "If it's just one of those clinics, there's no sense in going. Some woman that never had a baby just gets up and tells you a lot of silly stuff about feeding the baby too much, and not to give her candy. Or else she ought to have a quart of milk a day and no tea or coffee."

"This ain't a clinic, it's a Special," Grandmother Tompkins explained. Having set her heart on taking Ruby Muriel to bask in the admiration of the crowd, she would not give up. "There's room for all of us in the auto and Dan can drive."

So it was decided they should go. Melissa at once began writing a list of questions to ask the nurse, a list which grew so long that even she at last saw the need of trimming it. The great day arrived and Danny, who had been tucked to bed with the chickens the evening before, awoke from his bath, over which Melissa spent an extra ten minutes, to find his warm milk and then kicked about on an old comfort on the sunny porch while Melissa hurried through her morning's work. She had been up nearly three hours before Carrie appeared, though shrill protests from Ruby Muriel had long disturbed the country peace. Tired and cross, Carrie slammed her small daughter into Danny's high chair, and querulously asked for coffee for both.

"I don't see what's the matter with her," she complained. "She squaled half the night. Seems as if I didn't get a wink of sleep. I'll look like a scarecrow to-day, when all Dick's old girls are out."

Melissa thought she might tell Carrie what was wrong with Ruby Muriel. That young lady's supper the day before had included bits of salt pork, a piece of hot biscuit dipped in maple syrup, a ribble of cabbage, and the frosting off Carrie's cake. Experience had taught Melissa, however, that it would be unwise to refer to this, so she said nothing.

Dan came in as Carrie was sipping her coffee to announce that the bus would be ready in a half hour.

"She'll just have to go without her bath then," Carrie ignored Dan's reference to her late rising. "Unless you've got time to do her, Melissa," she added hopefully. "Could you? I've got to curl my hair."

"I'm afraid not," Melissa was scrubbing the potatoes for supper. "I've got to get Danny's bottle ready yet and Mother Tompkins wants a good lunch put up, and I must slick up a little myself. The water's all hot, though. Seems as if you could do it if you hustled."

"Oh, I can hustle as well as the next," Carrie sniffed. Seizing the soil-eaten kitchen towel she dipped one corner of it in the basin of water which Dan, fresh from grooming horses, had just used to wash his hands. Three swift swabs over Ruby Muriel's protesting face and a wipe at each hand completed the bath. Drying was even more quickly done. A single dab at her face and a pat at each hand with the dry end of the towel left a fine foundation for the cheap face powder with which Carrie sprinkled her offspring.

"There, who's going to know she hasn't had a bath?" she demanded. "Now sit still, darling, while mamma dresses, and here's a banana for you."

Melissa permitted herself the luxury of separating Ruby Muriel from the apple banana as Carrie dashed upstairs.

Curled, powdered and adorned with cheap trinkets, Carrie descended on the dot. Ruby Muriel was thrust into clean garments and, gay in a lingerie bonnet trimmed with clusters of pink roses and streamers of blue ribbon, occupied the post of honor on the front seat with Grandfather Tompkins and Dan. Danny, wearing a bonnet which Melissa had fashioned out of a handkerchief, perched on the little camp stool which was used when there were extras and clung contentedly to his mother's thumb.

Arrived at the Special, Grandfather Tompkins pushed directly towards the nurse with Ruby Muriel, as became a man of his importance. Grandmother Tompkins and Carrie stuck closely to him for everybody would be anxious to see Dick's wife and baby, fresh from the city. The crowd opened to let them through, but when Melissa with Danny tried to follow she found around the edge until she reached the nurse's side, where she stood drinking in every word.

"The future of the whole world rests upon to-day's babies," the nurse was saying. "War has taken the best of our manhood, so it is up to Canadians to bring up healthy men and women to take their places. Canada needs pure-bred children more than she does pure-bred stock."

"Here," she suddenly took Danny from Melissa, "is a baby who shows what intelligent care can do." Defiantly removing Danny's clothing she placed him on the scales. "Twenty pounds exactly," she announced, "and 'The Baby Special' is how old?"

"Eleven months," Melissa replied. "The nurse had some trouble with her speech. 'As near correct weight as we could ever hope to get,' she finally ventured to say, 'and,' whistling out a tape measure, 'I'll guess that he is just twenty-nine inches long. He looks perfectly proportioned. Exactly twenty-nine and one-fourth," she read off the measurement. "He has been kept pretty closely to milk and fruit juice, hasn't he?" And nodding approval to Melissa's reply she handed the smiling Danny high to Grandmother Tompkins.

"This baby is as near perfect physical as you can hope to get them," she said. "His skin is clear and pink, flesh firm, breath sweet, eyes bright and sparkling, stomach not bulging as it would be if he were over-fed. He has eight teeth, which is about right, and he seems to be a good-natured, happy little fellow. Keep on with plenty of milk, but add to it crack-cakes, toast, cereal, egg, and perhaps some finely chopped spinach as well as fruit juice and you'll be all right."

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Dan came in as Carrie was sipping her coffee to announce that the bus would be ready in a half hour.

"I can't be ready by then," Carrie wailed. "I ain't bathed the baby yet and I've got myself to dress."

"Can't help it," Dan was firm. "It takes a good hour to drive to Three Rivers and I've got to be back early. Why don't you try sleeping nights and getting up days like Melissa? She'll be ready."

## Soils and Crops

Address communications to Agronomist, 78 Adelaide St. West, Toronto.

### To Prevent Diarrhoea in Chickens.

Correct methods of poultry management will reduce the losses which occur each year from diarrhoea. Much of the loss from diarrhoea is due to improper environment. Briefly summarized, the causes of diarrhoea are disease germs, molds, or mismanagement. Among some of the common causes the following are most important:

Chilling: If a chick becomes chilled, it will have to indiscretely use of the nursery tray, especially during cold weather, or the chicks may get too far away from the heat. If the chicks start the night at some distance from the brooder the chances are that when the temperature falls some of the chicks will not find their way to the supply of heat. The last duty of the poultryman should be to see that the brood is safely stowed away for the night. Even in the daytime provision should be made to keep the chicks from getting too far away from the heat. Wire netting protectors will keep them at home and prevent losses.

Again, many poultrymen are careless in transferring chicks from the incubator to the brooder. If the incubator is in a cool room there is great danger that the chicks will be chilled. Especially is this true if the hands are cold or the container in which the chicks are put is not warmed up. But how easily either of these dangers can be avoided! After the chicks are put in the brooder, a temperature of 100 deg. F. is none too hot. But one should give the chicks a place to go if they care to cool off. The temperature should be reduced about four to five degrees a week but enough heat must always be given for comfort.

Chicks should not be let out of the coop until the grass is dry, because a

labies!" And she elbowed her way out of the crowd.

"I don't believe you could stand any more either," Dan, grinning broadly, suddenly appeared at Melissa's elbow. "Your head will be so big I'll have to buy you a new hat. What do you say to getting it right now?"

Melissa was speechless. To have Danny singled out for all that praise—though she always knew he was perfect—and then to have Dan offer to buy her so much as a shoe lace! It was too much.

"Blamed if it wasn't worth the price of a suit, too, to see Carrie's face when the nurse said Ruby was pimpled," Dan chuckled. "I never could see why the folks thought she was prettier than our Danny. You ain't had any clothes for some time, so you better stop for now."

A resplendent Melissa occupied the jolly camp stool on the return trip, with Danny in a new coat and bonnet, again clinging to her thumb. Ruby Muriel sucked a stick of striped candy, dabbling it at intervals over Grandfather Tompkins' coat sleeve. The ride was made in deep silence. Melissa was too overcome by the happenings of the day to utter a sound even had she been given to much speech. Carrie, sulked by Dick, whose indulgence could not be disturbed by anything an impudent nurse might say, and Grandfather and Grandmother Tompkins, grumpy and indignant, only Dan seemed jovial and indulgent in sultry chuckles as he kept the car speeding along.

"Pure-bred babies!" he said, when at home he lifted Danny out and actually carried him into the house. "You've got a pure-bred grandson to brag about now, dad, along with your Holsteins."

"Pure-bred fiddlesticks," snorted Grandfather Tompkins. "The fools ain't all dead yet."

"No, the more's the pity," agreed Grandmother Tompkins, hurrying after a doughnut for Ruby Muriel. Melissa only smiled.

"Old folks never can change," she reflected generously. "But I should think Carrie would wake up for Ruby's sake."

Our interest in the public welfare will grow only as fast as the spirit of humanity develops within us.

If there are cracks in the floor you want to stain, soak very soft tissue paper in hot thin starch until pulpy and fill up the cracks with this, and level it off with a knife. Then stain in the usual way. The cracks will be quite hidden.

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## THE CHILDREN'S HOUR

The Wise Physician.

The Queen was ill. All the court mourned and wept. Their beautiful queen was sick and the wise men, when questioned about her, would only shake their heads sadly. The king was in despair. He would give his kingdom, if only the queen could be made well.

But pale and quiet, she lay in her big bed. All the medicine in the kingdom could not cure her.

One day, while the king was sitting in the council chamber, pondering sadly over the queen's illness, one of the knights rushed into the room and said that he had just heard of a very famous physician, in a neighboring land, who, it was said, knew everything and could cure all ills. The king, much excited, jumped from his chair and ordered the very fastest messenger to go to the neighboring land and bring this famous physician to the court.

Soon the swift messenger returned, with the famous physician, who was indeed a wise, old man, well versed in the secrets of the earth.

The king, alight with hope, led the physician into the Queen's room. The wise physician looked at the pale and beautiful queen and talked gently with her. Finally he turned to the king and said, "There is only one cure."

"Oh, tell me," cried the king. "If it costs the whole of my kingdom, she shall have it."

"Then," said the wise, old physician, "the queen must have the very whitest egg in the whole world."

All the court attendants looked astonished. An Egg—they had never thought of that. The king, too, was astounded, but he had much faith in this wise old physician from the neighboring land.

Immediately the king had a proclamation read amongst all his knights to the effect that, he would give half his kingdom to the one who would find the whitest egg in the world.

And so the best and bravest knights of the realm started forth. Some went to the west, some to the east, some to the north and some to the south. Everywhere, they scoured the earth for the very whitest egg.

Soon they came riding back and all brought with them, many, many eggs. All were laid before the wise, old physician from the neighboring land. He looked at all of them carefully and then shook his head sadly. The very whitest egg was not there. The king who had begun to hope, now despaired and all the knights were cast down.

Just then in rushed the youngest knight of all. They had forgotten all about him. In he came, carrying carefully the whitest of eggs, which he had found at the very centre of the world. The wise old physician's face lighted up when he saw this whitest of eggs. An egg of such whiteness had never been seen before. Its snowy whiteness dazzled all the knights. The king once more began to hope. Carried by the wise old physician across the precious, whitest egg in the world.

Slowly she sucked its contents and then the anxious king and his court saw the color creep up into her cheeks. Her eyes began to sparkle. She clasped her hands—"I am well, I am well," she cried and threw her arms around the king.

The king and all his knights were overjoyed. Feasting and merrymaking were everywhere and the most honored ones were the wise old physician from the neighboring land and the young knight who had found the whitest of eggs.

### Early Tomatoes.

The earliest profit in growing tomatoes is usually from the earliest ripe fruit placed on the market; hence the aim of professional growers is to adopt every known means to obtain the largest crop of fruit as early a date as possible. Having this idea in mind the Dominion Horticulturist has, at the Central Experimental Farm at Ottawa, given special attention to the development of early varieties and strains. Many market gardeners, the Dominion Horticulturist notes, now save their own seed, selecting for earliness and smoothness of fruit each year. Those who have made a systematic practice of this may have in their own strain something as good as can be obtained anywhere, and perhaps better. At the Central Experimental Farm a comparison is made each year of many varieties and strains, and in the year before last thirty-seven named varieties were under test as well as fourteen unnamed ones were the wise old physician from the neighboring land and the young knight who had found the whitest of eggs.

It costs less to prevent disease than it does to cure it. A sick community develops bad neighbors.