

## AN ECHO FROM DARWIN

(Continued from page 10)

house. Meanwhile, however, treasures were collected and laid away against the ripening of Sister's years.

"Claribel gimme this doll's purse," said Jimsie, at school, one morning, "to leave her see Sister suckin' her thumb."

Jimsie had adopted a proprietary attitude ever since the night he had helped put the baby to bed and the morning he had helped give her a bath.

"That's pretty good." Johnsie looked the object over with the keen scrutiny of a second-hand dealer. "But it ain't as nice as the pinner that Lucy traded. It plays all right even with four keys gone."

"She'd oughter pay more to kiss her," his friend reminded him, "an' I say we don't trade no more kisses—for nothin'."

At last the great day dawned. At twelve o'clock Johnsie was to be allowed to attach himself to Sister's triumphal chariot and wheel her around an entire block.

With the instinct of the natural-born sleuth, Pастey sensed the coming event. He made himself particularly obnoxious.

"Hello, nurse," he hissed behind his speller. "How's the human concertina?"

Spartan control alone prevented Johnsie from making a fitting retort.

Presently, into the quiet of the room, a strange noise jangled. It was like an owl's cry mingled with that of a coyote, a cat and the human young.

"Who did that?" Teacher demanded.

"Pastey," accused a dozen voices. "He's allus makin' fun of Johnsie's baby. He's just full of bad manners—he is."

Pastey was dismissed, but he was not the boy one would like to picture. On the contrary! He loped up the street grinning and purposeful.

Arrived at the front door of his home, he made a bold entrance, knowing that custom demanded the presence of Milford's housewives in the kitchen at such an hour. He passed upstairs to the attic with no interruption and after a short search, he unearthed a tremendous brown woolly monkey.

Hiding it in the sitting room he made a noiseless escape and turned his face toward Johnsie's house. There, as he expected, Sister lay in her shining black perambulator, sleeping the untroubled slumber of unsuspecting babyhood.

Appetizing odors from the kitchen argued that the front of the house was deserted, so after a moment's delay, caused by a puzzling foot brake, the abductor made his second successful getaway, pushing the now rocking pram and its sleeping occupant as fast as possible to his home.

The school bell was ringing its mid-day dismissal as he returned the carriage to its place in the front yard, and a troop of children headed by Johnsie and Jimsie turned the corner.

"Here, you!" admonished the former, "Clear out! I ain't goin' to have you hangin' round an' sneakin' no looks at my sister!"

"Who wants to look at your old baby, nurse?" returned Pastey, making an insulting jibe with the tip of his tongue. "I'd just as lief look at a monkey, I would. That's what a baby looks like, anyways. Come an' see the nice young monkey! What'll you give to have a look at a pretty brown monkey?" he jeeringly asked the crowd as he made discreetly for the corner.

Divided between a desire to do battle, avenging the libelous attack upon Sister's beauty, and hunger for the plaudits of the assembly, Johnsie hesitated. The advice of a little girl decided for him.

"Don't mind him," she urged. "We'll all stand close round, so he can't peep an' if he gets funny, I'll tell his father."

Eight little girls and boys surrounded the carriage, making a cordon of bright-eyed faces into any of which Sister might have looked and seen a wealth of love. Every breath was held—that was an unwritten law when looking at something precious, like the inside of Father's watch.

"Ready?" asked Jimsie, holding the light flannel face covering on one side. Johnsie held it on the other.

"Go!" returned the brother, and they whisked down the cover to disclose the face of a hideous brown woolly monkey!

With a cry the like of which none of the horrified children had ever heard before, Johnsie turned a sickly green and dropped down beside the pram. He had fainted.

Out of the black which enveloped him, Jimsie saw two things—Pastey's mother running bare-headed up the street and carrying a small bundle which made lusty noises, and Pastey, himself, leering at the horror-stricken group from around a sheltering corner.

Armed with the courage of a righteous though unholy rage, Jimsie flew at the throat of the boy whose years and weight were considerably greater than his own. Through red-flecked atmosphere he lunged, meeting few obstructions with his fists, but many—alas—with his little face.

His passes grew feebler as a great weight bore him down to glorious defeat.

Pastey's father happening upon the scene, laid hold of his offspring by the seat of his trousers, and having listened to a confused but indignant account of the abduction, he steered his son home in the uncomfortable manner known to pirates and small boys, as "walking Spanish."

Pastey did not appear that afternoon.

And Jimsie was excused from school. He was permitted to wheel the baby up and down the street until she opened her eyes and mouth and signified her desire for refreshment. Later, he was allowed to hold her on his lap.

She lay still a long time, looking up into his face and puzzling over the strangeness of his appearance. Then she stretched forth an investigating finger and smiled. Jimsie gulped and clutched her very, very close.

And he wore his headache and unsightly plaster patches proudly: they were as a halo, consecrated by the sympathetic, caressing rose-leaf hands of sister!



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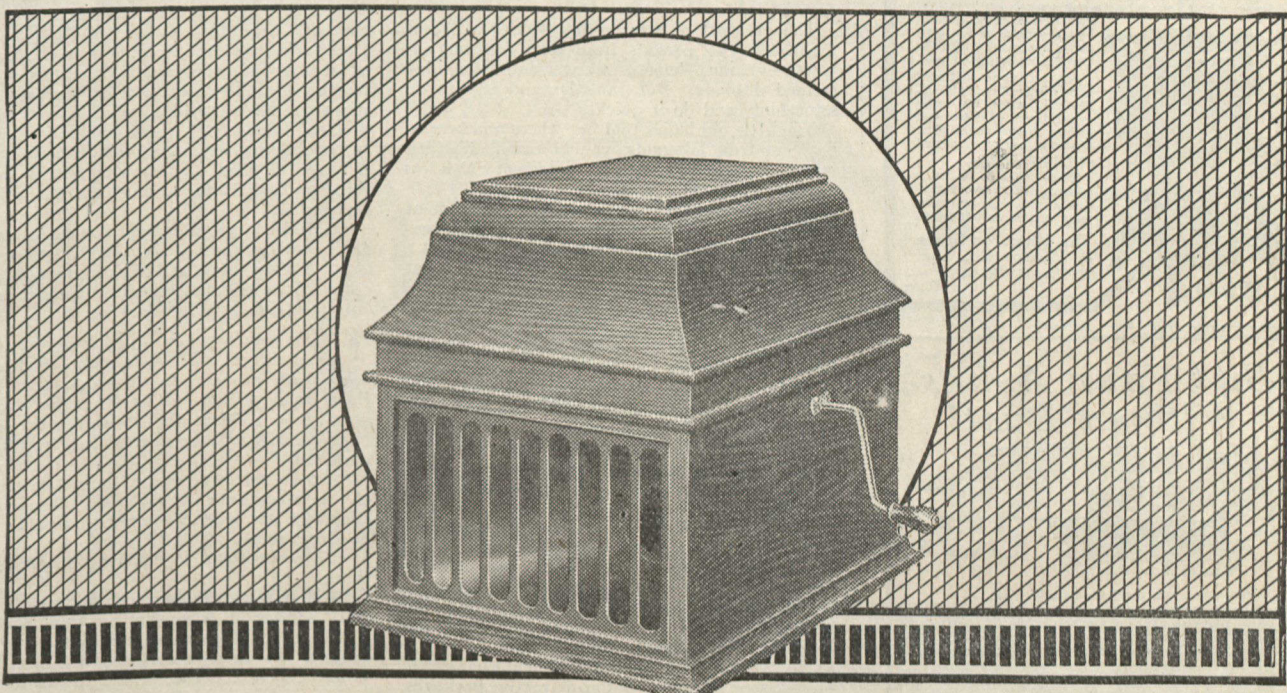
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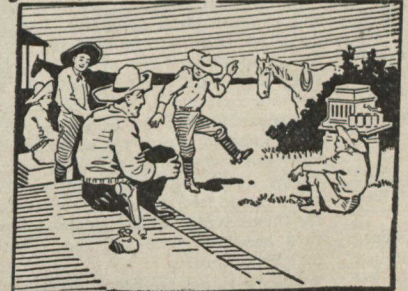
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