



MISS ROSE ON HORSEBACK

The Baby

The pretty girl had been spending a few days with a young married friend of hers in Victoria.

"I hope you have had a very pleasant visit," said I when she came in to see me, after her return.

"Oh, yes, they were both very kind and seemed glad to see me. Jessie was just as nice as ever—when she had a few minutes to spare."

"Why," inquired I in accents of surprise, "what kept her so busy? They are very comfortably off—it is not as if she had to be her own maid!"

"My dear," said Helen (that's the pretty girl's name), with impressive distinctiveness, "Jessie has a baby."

"I know she has! What about it? If she had two or three now, I could understand your tone of voice."

"Two or three?" laughed Helen in derision. "If she had two or three it would take the whole town to mind them, judging by the attention required by this one. He kept us all busy."

"Is he then such a cross child?"

"Not at all. He's a good enough little fellow and a darling—only they are spoiling him. I don't say he never cries."

"Of course he cries—all babies do cry—only thing they are born with the knowledge of how to do!" commented I flippantly.

"Naturally he cries now and then," went on Helen as if I had not spoken, "but they make too much fuss over him. If he just whimpers, they pick him up and carry him about, and dandle him, and shake things at him, and show him that pretty picture on the wall," and the "horsey-porseys" on the street, and let him have anything he grabs for."

"Indulgent parents evidently!"

"Well, rather! They are having up trouble for themselves. When he gets a bit older there will be no pleasing him!" And she shook her head wisely.

"I never could have believed what a handful—perhaps houseful is a better word—one child could be if I hadn't experienced it," continued Helen disgustedly. "It's dreadful the way everything centres around 'the baby.' When he's awake he keeps them on the jump, amusing him—or else he cries, and Jessie thinks he's sick. And when he's asleep they all move around on tip toe and talk in whispers, for fear of waking him. If you go in, speaking in an ordinary voice, you are met by Jessie hanging over the banister. 'Hush, the baby's asleep,' and you sneak about like a guilty creature. Jessie never has time to go anywhere, and the piano is getting mouldy for want of use. There is no time to play it when the baby's awake—and when he isn't you dare not touch a note for fear of the noise disturbing him. If he cries in the night they get up and turn on the

light and Tom carries him up and down (for he won't let you rock him, it's more fun to make people dance the two-step!) and plays with him. Oh dear! I used to hear them at it—and go to sleep again with a thankful heart. I was so glad I hadn't to entertain him."

And she sighed as if it made her tired to even remember the efforts of those devoted parents.

"It's all nonsense you know! There isn't a bit of necessity for all that to do over any youngster," was her summing up. "It never was intended."

"But I understand," said I presently, "that the apoplexy idea is to feed a baby, and lay it down comfortably, and pay no further attention to it. The truly modern baby is supposed to entertain itself—and enjoy it."

"Then Jessie is decidedly old-fashioned," returned Helen with decision. "If I ever have a baby of my own I'll begin right with it and train it not to expect all this fuss."

"Yes," said I with interest—I like to draw Helen out."

"Yes," repeated she even more decidedly. "I'll not allow it to be carried about and dandled, and rocked, and picked up as soon as it wakes, and then it won't expect it. It will be kept clean and warm and well fed and allowed to lie there until it wishes to use its own little arms and legs, and learns to move about. That's the way all the other animals do with their young. They don't pack them around—unless it is for safety or to take them to another place. Humans are the only animals that make such a work of nursing and caring for their little ones. Look at cats and dogs and sheep and cows! You don't see them exerting themselves because their kiddies whimper a little."

"You've been thinking this thing out evidently," said I laughing. "But what if the favored infant did not realize its blessed lot and cried?"

"Oh, I would pat it a little and turn it over, and speak to it soothingly, and then it would come to know that that was all that was coming, and be content."

Whether as a matron, my young friend will have strength of mind to carry out in practice her present theory, remains to be seen.

—A. T.



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