

TORCHY AND SHIRTY STORIES

By
SEWELL
FORD

IKKY-BOY COMES ALONG

Being a parent grows on you, don't it? Course, at first, when it's sprung on you so kind of sudden, you hardly know how to act. That is, if you're makin' your debut in the part. And I expect for a few months there, after young Richard Hemmingway Ballard came and settled down with Vee and me, I put kind of a ragged amateur performance as a fond father. All I can say about it now is I hope I didn't look as foolish as I felt.

As for Vee, she seemed to get her lines and business perfect from the start. Somehow, young mothers do. She knew how to handle the youngster right off; how to hold him and what to say to him when he wiggled up his face and made remarks to her that meant nothing at all to me. And she wasn't fussed or anything when company came in and caught her at it. Also, young Master Richard seemed to be right at home from the very first. Didn't seem surprised or strange or nervous in the presence of a pair of parents that he found wished on him without much wonder. Just gazed at us as calm and matter-of-fact as if he'd known us a long time. While me, I was a little bit of a panic whenever I was left alone with him.

But are we awkward now? I'll say we are in fact, as Harry Lauder used to put it, verily well acquainted. Chummy I might say. Why not, after we've stood two years of each other without any serious dispute? Not that I'm claimin' any long-distance record as a model parent. No I expect I do most of the thing I shouldn't, and only a few of them that I should. But I'll say I'm a critical young man. That's his own way of sayin' his name and mostly we call him that. Course he answers to others too; such as Old Scout, and Smootherkins, and young Roughhouse. I mean, he does when he's out with me with important enterprises; such as hauling Buddy the Alameda pup, around by the ears; or sportin' in milk and cereal, with Buddy watchin' hopeful for sideways; or pullin' out the drawer of Vee's work table.

It's been hinted to us by thoughtful friends who have all these scientific dope on bringin' up children, although most of 'em never had any of their own, that this is all wrong. Accordin' to them we ought to start right in makin' him drop whatever he's doin' and come to us the minute we call. Maybe we should too. But that ain't the way it works out, for generally, we don't want anything special and he seems so wrapped up in his private little affairs that it don't seem worth while breakin' in on his program. Course, ma'am! Buddy around may seem to us like a frivolous pastime, but how can you tell if it ain't the serious business in life to 'Ikky-boy just then? Besides, Buddy seems to like it. So as a rule we let 'em finish the game.

But there is one time each day when he's always ready to quit any kind of fun and come toddlin' with his hands stretched out and a wide grin on his chubby little face. That's along about 6:15 when I blow an arm towel. Then he's right there with the merry giggles and the friendly motions. Also his way of addressin' his male parent would give another jolt to a lot of people, I suppose.

"Hi, Torch!" That's his favorite word. "Reddy yourself you young freshy," I'm apt to come back at him. Followin' which I scooch to meet his flyin' tackle and we roll on the rug in a clinch, with Buddy yappin' delighted and mixin' in promiscuously. Finally we end up on the big davenport in front of the fire-place and noddle in a few minutes of lively chat.

"Well, 'Ikky-boy how you and Buddy been behavin' yourselves, eh?" I'll ask. "Which has been the worst outup, eh?"

"Buddy had dog," he'll say battin' him over the head with a pink fist. "See?" And he'll exhibit a tear in his snappers or a chewed sleeve. "Huh! I'll bet it's been fifty-fifty, you young roughhouse," I'll say. "Who do you like the best around this joint anyway?"

"Buddy" is always the answer. "And next?" I'll demand. "Mamma!" he'll say. "Hey, where do I come in?" I'll ask, shakin' him.

Then he'll screw up his mouth mischievously and say: "Torchy comes in name, Torchy Torchy!"

I'll admit Vee ain't so strong for all this. His Callin' me 'Torchy,' I mean, I mean she does her best, too, to get him to change it to Daddy. But that word don't seem to on 'Ikky-boy's list at all. He picked up the 'Torchy' all by himself and he seems to want to stick to it. I don't mind. Maybe it ain't just the thing for a son and heir to spring on a perfectly good father chuechid! over it besides, but it sounds quite all right to me. Don't hurt my sense of dignity a bit.

And it looks like he'll soon come to be called young Torchy himself. Uh-huh. For a while there Vee was sure his first crop of hair, which was wheat colored was like hers, was going to be the color emblem of his permanent tatch. But when the second growth began to show up she had to revise her forecast. Now there's no doubt of his achuevin' a pinkish set of wavy locks that'll make a fresh painted fire hydrant look faded. They're gettin' brighter and brighter and I expect in time they'll show the same new copper kettie tint that mine do.

"I don't care," says Vee. "I rather like it."

"That's the brave talk Vee!" says I. "It may be all he'll inherit from me but it ain't so worse at that. With that hair in evidence there won't be much danger of his bein' lost in a crowd. Folks will remember him after one good look. Besides, it's always sort of cheerin' on a rainy day. He'll be able to brighten up the

about 100 per cent. boy? He's full of pep and jump and go, same as Buddy, and he's just naturally got to let it out."

"I fail to see," says Auntie, "how teachin' him to be slang is at all necessary. As you know that's some thing of which I distinctly disapprove."

"Now that you remind me," says I, "seems I have heard you say some thing of that kind before. And take it from me I'm going to make a stab at trainin' him different. Right, now, Richard, approach your father."

"Ikky-boy lets loose of Buddy's collar and stares at me inquisitively."

"Young man," says I, "I want you to lay off that slang stuff. Ditch it. It ain't lady like or refined. It's in future when you converse with your parents see that you do it respectfully and proper. Get me?"

At which 'Ikky-boy looks bored. "Where?" he remarks boisterously, making a grab for Buddy's stubby tail and messin' it.

"Perfectly absurd!" snorts Auntie, "refrain! haughty to the day window. 'Disqualified!' says I under my breath. 'Might as well go the limit. Smootherkins. We'll have to grow up in our own crude way."

That was the state of affairs when this Mrs. Proctor Butt comes crashin' in on the scene of our strained domestic relations. Trust her to appear at just the wrong time. Mrs. Butt: "I call her, and she lives up to the name."

She's a dumpy built blonde, fair, with our regular afternoon reunion. Might be we went at it a little stronger and rougher than usual, on account of the youngster's havin' been held quiet in her lap for a half hour or so. "Hi hi, ol' Torchy, Torchy!" she shouts, grinnin' both hands into my hair.

"Buddy burn!" says I, makin' a hissing noise.

"Yah yah! 'Ikky-boy wanna ride hokey," says he.

"And me with my trousers just pressed!" says I, "say where do you get that stuff?"

"I must say," comes in Auntie, "that I don't consider that the proper way to talk to a child."

"Oh he don't mind," says I. "But he is apt to learn such expressions and use them himself," says she.

"Yes he picks up a lot," says I. He'd cheer that way. Aren't you, young tarrier?"

"Who-o-o!" says 'Ikky-boy, slidin' off my knee to make a dive at Buddy and roll him on the floor.

"One should speak gently to a child," says Auntie, "and uses only the best English."

"I might be polite to him," says I. "If he'd be polite to me but that don't seem to be his line."

Auntie shugs her shoulders and gives us up as hopeless. We're in bad with her, both of us, and I expect if there'd been a lawyer handy she'd revised her will on the spot. Honest it's lucky the times she's decided to cross me off as one of her heirs don't show on me anywhere or I'd be notched up like a yardstick, and if I'd done any worryin' over these spells of how I'd be an ubino from the ears up. But when she starts castin' the cold eye at Richard Hemmingway I almost wonder if that guilty feelin' and works up that I ain't some to blame.

"You ain't overlookin' the fact, are you, Auntie?" I suggest, "that he's

to havin' a conversational gum drop tossed at me once in a while, sort of offhand and casual. But that ain't Mrs. Buttinski's method. She feeds you raw molasses with a main spoon. Just smears you with it.

"Isn't it perfectly wonderful?" says she, waddin' in fury, "that your dear darling little son should be two years old? Do you know Mrs. Robert Elms just told me of what an important day it was in the lives of you two charming young people, so I came right over to congratulate you. And here I discover you all together in your beautiful little home, proud father and all. How fortunate!"

As she's beamin' straight at me I has to give her some comeback. "Yes, you're lucky, all right," says I. "Another minute and you wouldn't found me here for I was just—"

Which is where I get a frown and a back-up signal from Vee. She don't like Mrs. Proctor Butt a bit more'n I do but she ain't so frank about lettin' her know it.

"Oh, please don't run away," begs Mrs. Butt. "You make such an ideal young couple. As I tell Mr. Butt, just can't keep my eyes off you two whenever I see you out together."

"I'm sure that's nice of you to say so," says Vee, blushin'.

"Oh, every one thinks the same of you, my dear," says the lady. "Only I simply can't keep such things to myself. I have such an impulsive nature. And I adore young people and children, positively adore them. And now where is the darling little baby that I haven't seen for months and months? You'll forgive my running at this unseasonable hour, I know, but I just couldn't wait another day to—oh, there he is, the darling cherub! And isn't that a picture for an artist?"

"I must have to be some rapid-draw painter shiner if he was to use 'Ikky'

boy as a model just then for him and Buddy was havin' a free-for-all mix-up behind the davenport that nothing short of a movie camera would have done justice to."

"Oh you darling little fellow!" she gurgles on. "I must hold you in my arms just a moment. Please, mother, mayn't I?"

"I'm afraid you would find him rather a lively fellow. Just now, warns Vee. "You see, when he gets to playin' with Buddy he's apt to—"

"Oh I shan't mind a bit," says Mrs. Butt. "Besides the little dears always seem to take to me. Do let me have him for a moment?"

"You get him, Torchy," says Vee. So after more or less maneuverin' I untangles the two, shins Buddy in another room, and deposits 'Ikky-boy, still kickin' and strugglin' indignantly, in whatever lap Mrs. Butt has to offer.

She then proceeds to rave over him. It's enough to make you seasick. "Positively," she gushes, "And such heavenly big blue eyes with the long lashes and his little rosybud nose! O-o-o-o-o!"

From that on all she spouts is baby talk, while she mauls and paws him around like he was a sack of meal. I couldn't help grinnin' at Auntie, of that's one thing she and Vee have agreed on, that strangers want to be allowed to take such liberties with baby. Besides Auntie never did have any use for this Mrs. Butt anyway and hardly speaks to her civil when she meets her. Now Auntie is squirming in her chair and I can guess how her fingers are itchin' to rescue the youngster.

"I'm gurgles 'little sweetums, ain't it?" gurgles Mrs. Butt, rootin' him in the stomach with her nose. Won't let me has um's sweet little pinky. She's just tryin' to haul off one of his shoes when 'Ikky-boy cuts loose with the rough motions, fists and feet both in action, until she has to straighten up to save her hat and her hair.

"Dess one 'little toe-tiss," she begs. "Say," demands Mrs. Butt, pushin' her face away frostily, "where do you get that stuff?"

"Whaa-at?" gasps Mrs. Butt. "Lay off 'at tant you," says he. "OO—oo give 'Ikky-boy a big pain, oo does, G'way!"

"Why, how rude!" says Mrs. Butt, gaspin' around bewildered, and then she sports the approving smile on Auntie's face, she turns red in the ears.

"Say, I don't know when I've seen the old girl look so tickled over any thing. What she's worked up is almost a grin. And there's no doubt that Mrs. Butt knows why it's there. 'Of course,' says she, 'if you prove of such language—' and handin' the youngster over to Vee she straightens her hair and makes a quick exit.

"Bang!" says I. "I guess we got a slap on the wrist that time."

"I don't care a bit," says Vee holdin' in her chin well up. "She had no business maulin' baby in that fashion."

"I ain't worryin' if she never comes back," says I. "I'd just promised Auntie to train 'Ikky-boy to talk different and—"

"Under similar provocation," says Auntie, "I might use the same expressions—if I knew how."

"Hip, hip, for Auntie!" I sings out.



"Why, how rude!" says Mrs. Butt, gazing around bewildered.



"I must say, comes in Auntie, 'that I don't consider that the proper way to talk to a child.'"

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