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The Little Yaller Baby.



THE LITTLE YALLER BABY.

I hev allus hed a good opinion uv the wimmin folks. I don't look at 'em as some people do; uv course they're a necessity—just as men are. Uv course if there warn't no wimmin folks there wouldn't be no men folks—leastwise that's what the medikil books say. But I never wuz much on discussin' humin economy; what I hev allus thought 'nd said wuz that wimmin folks wuz a kind uv luxury, 'nd the best kind, too. Maybe it's because I haint hed much to do with 'em that I'm sot on 'em. Never did get real well acquainted with more 'n three or four uv 'em in all my life; seemed like it wuz meant that I shouldn't hev 'em round me as most men hev. Mother died when I wuz a little tyke, an' Ant Mary raised me till I wuz big enuff to make my own livin'. Down here in the Southwest, you see, most uv the girls is boys; there aint none uv them civilizin' influences folks talk uv,—nothin' but flowers 'nd birds 'nd such things as poetry tells about. So I kind uv growed up with the curis notion that wimmin folks wuz too good for our part uv the country, 'nd I hev'n't quite got that notion out'n my head yet.

One time—wall, I reckon 't wuz about four years ago—I got a letter frum ol' Col. Sibley to come up to Saint Louey 'nd consult with him 'bout some stock int'rests we hed together. Railroad travellin' wuz no new thing to me. I hed been prutty posperous,—hed got past hevin' to ride in a caboose 'nd git out at every stop to punch up the steers. Hed money in the Hoost'n bank 'nd use to go to Tchicago oncet a year; hed met Fill Armer 'nd shook hands with him, 'nd oncet the city papers hed a colume article about my bein' a millionaire; uv course 't warn't so, but a feller kind uv likes that sort uv thing, you know.

The mornin' after I got that letter from Col. Sibley I started for Saint Louey. I took a bunk in the Pullman car, like I hed been doin' for six years past; 'nd I reckon the other folks must hev thought I wuz a heap uv a man, for every haff-hour I give the nigger haf a dollar to bresh me off. The car wuz full uv people,—rich people, too, I reckon, for they wore good clo'es 'nd criticised the scenery. Jest across frum me there wuz a lady with a big, fat baby,—the pruttiest woman I hed seen in a month uv Sundays; and the baby! why, doggone my skin, when I wuzn't payin' money to the nigger, darned if I didn't set there watchin' the big, fat little cuss, like he wuz the only baby I ever seen. I aint much of a hand at babies, 'cause I haint seen many uv 'em, 'nd when it comes to handlin' 'em—why, that would break me all up, 'nd like 's not 't would break the baby all up too. But it has allus been my notion that nex' to the wimmin folks babies wuz jest about the nicest things on earth. So the more I looked at that big, fat little baby settin' in its mother's lap 'cross the way, the more I wanted to look; seemed like I wuz hoodooed by the little tyke; 'nd the first thing I knew there wuz water in my eyes; don't know why it is, but it allus makes me kind ur slop over to set 'nd watch a baby cooin' 'nd playin' in its mother's lap.

"Look a' hyar, Sam," says I to the nigger, "come hyar 'nd bresh me off agin! Why aint you tendin' to bizniss?"

But it didn't do no good 't all; pertendin' to be cross with the nigger might fool the other folks in the car, but it didn't fool me. I wuz dead stuck on that baby—gol darn his pictur'! And there the little tyke set in its mother's lap, doublin' up its fists 'nd tryin' to swaller 'em, 'nd talkin' like to its mother in a lingo I couldn't understan', but which the mother could, for she talked back to the baby in a soothin' lingo which I couldn't understand but which I liked to hear, 'nd she kissed the baby 'nd stroked its hair 'nd petted it like wimmin do.

It made me mad to hear them other folks in the car criticisen' the scenery 'nd things. A man's in mighty poor bizness, anyhow, to be lookin' at scenery when there's a woman in sight,—a woman *and* a baby!

Prutty soon—oh, maybe in a hour or two—the baby began to fret 'nd worrit. Seemed to me like the little critter wuz hungry. Knowin' that there wuzn't no eatin'-house this side uv Bowieville, I jest called the train boy, 'nd says I to him: "Hev you got any victuals that will do for a baby?"

"How is oranges 'nd bananas?" says he.

"That ought to do," sez I. "Jist do up a dozen uv your best oranges 'nd a dozen uv your best bananas 'nd take 'em over to that baby with my complerments."

But before he could do it, the lady hed laid the baby on one uv her arms 'nd hed spread a shawl over its head 'nd over her shoulder, 'nd all uv a suddin' the baby quit worritin' and seemed like he hed gone to sleep.

When we got to York Crossin' I looked out'n the winder 'nd seen some men carryin' a long pine box up towards the baggage car. Seein' their hats off, I knew there wuz a dead body in the box, 'nd I couldn't help feelin' sorry for the poor

creetur that hed died in that lonely place uv York Crossin'; but I mought hev felt a heap sorrier for the creeters that hed to live there, for I'll allow that York Crossin' is a *leetle* the durnedest lonesomest place I ever seen.

Well, just afore the train started agin, who should come into the car but Bill Woodson, and he wuz lookin' powerful tough. Bill herded cattle for me three winters, but hed moved away when he married one uv the waiter girls at Spooner's hotel at Hoost'n.

"Hello, Bill," says I; "what air you totin' so kind uv keerful-like in your arms there?"

"Why, I've got the baby," says he; 'nd as he said it the tears come up into his eyes.

"Your own baby, Bill?" says I.

"Yes," says he. "Nellie took sick uv the janders a fortnight ago, 'nd—'nd she died, 'nd I'm takin' her body up to Texarkany to bury. She lived there, you know, 'nd I'm goin' to leave the baby there with its gran'ma."

Poor Bill! it wuz his wife that the men were carryin' in that pine box to the baggage car.

"Likely lookin' baby, Bill," says I, cheerful like. "Perfect pictur' uv its mother; kind uv favors you round the lower part uv the face, tho'."

I said this to make Bill feel happier. If I'd told the truth, I'd 've said the baby wuz a sickly, yaller-lookin' little thing, for so it wuz; looked haff-starved, too. Couldn't help comparin' it with that big, fat baby in its mother's arms over the way.

"Bill," says I, "here's a ten-dollar note for the baby, 'nd God bless you!"

"Thank ye, Mr. Goodhue," says he, 'nd he choked all up as he moved off with that yaller little baby in his arms. It warn't very fur up the road he wuz goin', 'nd he found a seat in one uv the front cars.

But along about an hour after that back come Bill, moseyin' through the car like he wuz huntin' for somebody. Seemed like he wuz in trubble and wuz huntin' for a friend.

"Anything I kin do for you, Bill?" says I, but he didn't make no answer. All of a suddint he sot his eyes on the prutty lady that had the fat baby sleepin' in her arms, 'nd he made a break for her like he wuz crazy. He took off his hat 'nd bent down over her 'nd said somethin' none uv the rest uv us could hear. The lady kind uv started like she wuz frightened, 'nd then she looked up at Bill 'nd looked him right square in the countenance. She saw a tall, ganglin', awkward man, with long yaller hair 'nd frowzy beard, 'nd she saw that he wuz tremblin' 'nd hed tears in his eyes. She looked down at the fat baby in her arms, 'nd then she looked out'n the winder at the great stretch uv prairie land, 'nd seemed like she wuz lookin' off further'n the rest uv us could see. Then, at last, she turnt around 'nd said, "Yes," to Bill, 'nd Bill went off into the front car ag'in.

None uv the rest uv us knew what all this meant, but in a minnit Bill come back with his little yaller baby in his arms, 'nd you never heerd a baby squall 'nd carry on like that baby wuz squallin' 'nd carryin' on. Fact is, the little yaller baby was hungry, hungrier'n a wolf, 'nd there wuz its mother dead in the car up ahead 'nd its gran'ma a good piece up the road. What did the lady over the way do but lay her own sleepin' baby down on the seat beside her 'nd take Bill's little yaller baby 'nd hold it on one arm 'nd cover up its head 'nd her shoulder with a shawl, jist like she had done with the fat baby not long afore. Bill never looked at her; he took off his hat and held it in his hand, 'nd turnt around 'nd stood guard over that mother, 'nd I reckon that ef any man hed darst to look that way jist then Bill would've cut his heart out.

The little yaller baby didn't cry very long. Seemed like it knowed there wuz a mother holdin' it,—not its own mother, but a woman whose life hed been hallowed by God's blessin' with the love 'nd the purity 'nd the sanctity uv motherhood.

Why, I wouldn't hev swapped that sight uv Bill an' them two babies 'nd that sweet woman for all the cattle in Texas! It jest made me know that what I'd allus thought uv wimmin was gospel truth. God bless that lady! I say, wherever she is to-day, 'nd God bless all wimmin folks, for they're all alike in their unselfishness 'nd gentleness 'nd love!

Bill said, "God bless ye!" too, when she handed him back his poor little yaller baby. The little creeter wuz fast asleep, 'nd Bill darsent speak very loud for fear he'd wake it up. But his heart wuz way up in his mouth when he says "God bless ye!" to that dear lady; 'nd then he added, like he wanted to let her know that he meant to pay her back when he could: "I'll do the same for you some time, marm, if I kin."

1888.

[End of *The Little Yaller Baby* by Eugene Field]