See the discussion of this short story and circumstances surrounding its composition in my biography, pages 238-239. Jump to the end for further notes and editing principles.

THE FROG BABY A Story in Four Parts

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PART I. February 6, 1920.

LIKE every other woman of position in the land she had her War Work Committees, her V.A.D. Selection Board, her Soldiers' Comforts Depôt, her Hospital days. Lady Terence's busy husband, her servants, too, even the dogs were well accustomed, by now, to her new activities; to her driving away (with the motor full of books for the camps, of socks and vests for the trenches, or home-made cakes for soldiers' teas) — at an hour when of old her own breakfast would hardly have appeared at her bedroom door.

More revolutionary still, in the life of a conventionally fastidious lady, those comings home, with the motor full of queer people. Pitmen and dockers in hospital blue; women who, till they stood up, looked like young men; strange Entertainers with manners stranger still — a bewildering variety of visitors never seen beneath that roof before, were welcomed in those amazing days on the ground of some connection, real or supposed, with the great struggle then nearing the close of its third year.

All the same, Lord Terence's absorption in his Admiralty work, did not prevent his exercising a very definite control over his wife's apparently erratic manifestations. The queer people she had been bringing to

Grosvenor Square weren't half so queer as some she might have brought, but for the thought of what Terence might say — or even look. Her sense of the pararmountcy of Terence's wishes was of the kind not only familiar in the devoted wife Old Style, but peculiar to the wife whose thoughts and affections have never been divided, or diverted, by a child.

On a certain June afternoon, the butler opened the door to his mistress, and to the queerest visitor yet admitted. Followed, as usual, by the two best-beloved of the Pekinese, Tou-Tou and Beryl, Lady Terence Carrick, with her airy step, advanced from the motor holding by the hand a minute person dressed like a Jack Tar of the stage. The minute person, slightly unwilling and more than slightly grave, was himself provocative of smiling, at least in any one below the level of a butler. Mr. Dowling's smooth greyish face, which commonly looked as if modelled in plasticine, relaxed no muscle. His filmed eye regarded the sailor with coldness for the first instant, and then regarded him not at all.

"No, m'lady, his lordship is not back."

"Never mind, we'll have tea earlier. Send it up now."

Dowling's eyes made appeal to the face of the tall clock. The clock sided with Mr. Dowling. The clock said it wasn't yet four.

"Ask for an extra jug of milk, Dowling. And — a — " on her way to the stairs she turned with a smile of semi-embarrassment — "Oh, I'm not at home. And Dowling — "

"Yes, m'lady." His eyes remained at a level at least three feet above the sailor's hat. To perfection Mr. Dowling conveyed the idea: I am not aware of the object your ladyship holds by the hand. If I were aware, I should be surprised. Knowing as I do, the nephews and nieces and friends of the family, I am unable to account for this visitor. Knowing, above all (Dowling's increased dignity seemed to say), that the only interest your ladyship and Lord Terence have ever been able to take in the immature, has through eight and twenty years been confined to puppies, I cannot be expected to unbend to this latest queer visitor, who for all his seriousness, I cannot regard as a War-worker.

That was precisely where Dowling was out, but there was no time to explain. Lady Terence addressed herself a little self- consciously to the visitor. She took off his cap. He grabbed at it with remonstrant squeaks. She tried to smooth his hair; he ducked.

"Come then — this way — But those stairs are too much for you. For such very little legs, it must be like climbing the pyramids." She sent a look over her shoulder, appealing to the humanity of the butler. Dowling stood impassive. The lady picked up the sailor with a palpable absence of skill and the sailor objected.

"Walk self," he struggled out of her arms. She laughed. "An independent person," she announced, as though commending him to Dowling on fresh ground. It was no use.

"And he *can* do it all alone!" She recovered her spirits a little, watching how the sailor holding stoutly to the floreated design of the bannister, brought his backward leg up to join the one already on the step. With determination and profound seriousness he accomplished his first ascent from lower regions to the drawing-room.

"You can keep Tou-Tou and Beryl till I ring," Lady Terence called over the bannister. "Oh, and — a — Dowling, don't— you needn't say anything about my having — a — anyone with me." Into the butler's barely perceptible pause she tossed down: "It's — a — a little surprise."

It'll be that all right! Dowling seemed to say before his lips shaped: "Very well, m'lady." The sailor seemed to think it was a nice play-room. He was particularly taken with a priceless Chinese pagoda hung with exquisitely wrought gold bells. John Mundy chuckled as they tinkled. Just as tea came in he twitched off one of the bells and nearly brought the whole fantastic fabric down on his head.

"Oh, what will Terence say! You *mustn't*, baby." She turned the pagoda round to hide the ravishment and coaxed the bell out of the chubby hand in exchange for a cake. Immense fun it was giving John Mundy tea. When he lifted his rosy face out of the cup— "Good milk?" she asked and wiped the white moustache off his upper lip. His sufficient, his enchanting

answer was to hold out his cup for more. And when he had finished it, he held out his arms for her to take him on her lap. This so melted Lady Terence that she hadn't the strength of mind to remonstrate when he discovered the little gold bell down between the cushion and the arm of the chair. He could have played with that tiny bell forever! He was as good as the gold of the bell so long as he might turn it, and tinkle it, and roll it about, and put it in his mouth. She lay back in the great chair, watching him and thinking back, seeing herself at those stages, one after another, which had led to her sitting here in the stately, shining room, with this small salvaged human in the haven of her lap.

They had wanted merely her name on the Hospital Committee.

Institutions and Charities were always wanting her name. She had come secretly to resent the knowledge that, after her name, what was wanted was a subscription. Beyond that, nothing. Too often she had met the unblushing assurance that no claim whatever was to be made upon her time. What they meant was that they regarded her as useless except as a figurehead and a guarantee of solvency.

Before the war Lady Terence would not have objected to this definition of her place and use. But, where everything else was changing, that was changing too. She had not even been able without a prick of her stirred conscience, to hear: "Nobody thinks of anything now but soldiers. Women and babies — oh no."

That was the inauspicious beginning of her interest in a certain heavily encumbered Lying-in Hospital in East London. Not to speak of her aid in raising money, and not to make too much of the comforts with which she loaded her car for the weekly visit, Lady Terence's passage through the wards must have brought some little momentary distraction into the grim routine. For one thing Lady Terence wore charming clothes, and nearly always different ones. That was something. She was tall and slight and graceful still, with the lightest step, surely, that ever carried eight and forty years about the world. It carried her from bed to bed with a gentleness that could not hide from mother eyes the fact of the unreality

to this visitant from another world, of the happiness, as well as the sordidness and sorrow, that met its climax here.

"She's never 'ad one 'erself," an East-end mother told another. She didn't even seem to know the difference between the respectable married woman (who looked forward to her periodic two weeks in the hospital with all its pain and danger as her only holiday) and the little domestic servant, the un-married factory hand or shop girl — passed in by a merciful matron if this was "the first time." The respectable woman even suspected Lady Terence of taking a disproportionate interest in that white-faced thing with no ring on her hand, the girl who hadn't so much as told her name. She had been found unconscious at the bottom of those three steps which lead out of Tufnell Street into Commercial Road. Beside her, a loaf of bread about to cast its wrapping, and a packet of granulated sugar spilling out of its blue cornucopia. She was clearly ill-nourished but had seemed to be unhurt by her fall. Yet she refused to speak. There was no mark on her plain clothing; and nothing in her pocket to offer a clue. The matron thought Lady Terence might win the girl to say something. Lady Terence was more than disappointed, a little hurt, at her failure.

The, baby had come soon after the lady's last visit, six days ago. And the baby — well, the least said about the baby the better. But the mother seemed all right up till this morning. Half an hour ago she had) died. "For no reason at all."

The low hum of talk at the bottom of the ward increased. There was the lydy, coming in now, in one o' them short, fringe-edged, little-girl frocks. My word! if she hadn't made strite for the bed with the screen round it!

Lady Terence glanced over the screen and stood transfixed. Her floating veil and flying laces all at half mast. The jangling chains, the chateleine, the bangles, stricken for once into silence. Even that bird-like quick turning of the head stilled by the stillness of the dead girl's face.

A visitor wasn't expected to look over screens.

The matron came down the ward. The woman in the next bed heard Lady Terence ask: "Did the baby die too?"

"Not yet," the matron answered. He wasn't expected to live, and his mother wasn't expected to die. But there you were.

"Is that her baby?" Lady Terence turned in her impulsive way to a nurse going by with an infant in her arms.

"No, that's mine" — a proud voice claimed the flannel bundle. "Oh, you're taking care of it! — nice of you!" Lady Terence's pitying eye fell on a woman. lying with a baby in the hollow of each arm.

"No. Twins." Again Lady Terence looked over the screen. "But hers — where is it?"

"It's there by the fire." The matron checked the visitor's movement: "Better not. It's — a — not a pretty sight."

"What's the matter?" Lady Terence asked.

"Nothing very special, it's just a little misery, and it'll soon be out of its trouble."

As they stood there a young woman not in uniform, but with an air of being at home, came into the ward, looked about in a lack-lustre way and then sauntered over to the fire. The matron, whom nothing seemed ever to escape, followed Lady Terence's eyes to the slim languid figure, the colourless face.

"My niece," said Miss Neal.

The young woman went out of the ward a moment after, hiding a small bundle against her breast.

"Is she a nurse — your niece?"

"No. But I suppose she knows it's better for these women not to be looking at — that sort of thing."

Lady Terence's mind shrank from the subject. Yet there had been in the sheltering action of the girl, something — Lady Terence couldn't have

said what — something that kept the incident, kept the nameless child, alive in the memory days after he must in due course have joined that tragic procession to the workhouse, or the grave.

She did not, as her friends had prophesied, weary of visiting "the mothers," of admiring the fine babies that week by week came tumbling into the world. Not that her admiring was wholly without sophistication: "Every woman," she confided to the matron, "thinks her baby is perfectly beautiful." Lady Terence smiled.

"The odd part of it," said the Good Genius of the place, "the odd part is: each woman is right." Over a cup of tea in her charming sitting-room, the matron recalled for Lady Terence's benefit certain youthful experiences as district nurse in a Manchester slum: and a kindred result of the long years here. Nature is on our side!" The rosy face under the snow-white hair shone with conviction. "If you except one disease, it doesn't seem to matter how ailing and miserable the parents are — nature gives each child a fresh start. Thousands on thousands of these babies I've seen come into the world. They are beautiful! Sound and splendid. What's wrong, is what comes after. Nobody can frighten us with the hereditary bogey. That's why," she lowered her voice, "it makes such an impression on the nurses when a baby comes along like that poor girl's —" She would have changed the subject if the visitor hadn't said: "He died, I suppose?"

No, he hadn't died.

Lady Terence saw in her mind's eye a certain crèche for waifs and strays. Not even such featureless succour as that for the dead girl's baby. "The workhouse, I suppose?" "For a little while yet," the matron smiled apologetically, "my niece is taking care of him."

It was all a new experience to Lady Terence — the matron as much as any part of it. One couldn't 'place' her. A matron of a hospital who read French! Lady Terence came to look forward to the little talks in that sitting-room which had been part of the general surprise. Not only the books and flowers. The old furniture, the reproductions of Carpaccio and of the early Siennese. For a modern note, there was a glorious picture by

Eleanor Brickdale which Lady Terence wouldn't have minded hanging on her own wall. One of the rugs she was reduced to wondering how 'a woman like that' had got hold of. Like that! Like what? If you could detect in Miss Neal's manner any consciousness of a difference in station, you'd say that her supposition — never obtruded but firm — was that the advantage lay with the matron. She had been disconcertingly firm about admitting dogs. "Dogs!" She called the absolutely human Tou-Tou and the hitherto irresistible Beryl — " Dogs!" Called them dogs, and wouldn't suffer them over the threshold. But she seemed rather kind to her niece.

"Wa-eh wa-eh!" came a baby's wail out of Marna's bedroom. The matron consulted her watch. It was time Marna was back from the dentist. "I was very anxious about Marna three weeks ago," she said, pouring the China tea out of a charming old Wedgwood pot. "We couldn't rouse her. She had over-studied, I think."

Miss Marna, it appeared, was science teacher in a celebrated girl's school. The man she had been going to marry was a schoolmaster with militaristic enthusiasms. He had brought his school corps up to a high pitch of proficiency and he'd been one of the first of his profession to volunteer for foreign service. He was killed at the Battle of the Somme. The girl had broken down under combined grief and over-work. The worst of it was, according to her aunt, Marna's convalescence was retarded by a quite morbid hatred of her old occupation. "I brought her here," said Miss Neal pausing an instant to gauge the degree of rebellion implied in the intermittent protests from the next room — "just for a week or two as I thought. Till she could right herself. She must right herself."

"I'd hate to be a science mistress, too," observed the visitor. The matron smiled. "Yes, but Marna, you see, has no choice. She has to earn her living."

"Wa-eh! *Wa*-eh-eh!" came louder out of the adjoining room. Miss Neal rose: "I won't be long." She had been left in charge of the workhouse baby. The matron! As for him, he didn't seem to know he was a workhouse baby. He screeched with as much abandon as a Prince. Furious about something. What could the matron be doing to him? Lady Terence went

to the door and looked in. The matron was heating milk. Kind Miss Neal! Except in that matter of Tou-Tou and Beryl! As for the workhouse baby he was quiet a moment as though some mitigating circumstance had occurred to him. He lay on his back. In the unusual heat the clothing had been lightened. The blankets, even the sheet thrown back. The first Lady Terence saw of him was a small red foot curled: inwards but so drawn up it was higher than his head. Almost as if he'd had the sense to wish to hide his head. Bald, misshapen, with no top to it. A gnome-like face, with broad squat features crowded together in the insufficient space and making up laterally for what they lacked in the nobler direction. The negroid nose sprawled till you could hardly tell where it began and where ended.

Lady Terence was sufficiently repelled before the little monster lifted the hairless lids from its eyes and looked at her with a horrible squint. If she didn't like what she saw, no more did he. He burst into a roar of displeasure. The matron did not improve things by offering him his bottle. His action of indignant repulse brought the rubber into collision with the flat nose. The milk squirted in his face. The kindly whiteness but emphasised more the purple that spread a dull mottle up over the palpitating cranium. The horrid little atomy was on the verge of a fit, when the door of the next room opened and Marna walked in.

She put down her gloves and umbrella with the remark: "There, there, my pretty. Did he want Marna?" And apparently he didn't want an earthly thing beside. He cut his largest howl in the middle and swallowed it with a gurgling of content as Miss Marna held him and patted him and whispered reassurances in his ears. These, to Lady Terence's mingled amusement and disgust, were flattering comments on his character and personal appearance.

"You are fond of babies," said the visitor.

"No," answered the girl, I've always thought them a nuisance, and this one wants to justify me."

[END OF PART I]

PART II. February 13, 1920.

Whether Miss Marna was making herself useful to her aunt, or whether the matron's goodness of heart, forebore to insist, at the moment, on that bread-earning which she had declared indispensable, the girl and the baby were still at the hospital when Lady Terance came back from helping in her sister's canteen in Boulogne, some two months later.

The same scene was going on in the convalescent ward. Mothers with glorified faces, or wearing the remembered look of peace; nurses dressing and undressing the babies, speaking of them with that proprietary air acquired so soon by those who have to do with the helpless — and all the speaking praise

As she hurried along the corridor on her way out, Lady Terence met Marna Neal.

"You are coming to see our baby," the girl said with that smiling composure which, in taking for granted, goes far to create the inclination presumed.

If it had only been any other baby!

Lady Terance would have tried to escape, but there was Miss Neal waiting at the door. "Yes, you ought to see what a good baby he is. He never frets now — unless he frets for Marna. And as for being —" the Matron turned her cheerful face on Marna — "I suppose you'll say he never was ugly!"

"No. I won't say that," returned the girl. "But I'll say he's got over it. He's —" she commended him quietly to the authority in aesthetics: "He's pretty now!"

Lady Terence would gladly have taken her word for the impossible fact and let it pass. But that wasn't permitted. She was led to the tiny room where the child lay on Marna's bed. Lady Terrence braced herself.

And lo! it wasn't necessary. The baby mightn't be exactly pretty, but he certainly wasn't hideous. Rather a dear. She said so — staring, half incredulous. "And he's nearly got over squinting," she added unwarily.

"He doesn't squint at all," said Marna, "if you look at him straight."

This cool transference of the odium to the looker on, so diverted Lady Terence that she retailed the incident to her husband. It made Admiral Lord Terence Carrick laugh. An achievement in these days. When he felt less harassed and inclined for small talk: "How's the frog baby?" he'd say.

At Christmas, the Frog Baby was still at the hospital. Lady Terence found Marna helping to string the garlands and to hang the banners.

"I must go now," said the girl.

The ward sister protested. "You needn't. John's sound asleep."

"Who is John?" asked Lady Terance.

"John's the Frog Baby," the sister began —

"I told you," Marna interrupted with a touch of the matron's manner, "you weren't to call him that. It's an absurd name for him." She found an opportunity presently to say to Lady Terence: "You think it's my silly partiality? Wait! She threw down the garland and went out.

When he was brought into the ward he did the festive scene no disgrace. If he wasn't beautiful, he was pretty. Yes, engaging.

Marna wouldn't let the ward sister touch him. "No, go away. You aren't worthy." But she allowed Lady Terence to hold him. What was more to the point, John allowed it. He sat up on her arm and stared at the garlands. When Lady Terence spoke to him, he turned his curly head and fixed her with inquiring blue eyes. Then, profoundly inspired, he held up a hand — really to the sparkle of her swinging earring. She thought it was to her. Lady Terence kissed his hand. He took the act of allegiance right royally. Lady Terence was amused, touched — even a little thrilled. It was

the change in him, she explained afterwards in the matron's room, which had intrigued her. The transformation looked like substitution. *Was* it the same baby?

"Oh yes, the very same John Mundy."

"Why is he called that?" She was struck with the fact that Monday was 'her day.'

For a little John Bull, the first name hadn't needed any hunting. "And Monday —well— he came on Friday, but there's only one Man Friday, and as Marna says, *she* discovered him on a Monday. So that's what she calls him."

Lady Terance knew, or so she said, that babies did alter very much. But had the matron ever seen anything like this before?

"Perhaps not to the same degree. But — you mustn't give me away if I tell you a professional secret. A secret I wouldn't share with our best doctors. They wouldn't understand. They'd think I was —" she tapped her temple. "But the truth is, weak health isn't the only thing you can love a baby out of."

Lady Terance stared. Her astonishment not all, or chiefly, for the abstract doctrine. To think that this sensible woman could so romance about that commonplace, unemotional Marna.

"You aren't telling me that a baby can be loved out of being hideous."

"Don't say I told you so, — but I've seen it. Just doing the necessary things for a baby, — that won't work the miracle."

On the following Monday Lady Terance asked after John. Their acquaintance prospered. On the second Monday John was asleep. She went in with the matron to look at him. He lay there, a miracle of pink and white, the heavy rings of silk fallen over his eyelids.

"The greatest darling," said Lady Terence in her softest voice.

"Yes, returned the matron, loud enough to wake the poor lamb. "It's a pity to have to send him away!"

"Send him away!"

She had already kept him much longer than she had any business to, Miss Neal said, and she led the way briskly to her own room.

"What's going to happen? Where will he go?"

There was the appointed place for such babies, said the matron. She was already thinking more about the tea-table than about the baby.

"You don't mean to send him to the Waifs and Strays?" Lady Terance felt a distinct impulse of dislike toward the stout, rosy-faced woman pouring China tea out of her Wedgewood pot. She made herself very comfortable — did Miss Neal!

"They go to the workhouse as a rule," said the woman, who had expected you to believe that fairy tale about the miracle of Marna's affection.

Marna would be going back to her work. "She must, you know."

"Must she? And that nice baby — he'll be growing ugly again — according to your doctrine."

The matron seemed able to face that. She only laughed.

Laughed!

"A boy, too," said Lady Terance, after a moment. "Nowadays, especially —!" She left the rise in the market value of boys to penetrate the matron's mind. But Miss Neal instantly began about the news from the Front.

"Surely," Lady Terence led her back, "you could find somebody to take a *boy*," she persisted. "Haven't you thought of trying?"

"Yes, it had occurred to me. I wanted Marna to show him to that woman who was here last week — you saw her, I think."

"That wasn't the kind of person I meant."

"Well, anyway, she took the twins."

"Did she! And quite poor she looked. Really people seemed to have gone mad these days about adopting babies!"

There had always been a certain amount of it, the matron said, especially among the poor.

Lady Terence thought that natural. "It wouldn't be such a risk. But I've thought sometimes I might —. The trouble is," a little thoughtful frown appeared between the delicate eyebrows— "You could never be sure how he'd turn out."

"You could never be sure it of that if he were your own," Miss Neal observed, with that unsuitable freedom which now and then jarred on Lady Terance.

"Quite so. Only then, we have to accept it."

"That's what happens in either case," the matron maintained.

"Only," Lady Terence held herself a little stiffly, "one would know what was in the blood."

"Would one? Most families have their surprises."

Lady Terence betrayed some slight annoyance "He might, as my husband says, he might develop criminal tendencies."

"You've talked it over?" the matron smiled.

"Oh quite in the vague. When I've read out the advertisements in the *Times*, I've sometimes threatened to put one in — not under my own name, naturally — just to see what would happen. Of course, I couldn't ask Terence to adopt a child we didn't know all about. But a *nice* baby, with good blood, and healthy and all that. . . ."

"I see. A Prince in Exile."

"Could I, for instance, well, *could* I — Lady Terence demanded with spirit, ask my husband to adopt the Frog Baby?"

Though she didn't answer directly, the matron saw the impossibility of such a suggestion.

"But something ought to be done." The unaccustomed frown deepened between Lady Terrence's brows. "It doesn't seem right to let a baby like that go to the workhouse. A boy, too. . . ."

When they parted, the matron had promised not to take any further steps, till Lady Terence had pointed out to her husband that a boy 'like that' was a national asset; and had further asked why shouldn't she find some nice woman in the country to take care of John Mundy for a while anyway, "and see how he turns out."

Lady Terence re-appeared at the hospital the very next day. She had an inspiration in the night. Why shouldn't Miss Marna postpone going back to her work a little longer?

"I don't think you're as well as you were. I assure you I've been quite haunted by your white face. Wouldn't —" she appealed to the aunt — "wouldn't it do her all the good in the world to go and live in the country awhile? And she could have the baby to keep her from feeling lonely. And of course, there'd be a salary. — Should you mind trying it anyway?"

Miss Marna didn't think she'd mind.

Lady Terrance thanked her. It would give her time, she said. She didn't specify for what.

* * * * * * * * *

It was great fun establishing Marna and John Mundy in a darling little cottage on Lord Terence's Hertfordshire estate. Petrol was not so husbanded yet, but what Lady Terence could run down as often as she liked to see how John Mundy was faring.

In truth he throve astonishingly. John Mundy was turning out not only pretty but intelligent, amusing.

Lady Terence found herself thinking about him in season and out of season. "He has very marked likes and dislikes," she would announce without preamble — "really a wonderful amount of character for anything so young." Lord Terence would look up from the *Times* with the expression of one shifting the focus of an invisible opera glass. "Oh ah, the frog baby?"

"He *isn't* a frog baby!"

"That's what you said he was."

"Not the very least a frog-baby." And when Terrence laughed at her vehemence — "It shows how little you know about babies. They're *all* frog babies at first," she announced.

"Are they?" he'd say with a grin. "Then that's why I don't like 'em."

"You'd like John Mundy."

The Admiral returned to his leading article. "I mustn't bore him about John Mundy," she said to herself with that new protective instinct at work. Though she thought about him more and more, she left off talking so much about the baby in her husband's presence. Not by design exactly. Instinct. Her sister called John Mundy "Anne's secret vice."

She bought the prettiest clothes she could find for him, and dressed him in them with all the delight of a child adorning her doll. She had been right about the strength of John Mundy's likes and dislikes. He wouldn't stand much dressing up, though he stood an astonishing lot from Lady Terence. If he amused her, her ladyship amused the wave quite immoderately. John Mundy loved the rattling of charms and the clanging of bangles. He liked the tick-tick. He liked the too friendly, silky little dogs. Oh, never a doubt but he liked a pretty lady with bon-bons in her bag and toys, animate and inanimate, in her motor car.

They were immense friends.

The stolid Marna looked on.

"Does he give you much trouble?" Lady Terence asked. He had been nine months now in the country, and this attack of croup was his first illness.

"Well," Marna answered, "he keeps me on the hop."

"I'm afraid he breaks your rest," she said to the girl, who had been up all night.

"He'll sleep better to-night," said Marna.

Lady Terence came oftener as the weather improved with the early spring. She would dress John Mundy up like a little Arctic explorer, and take him for a drive in the car. John Mundy adored driving in the car.

"Now you'll have some peace and quiet," Lady Terence would say to Marna, standing at the gate.

"Yes," said Marna.

When John Mundy perceived that Marna wasn't coming too, he began to pucker his face and looked back. But that was only at first. He outgrew such babyishness as befitted a person nearly two. Marna commended John Mundy for manly behaviour.

[END PART II]

PART III February 20, 1920.

LADY TERENCE began to make up stories about his origin. "I always thought that poor girl had a very refined look — didn't you?"

"A good many of them have that," said Marna. "The most exquisite face I ever saw, there or anywhere, was a cockney scullery maid's."

It wasn't the answer Lady Terence wanted. She moved her head with that delicate wilfulness that sent her veil swirling. "I wouldn't wonder at all if John's mother was a lady."

"I would," said the provoking Marna. You'd think it gave her positive satisfaction to think of John as base-born. Lady Terence told her so in a moment of vexation. "*I* haven't a doubt he has gentle blood in him."

"And I haven't a doubt his mother was a servant, or a shop girl, who'd got into trouble, as they say."

It very nearly led to a quarrel, that speech. The only way Lady Terence could get over it was by saying to herself: "It just shows how much more sensitive I am about the child than she is. Affection brings vision. I *know* his mother was a gentle-woman. It was a war marriage; in hot haste before he returned to the Front. Kept secret for some good reason. Creditable. The man was killed. The girl bewildered: dazed by grief." Oh, the Frog Baby of Workhouse destination was far behind, by the time John Mundy was nearing the age of two.

He knew, if Marna didn't, that he was the equal of anybody. To one surfeited with respect, his summary way with great ladies was a delicious comedy, as well as a patent of nobility.

"The most lordly little person *I* ever knew!" Lady Terence would say. She would wait patiently for a return of the mood in which he would hold out his arms to her in a fashion which utterly melted Lady Terence. It would melt Terence himself.

To melt Terence became the most necessary end in life. It was worth taking any trouble to achieve. As to the best sort of trouble — taken with an eye to all that hung upon the issue — Lady Terence longed to admit Marna into her counsels. But Marna was unresponsive. Yes, even when it was a question of the baby's prospects. Not at all, you understand, as if she meant to be unresponsive. As if she couldn't help it. Made like that.

"I shall tell Terence how good you've been to the baby," was Lady Terence's way of conveying delicately the information — "you won't be forgotten — you'll get something out of this. Something handsome."

Lady Terence ordered four or five different sets of new clothes to try which should most commend the baby. He grew sick and tired of this trying on and taking off. He began to remonstrate, then to scream. He had to be given more barley sugar than was good for him in order to restore him to good humour. Marna, no help at all. What was the matter with the girl?

"I expect you are tired sometimes. A clever girl like you who can teach fearfully difficult subjects to other clever girls — it must seem rather a waste sometimes spending so much time on a small child."

"I haven't minded," said Marna. "Or rather," she added after a moment, "I've been very grateful. I wasn't fit for any other work when I came here."

"You do look a different creature, I must say," Lady Terence agreed cordially. "And so does John Mundy. It's an absurd name— John Mundy — don't you think? I sometimes feel it ought to be changed."

Marna seemed to have no opinion about this. What was wrong with the girl?

She had seemed all right yesterday. Lady Terence thought back. Petrol restrictions had been spoken of, and how Terence (not having yet seen the baby, or in the remotest degree realising what he'd come to be) had said lightly: 'You won't be able to go gadding to the country so much.'

"No," said Marna, agreeing as easily with Lord Terence as though *she* hadn't ever seen John either. Lady Terence made that head movement which set her veil swirling. "It's all very well, but I'm not going to let their silly laws affect my looking after the baby."

"No." The same word, and yet a wholly different No. You'd think sometimes Marna had lost every atom of that old interest in having the baby looked after. Was she tired of her own share in it? What more natural?

She was young, she had her friends, her interests, her profession. She had made herself a slave to the baby. Never went anywhere, never left him night or day. It was time it came to an end. She was even losing that serenity of temper which had so commended her. When Lady Terence pulled off the white lace frock and began to try how he'd look in kilts — "I'm on your side, John," said Marna brusquely, "I don't see, either, the use of all this dressing up!"

"Very well!" Lady Terence went on struggling to bring the fat little sausage of an arm into proper relation with the jacket sleeve — if Marna couldn't see that all John Mundy's future hung on the impression he was going to make that afternoon, Anne Carrick was certainly not the person to explain.

"I believe, after all, he'd like you best as a sailor — let us try!"

"I thought you said your husband didn't care about babies."

"Well, he doesn't. But I don't see how he can help liking John. I shall insist on his liking John."

In spite of Marna's stockishness, Lady Terence went off in high spirits, her face quite pink with excitement. John Mundy pink, too, not to say ruffled, by being dressed and undressed four mortal times.

"I shall insist on his liking — " Lady Terence found herself repeating, as she smiled down at the baby's absorption in the great business of fitting the top of the Chinese bell into the bottom of the silver trumpet with which his hostess had so divertingly blown out the spirit lamp. The clock was chiming five, and a step was on the stair.

Lord Terence's eye had caught something in the evening paper. He paused an instant in the open door — a long spare person, with thin red hair, close-cropped on a high narrow head. A beak of a nose, slightly out of drawing, lent a misleading look of ruthlessness to the clean-shaven, mahogany-coloured visage. He was reading without glasses and with an angry preoccupation upon what Anne would have recognised as his 'submarine face,' had she turned to greet him as usual. She sat very still in

the shelter of the high Medici chair, smiling. Let him wait till he came round the table and saw —

He didn't come round the table. He walked up and down. "The rot they write about the sinkings!" He quoted statistics, compared percentages, rated tonnage, not of course talking to Anne, or his tone would have been less hectoring: talking to himself: talking really to von Tirpitz. When he began to talk to von Tirpitz— "Sh!" said Anne.

"But don't I know? I tell you I'm morally certain —"

"Terry — look!" He gaped. "What's that?" said the Admiral in his quarter-deck voice.

"Sh!" said his wife, "you mustn't frighten him." So far from being frightened, Jack Tar had given the booming Admiral a preoccupied glance and returned to his problem. He'd thought of a new way. The broken projection at the top of the bell fitted into the narrow end of the trumpet. This was an achievement outshining the glory of admirals. John Mundy produced a gurgle of triumph.

Lord Terence produced: "Bless my soul! Where did you get that?"

"Oh! I've had it a good while," she said more airily than she felt. "Only you're not to call him 'it.' You're John Mundy, aren't you, darling?"

"The workhouse baby!"

"He isn't a workhouse baby. I'm morally certain," she adopted the Admiralty expert's form, "morally certain his mother was a gentlewoman. And anyhow he's the greatest darling. Don't you think he's a darling, Terry?"

"Well — I — I don't know if he's a darling or not. He's got rather a flat nose."

"Oh no! Not at all flat compared to —" she was going to say compared to what it was— "compared to most." Lord Terence looked at the baby very much as he would have looked over a doubtful puppy. "You seem a sturdy little John Bull, with your bullet head!"

She protested against this description of John Mundy's head, as she pushed back the rings of yellow hair.

"It's good enough peasant type," he said, "a bit too short in the leg."

"That’s only because he has a trick of curling them up." Lady Terence uncurled one to show. It seemed shorter than usual. She pulled it out a little.

"No!" said John Mundy, jerking the member out of her hand.

"See that? He won’t stand any familiarity, John won't."

Something less genial than familiarity in the mahogany face induced her to assure Lord Terence: "The more you see of him the more you'll like him."

"But," he retorted, "I don't propose to —"

Behind John Mundy's back she leaned towards her husband: "Terry— — "

He started faintly, and seemed to suspect what she was going to say before it came out.

"I want to keep him."

The wary expression bore little relation to the question-begging remark: "I thought you had been keeping him."

"I mean to keep him here. I want us to adopt him."

"We can't do that," he said with decision.

Like many another wife she didn't mind nearly so much what her husband said, as how he looked when he was saying it. "You mustn't scowl at us, dear, as if we were a couple of Tirpitzes."

Terence Carrick was fond of his wife. Underneath that off-with-his-head manner he was the soul of kindliness. About any matter near her heart he so much disliked crossing her that, practically, he had never done so. Not till this affair of John Mundy. She, on her part, had never been

prepared to hold so tight to her own resolve. They discussed it with increasing energy. It wasn't a fair thing to ask of him! He surely didn't need to remind her how ready he was to give in to her fancies —

"That shows how little you understand," she cried. "This isn't a fancy! This is something –"

"This is something out of the question!" He stopped striding about. He stood confronting her faded loveliness with eyes that were suddenly quite gentle. "My darling—"

She wouldn't look at him. She looked at John Mundy till he tired at last of his belled trumpet, slipped off her lap, and went exploring. She noticed with relief that he'd forgotten where the Chinese pagoda was. *Were* his legs too short? The thought worried her. She wished she'd left him in skirts.

Terence was still standing there looking down at her. "You can't seriously ask me to adopt — to give my name, to a child out of the gutter —"

"He *isn't* out of —"

But he did have rather a bullet head. She bowed her own, confessing to herself that she had seen only the curls. How clever men were! You couldn't take them in. If she persisted in her plan — would John Mundy stand before her some day heavy, loutish, a thick-witted peasant in spite of all she might do?

"What is it?" she asked nervously. She drew her drooping figure up, the better to follow her husband's eyes. They were on John Mundy. And what was poor John Mundy doing to deserve a look like that? Merely dragging forward from behind the great easel a little chair. The little chair Terence's mother had so exquisitely embroidered for him. The chair of which Anne remembered saying in those early days of marriage: "No, it shan't be banished to the attic! We'll keep it there till another tiny wee Terence comes along." Terence's happy laugh that far-away day!

And now, instead of any faint reflection of happiness, this sharp shrinking at sight of the alien child usurping the ghost child's privilege.

"Oh, how you must have wanted him!" breathed Anne — "the baby that didn't come!"

"Not at all," he said brusquely; "I simply never think about it," and turned away.

"Such liars we've been!"

"Liars!" he looked back.

"Even to each other. Even to ourselves — when we agreed a baby would have been an interruption. When you said you'd have been jealous of it. When I said we'd neither of us ever be first with the other again. We were whistling in the dark."

"The dark! Nonsense — you mustn't be morbid. I've told you I simply never think about it."

"But if you're reminded — you can't bear it. Get up, John Mundy. That isn't your chair."

John Mundy made a horrible scene. He hung on to the other child's chair with a grip that astonished Anne. He bellowed with a lung power that unnerved von Tirpitz's antagonist. Worse. John Mundy kicked out with his short legs as if determined to ensure respect for them in future. He kicked impartially. Kicked Lady Terence as well as his lordship.

Though she wouldn't have admitted it, Anne's belief in the delightfulness of her plan had been shaken before the exhibition of infant fury at being deprived of the one chair in the room suited to his taste and to the length of his members. Complain of my short legs, and then want me to dangle them a yard from the floor! his roaring seemed to say.

Oh yes, before being deafened and kicked, Lady Terence had begun to look on John Mundy with other eyes.

"The drawing-room is certainly no place —" Admiral Lord Terence Carrick had rung the bell.

"Send Mrs. Wylie here."

By a common impulse he and his wife had turned their backs on the victorious baby — left him there with wet cheeks, scowling, but in possession of the chair. "You see it would never do — it would wear you out." As Anne didn't answer he tried to see her face. "Look at me! My dear! Does it mean so much?"

"It doesn't mean all I thought it might, but still," she glanced back at the comic little figure, "I do want him where I can see him, *if I want to* — rain or shine; petrol or no petrol."

Lord Terence stood wrinkling his brows.

[END PART III]

PART IV. February 27, 1920.

MARNA must have seen from a distance that the visit hadn't been an unqualified success. For one thing John Mundy was squirming and trying to escape out of the lady's arms. His revenge at being thwarted, was revealed as the motor drew nearer. He had flung himself back with his hatless head touching the seat. He elevated his little round stomach and arched his back inward, till it looked as if his spine must crack — the while he screeched himself dark purple in the face.

"All tired out!" said Marna as she took him into her arms. The rigid little body relaxed. John Mundy buried his face against her, and bleated a sobbing breath or two — then silence.

Once indoors, though she let him nestle against her, Marna hardly seemed to notice the child. Her eyes kept on covertly seeking in Lady Terence's face the reason for her coming back into the cottage, instead of going about her business.

"I mustn't stay, for I'm tired, too." Lady Terence stood before the glass adjusting her perturbed hat, and tidying the laces John Mundy had torn. "There were just one or two things I wanted to say about—" she stopped and looked sideways at the angle of her hat. "We shall be ready the day after to-morrow to have the baby at Grosvenor Square."

Marna sat intensely still for a moment before she said: "Lord Terence wants him, then?"

"Well, I— he — doesn't mind."

"Doesn't mind!" She raised her eyes. "Is that enough?"

"Enough to start with," said the lady as she turned airily from the glass.

The girl was looking down at the sleeping face. She said nothing.

Lady Terence was vaguely conscious of some quality in the silence that made it an effort to go on talking about her plans. "May I borrow this?"

Marna was obliged to look up. Lady Terence was holding out a halfpenny hatpin. "Oh yes," said the girl, and quickly dropped her eyes.

But Lady Terence had seen. Very nearly she had cried out: Don't — don't look like that! What she said was: "Of course you shall come and see him." Marna didn't answer. She feels it more than I expected, thought Lady Terence, as she thrust the additional hatpin through the cockade in the brim of her tricorne. An irrational panic fell upon her as she found herself reflecting what this parting might conceivably be to Marna. But, she said to herself, it's always been understood. And even if it wasn't! I've paid for him all this time. He can be a little savage when he likes — but he's my little savage. And then aloud: "After all, we can do no more for him — than — most people could."

"Can you?" said the other quickly, as though wanting precisely that assurance. "Isn't it an awful risk?"

"Risk! Are you thinking he won't turn out all right?"

"I'm thinking what a baby wants isn't really a great house and a great name, is it?" she seemed to plead. As Lady Terence only stared, the girl stumbled on: "What it wants — it wants " — was her lip shaking? The eyes suddenly dropped on the closely cradled head, seemed to say: "It wants this—" the thing John Mundy had already found. "How can you be sure that Lord Terence will care about him as much as —"

Lord Terence's wife could have laughed at that demand, if she hadn't been too considerate. "We can hardly," she said gently, "expect a man— —" There was no need to finish.

"I suppose," Marna articulated with painful slowness, "it will be a great thing for a nobody's child to be the adopted son of Lord Terence Carrick."

"Oh well, as to adopting — that's a serious step for — —" There was no need to add, for people like us.

"I suppose," said Marna, dismissing the legal formalities as of no account, "it will come to the same thing."

"What it'll come to I don't know. It certainly isn't the same thing at the start," said Lady Terence. There was a note of pettishness in her pleasant voice. "I wanted John to bowl my husband over."

"And he wasn't bowled over," the girl triumphed. "I thought when I first caught sight of you coming home: 'John's in one of his young Turk moods.'" She was positively smiling again. Lady Terence admitted that she had never seen him so naughty. "I dare say I'd idealised him."

He hadn't, she told herself again, looked at all like an early Italian cherub when he had screamed himself into purple spots and contorted his body like a cat in a fit. The girl with no early Italian standard in cherubs didn't mind that sort of thing. Lady Terence's passion for beauty as well as her regard for seemliness had received a jar. "Even when he isn't being cantankerous, Terence says it's a common little face. And, he says, it'll grow commoner."

Marna stopped smiling. Whether she changed her position or what happened, there was John Mundy sitting up quite straight for a moment turning his "common" face unblushing to the objector, his hair ruffled and fluffled out on the off side, and the damp curls clinging to his warm head on the Marna side. He stretched himself in manifest luxury.

"Terence says his legs are too short for his body. I wonder," she pursued in the pause, "if they are too short. What do you say?"

"What I say is that if your husband doesn't like his legs, or his head, or his face, what is there left to like?"

John turned away from the problem with superb indifference. His heavy eyelids fell, his head fell. The whole little body relaxed again to Marna's hold. "Since your husband feels like that," Marna began a trifle breathlessly, "surely you don't want — you can't expect him—"

"That's just it. I can't. I don't even want to, if he is going to grow up a bullet-headed peasant."

Marna and John sat locked in silence.

"Terence is very good about it. When he saw how I felt he suggested another plan. Only he wants me to what he calls 'sleep on it' before we formally decide. Terence is clear about one thing; it wouldn't be fair to his relations — not fair to the child to bring him up out of his class."

"His class?" echoed Marna. The idea of the baby having a class was something too new, too strange to grasp.

"But Terence's willing to let me have him while he's little," the lady ran on, "and then we'll send him to some school and have him taught a useful trade. I don't really need to sleep on it to know it's the best plan."

"No, one wouldn't."

She said it so oddly, Anne sat looking at her till a new idea dawned.

Not a word had been said about the girl's immediate future. That detail had been lost sight of in the emotions of the afternoon. It would be all right. Terence was munificent in such matters. "This new arrangement

won't make any difference to your salary and expenses," she said pleasantly. "All that will be paid for a month or two, till you find something else." She waited for the thanks which didn't come. No syllable of any sort — not a sign.

"I expect it will be a relief to you, in many ways, to get back to your own work. It's rather a waste for a girl with your expensive education to be turned into a —" she smiled — "well, a sort of nurse girl. You've been wonderfully good. And I shall never forget it." Perhaps it was the smouldering mutiny in the face, coupled with Lady Terence's distaste for scenes that weren't 'pretty,' which drove her on to offer a solatium. "You'll let us — We should like to give you something — besides the two years' salary. Something" — she smiled, at her most engaging— "something to remember John by for always."

Marna mumbled.

"What?"

"I was wondering how much you thought I'd have to be paid to remember him."

The lady's face of consternation foreshadowed Lord Terence's annoyance at having to deal with a case of blackmail.

And then, mercifully, Marna laughed. "Forgive me, Lady Terence, you haven't understood. What I'd like to know — you won't mind my asking, for even you say I've taken decent care of him — who is going to look after John in Grosvenor Square?"

"Mrs. Wylie, our old housekeeper," said Lady Terence with dignity.

"The old housekeeper!" repeated the girl in a tone Anne Garrick disliked extremely.

"In any case," the lady had the air of defending herself from encroachment, "*I* could hardly be expected to do it!" As Marna didn't respond — "I certainly couldn't. Not even, as Terence said, not even for a child of my own."

"Of course not." But the form her agreement took was crude. "It's a thing for somebody who is young," said she, "not for a middle-aged — certainly not anybody old. Think how the old housekeeper would hate — all the things I love. Being waked at any hour of the night. Changing him, bathing him. Sitting up with him when he's ill. Comforting him when he's cross. Loving him whatever he is, clean or dirty; more when he's ill than when he's well; more when he's naughty than when he's good — more, more, always more."

The anger had gone out of her face. Her eyes filled. "Don't you see," she said gently, "I loved him out of being ugly; out of being weak; out of being lost among the Waifs and Strays. How *can* I —?"

Lady Terence's mind had followed Marna's back. "It wasn't your doing that he didn't go to the Waifs and Strays."

"Yes, my doing."

"Not at all. I had to persuade your aunt to keep him till I could speak to my husband. I had to persuade you to put off going back to your school — to beg you to go on taking care of him."

"Somebody had to help," she said doggedly. "I made up my mind it ought to be you. I arranged it should be you. I wouldn't have given him up then. It isn't to be expected I would now."

"I am sorry. I am afraid you must." Lady Terence had risen and drawn her long satin coat round her shoulders. The suave grace of her action was arrested by Marna's sudden lunge forward.

"What? In spite of what I've told you —!" She stood there an instant, her eyes bright with anger above the tranquility of the sleeping child. "You've had pretty well everything in your life, except John Mundy. And now you must have John Mundy, too! *No!*"

"I think you forget yourself," said Lady Terence.

The baby stirred. He uttered a soft, semi-articulate remonstrance. Marna patted him.

"Forgive me," she went on in an altered tone. "I hope you'll forgive me. But —" the hardness settled on her face again: "you mustn't take John away." Lady Terence had conquered her outward agitation. "I can only say again, I'm sorry. But it's all settled."

"It's all settled," Marna echoed, and the words seemed like agreement till she added: "I don't know how I could have borne it if you had been going to do the best you could by him."

"I am!" exclaimed the other woman, flushing under the aspersion. "Terence and I are both going to do the best by him."

"Why," Marna broke out, "you aren't even going to do the best by yourself."

"I'm not thinking about myself," said Lady Terence, her head held high.

"Yes, you are," retorted the terrible young woman. "We all are. You are thinking you can give so little and get — get the greatest thing in the world — think you can pay a stranger to give him what money won't buy. Your part — to have him in with the puppies after tea. *My* baby! My ba—!" Marna sat down suddenly and hid her eyes against John Mundy's shoulder.

* * * * * * * * *

Lady Terence carried her anger and the amazing story home. They were giving a dinner party that evening. She couldn't unburden her soul till nearly midnight.

"I thought you were looking anxious and over-strained," was her husband's first comment. "You see for yourself how subversive a baby is! I won't have this sort of thing —"

"Terence!"

He waited.

"Suppose she won't give him up?"

"Good riddance!"

Anne turned her half-averted face to his. He walked away from her scrutiny, muttering uneasily. "She'll have to give him up if you really want him."

"You think so, Terence? She will have to?"

"Of course. Aren't you paying for him? Haven't you paid for him all along?"

"She pays very little attention to money."

"Oh, does she? Well, it's the people who pay little attention to money who are safe to be most in need of it. The young woman can't, from what you've told me, get along without your help. You can tell her we'll give her a cheque when she gives up the child."

"I did. She doesn't seem to care about cheques."

"Nonsense! Everybody cares about cheques."

"Anne reported the encounter in detail. With an accuracy that showed how they had gone home she repeated Marna's passionate sentences.

"I see. Her game is to make you think it's a great sacrifice, so she can set a great price on it."

"No, no," Anne exclaimed on the first impulse, and then fell to wondering. Was self-interest at the root of it? Though more than half persuaded, "No," she said again, "what Marna hates is the idea of Mrs. Wylie. I believe she'd be quite content to go on taking care of John — even here!"

Instead of repudiating such a plan — "Well," said Lord Terence, weary of the subject, "you'd have to get an under nurse, I suppose. Why not go on with the one you've got?"

"Have Marna here!"

"A nurse of some sort — isn't that the penalty, one of 'em — for having a baby about?"

"Marna here! I couldn't have that. John would never be mine. No. We must pay her — pay her well, Terence, and let her go."

* * * * * * * * *

There was heavy rain that night. At half-past two the next afternoon it was pouring still. Ordinarily Lady Terence would have abandoned the idea of going to the country in such weather. Not to-day.

She had her reward. By the time she came in sight of the clematis-covered roof of the cottage — there it was winking away its raindrops in the slanting sun.

No wonder that girl prefers this to a London slum!

Always something fresh and charming here — apart from John Mundy. The clematis dripping from the roof had long shed its petals. In the face of last night's gale the honeysuckle over the hooded porch, as if it had been John Mundy in a fit of petulance, had flung down its coral trumpets. They strewed the grey-flagged path. But in the little border you drove past on your way round to the gate Canterbury bells were lording it, ladying it rather, in full skirts above the rain-beaten pinks. Behind all, a rank of larkspurs still in bud held smartly aloft their slender spears.

"Since she likes it she might go on here for a while — and have a friend to stay." Marna was to be treated generously. As the motor swung round to the gate Lady Terence scanned the sitting-room windows for the flash of tousled yellow silk, John's bullet head bobbing with excitement to greet the sound of the motor. She called out as she clicked the gate: "John! John Mundy!"

Asleep.

Before she tried the door a premonition seized her. There was something strange about the cottage. Was he ill?

She tried the door. Locked. She rattled the handle. She knocked. Had they gone to the village? Edith would know.

Lady Terence went round to the back. The kitchen door was locked. She looked in through the window. All in a kind of inhuman orderliness. The fire out. She turned round suddenly, with a sense that someone was looking over her shoulder. No one. Nothing — except at her feet John Mundy's fife, half in half out of a shallow pool, the gay paint rain-washed, faded.

She drove to the North Lodge. The keeper's daughter, who cooked and cleaned for Marna and the baby, came out to open the gate.

"They went away this morning," the girl said.

Went where? She didn't know. "I thought your ladyship must have sent for them."

"How long will she be away?"

"She didn't say she was coming back," the girl answered. But it seemed probable she was, "because she hasn't taken any of the baby's best clothes."

* * * * * * * * *

For a long time she would remember that drive back to London. She went straight to the hospital— straight to the matron.

"I suppose she's got him in there?" Lady Terence moved her head towards the little room door.

The question seemed not to surprise the matron. "Marna? No."

"But she's been here?"

"No. This has come." Off the book-piled table Miss Neal took an open telegram.

"I'm all right; so is John. Marna."

Stamped: "St. Pancras, 10 o'clock." Beyond that no word, no sign.

"What does it mean?" Bewildered, worn out, Lady Terence dropped into a chair.

"I've been thinking you'd tell me." Marna's aunt had sat down too. Not as though she rested. In the remembered way, relaxing no whit of her sturdy stiffness, she sat with her air of being on duty, listening to the story. Thinking.

"I suppose you know where she'd be likely to go?" said Lady Terence a little sharply.

No. Miss Neal hadn't any idea.

"Well, sooner or later," Lady Terence rose wearily, "she is sure to turn up here."

The matron thought that unlikely.

Lady Terence had grounds for knowing better. "What she has saved can't last long. She is extravagant for a girl of her —. Anyhow, I've promised her help." The plaintive note seemed rather to claim help for the lady. "It's what she'll do in the meantime that worries me. She can't go back to her school, saddled with a baby. Besides, what would people say to a girl of her age reappearing with — Don't you see, she *must* have help!"

Still the matron sat there, encased in that unruffled competence. "Marna is well now," she said at last. "In other ways, too, the situation isn't what it was two years ago. As I find — dealing with nurses. Young women are growing very independent. A girl like Marna— oh, no trouble whatever about her getting something to do!"

"But — but the baby — " faltered Lady Terence.

For the first time the matron smiled. "I don't think Marna is likely to neglect John Mundy, do you?"

Lady Terence was honest. "No," she answered. As she neared the door some thought halted her. "I keep hearing her voice. Marna's saying, '*My* baby. My ba— ' and then breaking down." The matron had risen. She levelled a shrewd look at her visitor.

Lady Terence evaded the look. Her restless head set her veil swirling. That's the only part I haven't told Terence. If I did I know what he'd say."

The matron waited.

"Terence would say that it was a case of substitution. Instead of an ugly baby, a pretty one. Marna's own."

The matron's steady gaze showed no wavering. "Is that your view?" she asked.

"No," said Lady Terence miserably. "But it *would* have been before I knew John Mundy."

"Then he has repaid you." She followed the visitor out into the corridor. "It's knowing the kind of thing people will say; that's what has cost many a child a home and — all the rest. Women have been afraid. They won't be so afraid in future."

She was passing the convalescent room. "Will you come in and see our —"

"No! No!" Lady Terence fled down the passage.

"Some other time," said the matron, following cheerfully.

"No, no," came from the threshold. "I don't think I'll be coming again." Lady Terence ran down the steps as if she were afraid of being forcibly returned to that room full of mothers and of babies — babies — babies wherever you looked.

As she took her seat Lady Terence caught sight of her face in the car mirror. Heavens — what a haggard wreck! Yes — dogs *are* less agitating.

They'd come running to meet her when she got home.

Tou tou. Beryl.

And when she was tired Dowling would take them away.

[END]

NOTES by Joanne E. Gates for the Robins Web

According to ER's bibliographer, Sue Thomas, this is the last published of ER's short stories.

Entry 159: 'The Frog Baby.' *Woman's Leader:* 6 Feb 1920: 14-15; 13 Feb 1920: 36-37; 20 Feb 1920: 60-61; 27 Feb 1920: 84-86.

Online images of the volume of *The Woman's Leader* can be found at London School of Economics Digital Library.

The page numbers listed above should guide the reader, but the equivalence in image numbers (which cover a two-page spread) are these: 53 (Part 1), 69 (Part 2), 82 (Part 3), 95, 96 (Part 4). The title and author's name are listed at each issue's contents page, with this the first occurrence at image 46, https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/Documents/Detail/the-womans-leader.-1920/67257?item=67304

In transcribing this for the Robins Web, pagination is omitted. Also eliminated are "To Be Continued" indicators. Unless there is an obvious type-setting error, punctuation and English spelling are maintained as originally printed. Smart quotes are rendered here as straight quotes. The division into the four "Parts" and other spacing marks or separation by a row of asterisks breaks in the text are indicated. The original setting was in two columns.

Robins, as my biography notes, was aware of, or even close acquaintances with, prominent women who adopted war orphans. Although some of the physical descriptions of new-born John Mundy may carry racial stereotypes, they are mixed with yellow curls and blue eyes, a sense of dwarfism or low-weight birth, indicating the arbitrary nature of the depiction of new born baby's appearance. (Especially in her American life, Robins was dedicated to the better education of black Americans, having met and lobbied for W.E.B. DuBois to appear at the Lyceum Club in London, 1911.) When the suspicion of poor breeding arises, it is met with a powerful argument for the most affectionate nurturing, not by those whose financial privilege depicted them as more contented to fondle their pet dogs than dress up the orphan.

Robins published two other war related short stories. "Lost and Found" was published in *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, September, 1915. "Tortoise Shell Cat" appeared first in *Cosmopolitan* and then in the collection of stories that came out later in 1920 as *The Mills of the Gods and Other Stories.* See the list of titles at https://www.jsu.edu/robinsweb/docshort/index.html

It is clear from diary entries that the genesis and major work on the story was July 1918. Internally, the narrator mentions that it is the third year of the war. The major flashback depicts the baby as infant, and his description in present time as nearly two years old clarifies these two time frames. In her diary, Robins also worries that her drafting of the story has made it too long. Later, in 1919, she hints that "John Mundy" has been sent out to several outlets and that she asks her American agent Paul Reynolds to enumerate these. Although it may be tempting to argue that Robins lent her weight to the newly organized *Woman's Leader,* it might also be seen as a leftover story, not strong enough (or too long) to include in her anthology or place with a journal that might have paid more. I could find no evidence that Robins managed how the parts were to be split across the issues. By the time of this story's eventual printing, Robins was juggling many longer fiction projects and political activities.

At the point of composition of this story, Robins was putting the finishing touches on the book version of her trans-Atlantic novel, *Camilla*, which even more daringly than this story, employs *in media res* as a structural device, more common in classical epics than in the fiction of this time period. Especially in the earlier serialized printing of *Camilla*, Robins knew she might risk readership by introducing a detailed back story; but she asserted her privilege to the editor. (*Cosmopolitan* serialized *Camilla* monthly from October 1917 to September 1918.) Here, there is not a gap in the text, nor a sub-heading, nor the typographer's indication of the entry into a previous time frame. The reader must carefully note the transition with the sentence on page 4:

> She lay back in the great chair, watching him and thinking back, seeing herself at those stages, one after another, which had led to her sitting here in the stately, shining room, with this small salvaged human in the haven of her lap.

It is clear from the archival record that *Common Cause* is the precursor of *The Woman's Journal,* and this statement is made frequently in the early issues, with both titles on title pages of the early issues. Although it would be tempting to imagine that Robins had more of a hand in supporting this new launch, there is not as much evidence for this as there is for her inclusion as one of those involved in the founding of *Time and Tide*, a weekly feminist magazine that began publishing in May, 1920, and whose second issue included the serialization of the children's story, *Prudence and Peter*, co-authored by Robins and Octavia Wilberforce. The printings of the later parts of the "The Frog Baby" are accompanied by notices that readers can send for back issues so they can read the full story.

Explanatory notes:

von Tirpitz is Alfred von Tirpitz, German grand admiral and state secretary of the imperial naval office. Though not directing warfare during World War I, he would have been known as a lobbyist for unrestricted U Boat action. When that became controversial after the sinking of the *Lusitania*, he resigned. He spoke English and sent his two daughters to college in England. ER's fictional admiral thus may have known him more personally as an adversary than merely from the news reports.

Solatium in Part 4, from the Latin, is a payment or compensation for loss, related to solace.