

*How Grandpa Lost the Baby*  
by Mary Kyle Dallas

A telegram from Anna Maria:

“The cook has gone. Big dinner party. Going crazy. Please come.”

Mrs. Jones read it carefully and understood it at a glance. It meant that Anna Maria’s cook had left her and that she was incapable of preparing the dinner, or of giving directions for its preparation. Anna Maria had always been the blue stocking of the family, had been set down as the single sister, and had surprised every one by marrying, rather late in life, the erudite Professor Potts. Of course, without a cook Anna Maria was helpless, and Matilda, with her fifteen years’ experience, would fly to her assistance.

“But who will take care of baby?” said Mrs. Jones. “It is wash day, and the upstairs girl is doing the cooking. The children are in school, and Emeline gone to visit her friend, Miss Miller. I wish I had not let her go. Dear me! Grandpa, will you take care of baby until I come home? I shan’t stay longer than I can help; and *would* you be so good and kind as to do it?”

“Take care of baby! Why of course,” said grandpa, who was really Mrs. Jones’s father-in-law. “He’ll not be any trouble. Tome to his dampa—dere den.” He held out his arms, Mrs. Jones deposited baby in them, placed on the desk before grandpa a cup of sweetened milk and water, and rushed away to prepare for her trip across town. Soon the door closed behind her, and grandpa found himself in the unwonted position of nurse. At first it was not unpleasant. Baby cooed and chewed his thumb and kicked its little feet until one sock after the other tumbled off; and grandpa smiled and talked baby-talk. But after half an hour of this amiability, suddenly and without warning baby began to wail, a-wa a-wa a-a-a wa a-a-wa a-wa.

“What’s ze matter, petty?” asked grandpa. Baby responded by stiffening himself in an alarming manner, and raising his voice several notes higher. It was his intention to be walked with. The idea dawned on grandpa’s mind by degrees, and as soon as he fairly comprehended it, he yielded. Up and down over the carpeted floor of his study the old gentleman began to trot, and at last the little head drooped down upon his coat collar, and he saw the little eyes shut fast.

“Women,” said grandfather, conceitedly, “will worry with a child all day, whereas, a little judicious management will end the trouble very soon.”

Meanwhile Mrs. Jones flew in all haste to Anna Maria, and finding her about to put a turkey into the oven precisely as it came from the butcher’s, and with its long legs sticking straight out, decided that she was not fit to be left to herself, and remained with her until the nine professors who had been unexpectedly invited to dine by the master of the house, were in the dining-room.

“Don’t mind me, Anna Maria,” she said. “I’m cook to-day, and I’ll send little Betty up with the dessert before I go.”

Mrs. Jones performed her promise, and then fastening her cloak about her, and tying her blue veil over her flushed face, she hurried homeward, thinking of poor, deserted baby all the while.

She had reached the corner of her own street when suddenly she saw a sight that caused her to give a little scream—grandfather, with his usual amiable smile upon his countenance, and his hands full of letters, slowly trotting along toward the house.

“He must have left baby,” said Mrs. Jones, “but I suppose he called cook or Maggie,” said she hurried on just in time to be admitted by grandpa’s latch-key.

“Baby all right?” she asked, pleasantly, as she untied her veil.

“Baby? I—I presume so,” answered grandpa. Then he turned suddenly very red, and looked confusedly about him.

“Where is he?” asked Mrs. Jones.

“Where?—ah, yes—naturally—um—” responded grandpa, meditating profoundly; “um—yes.”

“I suppose you mean you don’t know where Maggie has taken him just now?” said Mrs. Jones, with exaggerated cheerfulness.

“Oh, that’s it, of course; naturally Maggie would take him. He would be apt to cry, and she, of course, would come.”

“Maggie!” shrieked Mrs. Jones, wildly: “Maggie!”

Up stairs she ran. No Maggie was to be found—no baby either. Downstairs she flew. Cook and Maggie, both engaged in the wringing of sheets, looked up in surprise.

“Where is baby?” screamed Mrs. Jones.

“Lord save us all!” cried cook.

“Where would he be?” asked Maggie.

“Sure, mam, what do ye mane?”

“Where?” screamed Mrs. Jones again, and rushed up stairs again.

“Grandpa,” she cried, “oh tell me, tell me, tell me where baby is!”

The guilty man looked at his daughter-in-law and looked away again.

“You see I’m not used to taking care of babies,” he said slowly. “Naturally, I’m not, and—well—I—”

“Speak!” shrieked Mrs. Jones. “I’m going to have a spasm of some sort.”

“Well,” continued grandpa, “really, my dear, I am forced to confess that I don’t remember. But I’ve only been to the post-office and down to Thompson’s office; I took the car down; I suppose

I left him in one of those places, not intentionally, you know. I must have forgotten all about him. I thought he was in the house; I'll go and see."

By this time Mrs. Jones had actually dropped down upon the floor, with her heart throbbing so that she could hear it; but she roused herself. Happily, there was a telegraphic attachment in grandfather's study, and in less than half an hour the whole family connection was flying about the city in search of the baby. Fruitless search!

The detectives who were called in evidently suspected grandpa of having done away with the child, and inquired if he had any interest in its death? Finally night fell upon the afflicted household, and only those who have ever felt the same trouble know what the poor mother suffered, as one by one her friends appeared to announce their want of success, and consult with each other as to the next steps to be taken. All drew together in the study. The gas was lit. Grandpa, literally bowed with shame and sorrow, sat in their midst, and his son thus addressed him:

"Father, I've no wish to blame you, but really it seems extraordinary that you cannot remember at what moment you missed our darling. That would give us a clew."

"Naturally," said grandpa. "And it's a most extraordinary lapse of memory. I knew he went to sleep. Then I forgot all about him. I confess it—I forgot all about him. I thought I put him on the sofa, or somewhere. Then I didn't know but that I kept him on my arm and took him out with me, but—"

"Wa-a-a!" cried something near by. "A-wa, a-wa, a-wa-a-a—"

"What's that?" cried grandpa.

"Baby's voice!" cried Mrs. Jones. "Oh, where, where?"

"A-wa," came from the voice again.

"I remember," said grandpa. "I remember now. I thought the waste paper basket would be a good cradle for him and I left him there."

And grandpa dived under his writing-table which was covered with a deep cloth, and drew out the oblong basket which he always kept for waste paper, and which was quite hidden by the cloth, and there, just waking from his long nap, was baby, rosy and unharmed.

"It all comes back like a flash," said grandpa. "What a remarkable lapse of memory. I'm greatly relieved—greatly relieved; dear, dear, I'm greatly relieved, indeed!"

But Mrs. Jones could say nothing. All she could do was to cry over her baby as she clasped it to her bosom. The gentlemen of the family thought the affair a great joke, of course. The detectives considered it very suspicious. The neighbors were rather disappointed that the affair ended so tamely; and grandpa has never been left in charge of a baby since that hour.

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