

with great detail. It spares nothing. The wisdom of men is embodied in these words. Listen carefully."

For a while I did. But it was too deep for me. Some of the words were about ten feet long, which must have pleased Dad, because he loves long words. It went on and on. The more he read, the more excited Dad got. After a while he was shouting and making gestures the way he does in court. The last I remember I was falling asleep.

WHEN I woke up, it was dark. I was still in the chair, with a blanket tucked around me. I turned on the light and saw by the clock on the fireplace that it was almost eight-thirty. I'd been asleep almost four hours. The nurse saw the light and came in.

"Your mother's awake now," she said. "Wouldn't you like to see her?"

We went upstairs, and I tiptoed into Mother's room. She was wide-awake under the soft lamp. I had never seen her looking so pretty. For a minute I couldn't say a word. I just stood there and stared at her. Then she raised her arm for me, and I knelt down, and all at once I wanted to pray. But she pulled my head against her and ran her fingers through my hair. I was so glad to be there, I couldn't say a word.

She whispered in my ear, "Would you like to see what Dr. Stork brought you?"

I nodded, and she lifted the covers. It was a baby wrapped in pink blankets at her side. I didn't say so, but I sure thought it was awfully ugly. It was practically bald, and it had sticky eyes.

"Isn't she wonderful?" Mother said.

"Yeah," I said, not meaning it.

"Oh, that stork!" Mother said. "What a bird he is!" She closed her eyes and whispered like a prayer, "He's God's most beautiful bird."

I didn't get that. The nurse told me I'd have to go, and when I got outside in the hall, I still didn't get it. I went to my room and locked the door. For a long time I lay in the dark thinking about it. Finally I felt it coming. It had been coming all day; but now I was alone and didn't care, and I didn't know what it was because it was half wanting to pray and give thanks and half just plain bawling, and so I prayed and bawled at once, letting them both come out without trying to stop them any more.

What got me was that I didn't know any more than I ever did. I didn't believe in storks, and neither did Dad. And Mother didn't—not really. And yet she could suffer so much, and have a baby, and almost die, and still say the stork was God's most beautiful bird. I knew she was wonderfully brave, and I knew it was marvelous. Oh, sure, it was swell, it was great. You had to have a lot of courage. But I didn't get it. I just didn't get the idea at all.

THE END

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