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The Baby Party

by F Scott Fitzgerald

When John Andros felt old he found solace¹ in the thought of life continuing through his child. The dark trumpets of oblivion were less loud at the **patter** of his child's feet or at the sound of his child's voice babbling mad non sequiturs² to him over the telephone. The latter incident occurred every afternoon at three when his wife called the office from the country, and he came to look forward to it as one of the vivid minutes of his day.

He was not physically old, but his life had been a series of struggles up a series of rugged hills, and here at thirty-eight having won his battles against ill-health and poverty he cherished³ less than the usual number of illusions. Even his feeling about his little girl was qualified. She had interrupted his rather intense love-affair with his wife, and she was the reason for their living in a suburban town, where they paid for country air with endless servant troubles and the weary merry-go-round⁴ of the commuting⁵ train.

It was little Ede as a definite piece of youth that chiefly interested him. He liked to take her on his lap⁶ and examine minutely her fragrant, downy⁷ scalp and her eyes with their irises of morning blue. Having paid this homage John was content that the nurse should take her away. After ten minutes the very vitality of the child irritated him; he was inclined to lose his temper when things were broken, and one Sunday afternoon when she had **disrupted** a bridge game⁸ by permanently hiding

1 something that makes you feel better when you are sad or upset

2 a statement that does not have a connection with what was said before

3 believed something is of value because it is important to you

4 a continuous series of related events or activities

5 travelling regularly to and from work

6 the top part of the legs when sitting down

7 covered in soft small hairs

8 a card game for four players who make two teams

up the ace of spades⁹, he had made a scene that had reduced his wife to tears.

This was absurd and John was ashamed of himself. It was inevitable that such things would happen, and it was impossible that little Ede should spend all her indoor hours in the nursery upstairs when she was becoming, as her mother said, more nearly a 'real person' every day.

She was two and a half, and this afternoon, for instance, she was going to a baby party. Grown-up Edith, her mother, had telephoned the information to the office, and little Ede had confirmed the business by shouting 'I yam going to a *pantry!*' into John's unsuspecting left ear.

'Drop in at the Markeys' when you get home, won't you, dear?' resumed her mother. 'It'll be funny. Ede's going to be all dressed up in her new pink dress –'

The conversation terminated abruptly with a squawk¹⁰ which indicated that the telephone had been pulled violently to the floor. John laughed and decided to get an early train out; the **prospect** of a baby party in someone else's house amused him.

'What a peach of a mess¹¹!' he thought humorously. 'A dozen mothers, and each one looking at nothing but her own child. All the babies breaking things and grabbing at the cake, and each mama going home thinking about the subtle superiority of her own child to every other child there.'

He was in a good humour today – all the things in his life were going better than they had ever gone before. When he got off the train at his station he shook his head at an importunate¹² taxi man, and began to walk up the long hill towards his house through the crisp December twilight¹³. It was only six o'clock but the moon was out, shining with proud brilliance on the thin sugary snow that lay over the lawns.

9 a card with one symbol like a pointed, black leaf; in a card game, it has either the highest or lowest value in a suit

10 a loud high noise like a bird

11 *informal, old-fashioned, phrase* 'What a peach of a mess': a wonderful mess

12 *formal*: continuing to ask for something in a determined and annoying way

13 the light in the evening when the sky begins to get dark

As he walked along drawing his lungs full of cold air his happiness increased, and the idea of a baby party appealed to him more and more. He began to wonder how Ede compared to other children of her own age, and if the pink dress she was to wear was something radical and mature. Increasing his gait¹⁴ he came in sight of his own house, where the lights of a **defunct** Christmas-tree still blossomed in the window, but he continued on past the walk¹⁵. The party was at the Markeys' next door.

As he mounted the brick step and rang the bell he became aware of voices inside, and he was glad he was not too late. Then he raised his head and listened – the voices were not children's voices, but they were loud and pitched high with anger; there were at least three of them and one, which rose as he listened to a hysterical sob¹⁶, he recognised immediately as his wife's.

'There's been some trouble,' he thought quickly.

Trying the door, he found it unlocked and pushed it open.

The baby party started at half past four, but Edith Andros, calculating **shrewdly** that the new dress would stand out more sensationally against vestments¹⁷ already rumpled¹⁸, planned the arrival of herself and little Ede for five. When they appeared it was already a flourishing¹⁹ affair. Four baby girls and nine baby boys, each one curled and washed and dressed with all the care of a proud and jealous heart, were dancing to the music of a phonograph²⁰. Never more than two or three were dancing at once, but as all were continually in motion running to and from their mothers for encouragement, the general effect was the same.

As Edith and her daughter entered, the music was temporarily drowned out by a sustained chorus, consisting largely of the word *cute*²¹ and directed towards little Ede, who stood looking timidly

14 the way that someone walks

15 US: a path across someone's grass or garden

16 the sound made when someone cries noisily

17 *formal*: clothes normally worn by a priest

18 untidy or not smooth

19 successful

20 *old-fashioned*: a record player

21 attractive, usually small, and easy to like

about and fingering the edges of her pink dress. She was not kissed – this is the sanitary age²² – but she was passed along a row of mamas each one of whom said 'cu-u-ute' to her and held her pink little hand before passing her on to the next. After some encouragement and a few mild pushes she was absorbed into the dance, and became an active member of the party.

Edith stood near the door talking to Mrs Markey, and keeping an eye on the tiny figure in the pink dress. She did not care for Mrs Markey; she considered her both snippy²³ and common²⁴, but John and Joe Markey were congenial²⁵ and went in together on the commuting train every morning, so the two women kept up an elaborate **pretence** of warm amity²⁶. They were always reproaching each other for 'not coming to see me', and they were always planning the kind of parties that began with 'You'll have to come to dinner with us soon, and we'll go to the theatre,' but never matured further.

'Little Ede looks perfectly darling²⁷,' said Mrs Markey, smiling and moistening her lips in a way that Edith found particularly repulsive. 'So *grown-up* – I can't believe it!'

Edith wondered if 'little Ede' referred to the fact that Billy Markey, though several months younger, weighed almost five pounds more. Accepting a cup of tea she took a seat with two other ladies on a divan and launched into the real business of the afternoon, which of course lay in relating the recent accomplishments and insouciances²⁸ of her child.

An hour passed. Dancing palled²⁹ and the babies took to sterner³⁰ sport. They ran into the dining-room, rounded the big table, and essayed³¹ the kitchen door, from which they were rescued by an expeditionary force of mothers. Having been

22 *phrase 'the sanitary age'*: relating to health, a time when people were aware of cleanliness

23 someone who is not patient and speaks to people in an angry way

24 an insulting way of describing someone from a low social class

25 friendly and enjoying the company of others

26 *formal*: a friendly relationship, especially between nations or groups of people

27 very attractive; people who use this word do not usually sound sincere

28 amusing or carefree activities

29 become less interesting

30 more serious

31 *military*: attempted

rounded up³² they immediately broke loose, and rushing back to the dining-room tried the familiar swinging door again. The word 'overheated' began to be used, and small white brows were dried with small white handkerchiefs. A general attempt to make the babies sit down began, but the babies squirmed off laps with peremptory³³ cries of 'Down! Down!' and the rush into the fascinating dining-room began anew.

This phase of the party came to an end with the arrival of refreshments, a large cake with two candles, and saucers of vanilla ice-cream. Billy Markey, a stout laughing baby with red hair and legs somewhat bowed³⁴, blew out the candles, and placed an experimental thumb on the white frosting³⁵. The refreshments were distributed, and the children ate, greedily but without confusion – they had behaved remarkably well all afternoon. They were modern babies who ate and slept at regular hours, so their dispositions³⁶ were good, and their faces healthy and pink – such a peaceful party would not have been possible thirty years ago.

After the refreshments a gradual exodus³⁷ began. Edith glanced anxiously at her watch – it was almost six, and John had not arrived. She wanted him to see Ede with the other children – to see how dignified and polite and intelligent she was, and how the only ice-cream spot on her dress was some that had dropped from her chin when she was joggled³⁸ from behind.

'You're a darling,' she whispered to her child, drawing³⁹ her suddenly against her knee. 'Do you know you're a darling? Do you *know* you're a darling?'

32 *phrase 'rounded up'*: brought together in a place for a particular purpose, especially cattle

33 *formal*: speaking or behaving rather rudely, as if you expect other people to obey you immediately

34 curved so that the knees do not meet

35 *US*: a smooth sweet substance usually made from sugar, butter and liquid, used for covering cakes

36 the way that someone normally thinks and behaves, that shows what type of person they are

37 when a lot of people leave a place or activity at the same time

38 *informal*: moved in different directions with sudden, quick movements

39 *phrase 'drawing against'*: moving someone towards you

Ede laughed. 'Bow-wow⁴⁰,' she said suddenly.

'Bow-wow?' Edith looked around. 'There isn't any bow-wow.'

'Bow-wow,' repeated Ede. 'I want a bow-wow.'

Edith followed the small pointing finger.

'That isn't a bow-wow, dearest, that's a teddy-bear⁴¹.'

'Bear?'

'Yes, that's a teddy-bear, and it belongs to Billy Markey. You don't want Billy Markey's teddy-bear, do you?'

Ede did want it.

She broke away from her mother and approached Billy Markey, who held the toy closely in his arms. Ede stood regarding him with *inscrutable* eyes, and Billy laughed.

Grown-up Edith looked at her watch again, this time impatiently.

The party had dwindled⁴² until, besides Ede and Billy, there were only two babies remaining – and one of the two remained only by virtue of⁴³ having hidden himself under the dining-room table. It was selfish of John not to come. It showed so little pride in the child. Other fathers had come, half a dozen of them, to call for their wives, and they had stayed for a while and looked on.

There was a sudden wail. Ede had obtained Billy's teddy-bear by pulling it forcibly from his arms, and on Billy's attempt to recover it, she had pushed him casually to the floor.

'Why, Ede!' cried her mother, repressing an inclination to laugh.

Joe Markey, a handsome, broad-shouldered man of thirty-five, picked up his son and set him on his feet. 'You're a fine fellow,' he said *jovially*. 'Let a girl knock you over! You're a fine fellow.'

'Did he bump his head?' Mrs Markey returned anxiously from bowing⁴⁴ the next to last remaining mother out of the door.

'No-o-o-o,' exclaimed Markey. 'He bumped something else, didn't you, Billy? He bumped something else.'

40 the noise a dog makes, used by children or when talking to children

41 a soft toy bear

42 become gradually less or smaller over a period of time until almost nothing remains

43 because of, or as a result of

44 *phrase 'bow out'*: saying goodbye

Billy had so far forgotten the bump that he was already making an attempt to recover his property. He seized a leg of the bear which projected from Ede's enveloping arms and tugged at it but without success.

'No,' said Ede emphatically.

Suddenly, encouraged by the success of her former half-accidental *manoeuvre*, Ede dropped the teddy-bear, placed her hands on Billy's shoulders and pushed him backward off his feet.

This time he landed less harmlessly; his head hit the bare floor just off the rug with a dull hollow sound, whereupon he drew in his breath⁴⁵ and delivered an agonized yell.

Immediately the room was in confusion. With an exclamation Markey hurried to his son, but his wife was first to reach the injured baby and catch him up into her arms.

'Oh, Billy,' she cried, 'what a terrible bump! She ought to be spanked⁴⁶.'

Edith, who had rushed immediately to her daughter, heard this remark, and her lips came sharply together.

'Why, Ede,' she whispered perfunctorily, 'you bad girl!'

Ede put back her little head suddenly and laughed. It was a loud laugh, a triumphant laugh with victory in it and challenge and *contempt*. Unfortunately it was also an infectious laugh. Before her mother realized the delicacy of the situation, she too had laughed, an audible, distinct laugh not unlike the baby's, and partaking of⁴⁷ the same overtones.

Then, as suddenly, she stopped.

Mrs Markey's face had grown red with anger, and Markey, who had been feeling the back of the baby's head with one finger, looked at her, *frowning*.

'It's *swollen* already,' he said with a note of reproof⁴⁸ in his voice. 'I'll get some witch-hazel⁴⁹.'

45 *phrase* 'drew in his breath': take in a lot of air as you breathe

46 slapped or hit on the bottom with an open hand

47 *formal*: sharing

48 *formal*: criticism or blame

49 liquid used for rubbing on small cuts or injuries

But Mrs Markey had lost her temper. 'I don't see anything funny about a child being hurt!' she said in a *trembling* voice.

Little Ede meanwhile had been looking at her mother curiously. She noted that her own laugh had produced her mother's and she wondered if the same cause would always produce the same effect. So she chose this moment to throw back her head and laugh again.

To her mother the additional mirth⁵⁰ added the final touch of hysteria to the situation. Pressing her handkerchief to her mouth she *giggled* irrepressibly. It was more than nervousness – she felt that in a peculiar way she was laughing with her child – they were laughing together.

It was in a way a *defiance* – those two against the world.

While Markey rushed upstairs to the bathroom for ointment, his wife was walking up and down rocking the yelling boy in her arms.

'Please go home!' she broke out suddenly. 'The child's badly hurt, and if you haven't the decency to be quiet, you'd better go home.'

'Very well,' said Edith, her own temper rising. 'I've never seen anyone make such a mountain out of –'

'Get out!' cried Mrs Markey frantically. 'There's the door, get out – I never want to see you in our house again. You or your brat⁵¹ either!'

Edith had taken her daughter's hand and was moving quickly towards the door, but at this remark she stopped and turned around, her face contracting with *indignation*.

'Don't you dare call her that!'

Mrs Markey did not answer but continued walking up and down, muttering to herself and to Billy in an inaudible voice.

Edith began to cry.

'I will get out!' she *sobbed*, 'I've never heard anybody so rude and c-common in my life. I'm glad your baby did get pushed down – he's nothing but a f-fat little fool anyhow.'

50 *mainly literary*: happy laughter

51 *informal*: an annoying child who behaves badly

Joe Markey reached the foot of the stairs just in time to hear this remark.

'Why, Mrs Andros,' he said sharply, 'can't you see the child's hurt. You really ought to control yourself.'

'Control m-myself!' exclaimed Edith brokenly. 'You better ask her to c-control herself. I've never heard anybody so c-common in my life.'

'She's insulting me!' Mrs Markey was now livid with rage⁵². 'Did you hear what she said, Joe? I wish you'd put her out. If she won't go, just take her by the shoulders and put her out!'

'Don't you dare touch me!' cried Edith. 'I'm going just as quick as I can find my c-coat!'

Blind with tears she took a step toward the hall. It was just at this moment that the door opened and John Andros walked anxiously in.

'John!' cried Edith, and fled to him wildly.

'What's the matter? Why, what's the matter?'

'They're – they're putting me out!' she wailed, collapsing against him. 'He'd just started to take me by the shoulders and put me out. I want my coat!'

'That's not true,' objected Markey hurriedly. 'Nobody's going to put you out.' He turned to John. 'Nobody's going to put you out.' He turned to John. 'Nobody's going to put her out,' he repeated. 'She's –'

'What do you mean "put her out"?' demanded John **abruptly**. 'What's all this talk, anyhow?'

'Oh, let's go!' cried Edith. 'I want to go. They're so *common*, John!'

'Look here!' Markey's face darkened. 'You've said that about enough. You're acting sort of⁵³ crazy.'

'They called Ede a brat!'

For the second time that afternoon little Ede expressed emotion at an inopportune moment. Confused and frightened at the

52 phrase 'livid with rage': extremely angry

53 mainly spoken, phrase 'sort of': slightly or in some ways

shouting voices, she began to cry, and her tears had the effect of conveying⁵⁴ that she felt the insult in her heart.

'What's the idea of this?' broke out John. 'Do you insult your guests in your own house?'

'It seems to me it's your wife that's done the insulting!' answered Markey crisply. 'In fact, your baby there started all the trouble.'

John gave a contemptuous **snort**. 'Are you calling names at a little baby?' he inquired. 'That's a fine manly business!'

'Don't talk to him, John,' insisted Edith. 'Find my coat!'

'You must be in a bad way,' went on John angrily, 'if you have to take out your temper on⁵⁵ a helpless little baby.'

'I never heard anything so damn⁵⁶ twisted⁵⁷ in my life,' shouted Markey. 'If that wife of yours would shut her mouth for a minute –'

'Wait a minute! You're not talking to a woman and child now –'

There was an incidental interruption. Edith had been fumbling on a chair for her coat, and Mrs Markey had been watching her with hot, angry eyes. Suddenly she laid Billy down on the sofa, where he immediately stopped crying and pulled himself upright, and coming into the hall she quickly found Edith's coat and handed it to her without a word. Then she went back to the sofa, picked up Billy, and rocking him in her arms looked again at Edith with hot, angry eyes. The interruption had taken less than half a minute.

'Your wife comes in here and begins shouting around about how common we are,' burst out Markey violently. 'Well, if we're so damn common, you'd better stay away! And what's more, you'd better get out now!'

Again, John gave a short, contemptuous laugh.

54 communicating ideas or feelings indirectly

55 phrase 'take out your temper on': make someone suffer because you are angry, upset or tired, even if it is not their fault

56 used for emphasising what you are saying, especially when you are angry about something

57 informal: behaving in a strange and cruel way

'You're not only common,' he returned, 'you're evidently an awful bully⁵⁸ – when there's any helpless women and children around.' He felt for the knob and swung the door open. 'Come on, Edith.'

Taking up her daughter in her arms, his wife stepped outside and John, still looking contemptuously at Markey, started to follow.

'Wait a minute!' Markey took a step forward; he was trembling slightly, and two large veins on his temples⁵⁹ were suddenly full of blood. 'You don't think you can get away with that, do you? With me?'

Without a word John walked out the door, leaving it open.

Edith, still weeping, had started for home. After following her with his eyes until she reached her own walk, John turned back towards the lighted doorway where Markey was slowly coming down the slippery steps. He took off his overcoat and hat, tossed them off the path onto the snow. Then, sliding a little on the iced walk, he took a step forward.

At the first **blow**, they both slipped and fell heavily to the sidewalk, half rising then, and again pulled each other on the ground. They found a better foothold in the thin snow to the side of the walk and rushed at each other, both swinging wildly and pressing out the snow into a **pasty**⁶⁰ mud underfoot.

The street was deserted, and except for their short tired gasps and the padded sound as one or the other slipped down into the slushy⁶¹ mud, they fought in silence, clearly defined to each other by the full moonlight as well as by the amber glow that shone out of the open door. Several times they both slipped down together, and then for a while the conflict threshed about wildly on the lawn.

For ten, fifteen, twenty minutes they fought there senselessly in the moonlight. They had both taken off coats and vests at some silently agreed upon interval and now their shirts dripped

58 someone who frightens or hurts someone who is smaller and weaker than they are

59 the flat areas on either side of your forehead next to your eyes

60 like paste: a kind of glue often made with flour and water

61 used to describe snow that is starting to melt

from their backs in wet pulpy⁶² shreds⁶³. Both were torn and bleeding and so exhausted that they could stand only when by their position they mutually supported each other – the impact, the mere effort of a blow, would send them both to their hands and knees.

But it was not **weariness** that ended the business, and the very meaninglessness of the fight was a reason for not stopping. They stopped because once when they were straining at each other on the ground, they heard a man's footsteps coming along the sidewalk. They had rolled somehow into the shadow, and when they heard these footsteps they stopped fighting, stopped moving, stopped breathing, lay **huddled** together like two boys playing Indian⁶⁴ until the footsteps had passed. Then, staggering to their feet, they looked at each other like two drunken men.

'I'll be damned if I'm going on with this thing any more,' cried Markey thickly.

'I'm not going on any more either,' said John Andros. 'I've had enough of this thing.'

Again they looked at each other, sulkily⁶⁵ this time, as if each suspected the other of **urging** him to a renewal of the fight. Markey spat out a mouthful of blood from a cut lip; then he **cursed** softly, and picking up his coat and vest, shook off the snow from them in a surprised way, as if their comparative dampness was his only worry in the world.

'Want to come in and wash up⁶⁶?' he asked suddenly.

'No, thanks,' said John. 'I ought to be going home – my wife'll be worried.'

He too picked up his coat and vest and then his overcoat and hat. Soaking wet⁶⁷ and dripping with perspiration, it seemed absurd that less than half an hour ago he had been wearing all these clothes.

'Well – good night,' he said hesitantly.

62 very soft; pulp is the inside of fruit or vegetables

63 long thin pieces cut or torn from something

64 phrase 'playing Indian': lying very quietly, as if hunting

65 in a way that shows you are unhappy or angry and not wanting to talk to anyone or be with other people

66 US phrase 'wash up': wash yourself, especially your hands and face

67 extremely wet

Suddenly they walked towards each other and shook hands. It was no perfunctory hand-shake: John Andros's arm went around Markey's shoulder, and he patted him softly on the back for a little while.

'No harm done,' he said brokenly.

'No – you?'

'No, no harm done.'

'Well,' said John Andros after a minute, 'I guess⁶⁸ I'll say good night.'

Limping slightly and with his clothes over his arm, John Andros turned away. The moonlight was still bright as he left the dark patch of trampled ground and walked over the intervening lawn. Down at the station, half a mile away, he could hear the rumble of the seven o'clock train.

'But you must have been crazy,' cried Edith brokenly. 'I thought you were going to fix⁶⁹ it all up there and shake hands. That's why I went away.'

'Did you want us to fix it up?'

'Of course not, I never want to see them again. But I thought of course that was what you were going to do.' She was touching the **bruises** on his neck and back with iodine⁷⁰ as he sat placidly in a hot bath. 'I'm going to get the doctor,' she said insistently. 'You may be hurt internally.'

He shook his head 'Not a chance,' he answered. 'I don't want this to get all over the town.'

'I don't understand yet how it all happened.'

'Neither do I.' He smiled grimly. 'I guess these baby parties are pretty **rough** affairs.'

'Well, one thing –' suggested Edith hopefully, 'I'm certainly glad we have beef steak in the house for tomorrow's dinner.'

'Why?'

68 *informal*: used when you are saying something that you think is probably true or correct

69 *informal*: to find a solution to a situation where things are not working well

70 a dark chemical put on cuts in the skin to prevent infection

'For your eye, of course. Do you know I came within an ace of⁷¹ ordering veal? Wasn't that the luckiest thing?'

Half an hour later, dressed except that his neck would accommodate⁷² no collar, John moved his limbs experimentally before the glass⁷³. 'I believe I'll get myself in better shape,' he said thoughtfully. 'I must be getting old.'

'You mean so that next time you can beat him?'

'I did beat him,' he announced. 'At least, I beat him as much as he beat me. And there isn't going to be a next time. Don't you go calling people common any more. If you get in any trouble, you just take your coat and go home. Understand?'

'Yes, dear,' she said **meekly**. 'I was very foolish and now I understand.'

Out in the hall, he paused abruptly by the baby's door.

'Is she asleep?'

'Sound asleep⁷⁴. But you can go in and peek at her – just to say good night.'

They **tiptoed** in and bent together over the bed. Little Ede, her cheeks **flushed** with health, her pink hands clasped⁷⁵ together, was sleeping soundly in the cool, dark room. John reached over the railing of the bed and passed his hand lightly over the silken⁷⁶ hair.

'She's asleep,' he murmured in a puzzled way.

'Naturally, after such an afternoon.'

'Miz Andros,' the coloured⁷⁷ maid's stage whisper⁷⁸ floated in from the hall. 'Mr and Miz Markey downstairs an' want to see you. Mr Markey he's all cut up in pieces, mam'n. His face look like a roast beef. An' Miz Markey she 'pear mighty mad⁷⁹.'

71 *phrase* 'came within an ace of': almost doing something, or nearly succeeding in doing it

72 provide a place, or room, for something

73 *US*: mirror

74 *phrase* 'sound asleep': sleeping very well

75 *mainly literary*: held tightly

76 very soft, smooth or shiny

77 *old-fashioned, offensive*: black

78 a way of speaking in which you pretend to talk very quietly but you can be heard by other people

79 she appears to be very angry

'Why, what incomparable nerve⁸⁰!' exclaimed Edith. 'Just tell them we're not home. I wouldn't go down for anything in the world.'

'You most certainly will.' John's voice was hard and set⁸¹.

'What?'

'You'll go down right now, and, what's more, whatever that other woman does, you'll apologize for what you said this afternoon. After that you don't ever have to see her again.'

'Why – John, I can't.'

'You've got to. And just remember that she probably hated to come over here twice as much as you hate to go downstairs.'

'Aren't you coming? Do I have to go alone?'

'I'll be down – in just a minute.'

John Andros waited until she had closed the door behind her; then he reached over into the bed, and picking up his daughter, blankets and all, sat down in the rocking-chair holding her tightly in his arms. She moved a little, and he held his breath, but she was sleeping soundly, and in a moment she was resting quietly in the hollow⁸² of his elbow. Slowly he bent his head until his cheek was against her bright hair. 'Dear little girl,' he whispered. 'Dear little girl, dear little girl.'

John Andros knew at length what it was he fought for so savagely that evening. He had it now, he possessed it forever, and for some time he sat there rocking very slowly to and fro in the darkness.

80 rude attitude, usually shown by behaviour that makes other people angry

81 not changing, not showing what you really feel

82 an area on someone's body that is slightly lower than the area around it

Post-reading exercises

Understanding the story

- 1 Use these questions to help you check that you have understood the story.

John

- 1 Where does John work? Where does he live?
- 2 What happens every afternoon at three o'clock?
- 3 How old is John? What has his life been like? What is it like now?
- 4 How does he feel about his daughter?
- 5 Where is the baby party going to be?
- 6 What time of year is it?
- 7 What does John hear as he approaches the Markeys' house?

The party

- 8 Why does Edith decide to take Ede to the party at five o'clock?
- 9 How many babies are at the party?
- 10 Why do Edith and Mrs Markey pretend to like each other?
- 11 What do the children do when they have finished dancing?
- 12 When do most parents begin to leave the party?
- 13 How many children are there at the end of the party?
- 14 Why does Ede push Billy? Why does he cry?
- 15 Why do you think Edith laughs?
- 16 Why does Mrs Markey tell Edith to leave?
- 17 What does Mrs Markey call Ede? How does Edith react?
- 18 Why is John angry? Why is Joe angry?

After the party

- 19 Why does John leave the door open when he leaves the Markeys' house?
- 20 Where does the fight take place? Why do the men stop fighting?
- 21 What do the men do before they leave each other?
- 22 Does John think he won the fight?
- 23 What does John tell Edith to do in the future?
- 24 What are John and Edith doing when the Markeys arrive?
- 25 What does John tell Edith she must do?
- 26 Why doesn't John go downstairs with his wife?