

12-10-99

Entertaining Baby

No one still living can corroborate my story. Nevertheless, I feel safe in telling it, because I heard it so many times from the three people who participated in it.

The story began on a warm summer afternoon when I woke from a nap. Mother dressed me in a crisp blue checked gingham sun dress which was made in a style easy to get on an impatient two-year-old. The dress could be ironed flat, and was seamless with two broad straps which crossed in back and buttoned at the baby's undefined waistline. A small pocket decorated the front, trimmed with the narrow lace which finished the rest of the garment.

They never said so in the tales I heard, but I must assume that I didn't always wake from sleep in an angelic mood, and I have to guess that Mother, Daddy, and my grandmother Mamie had other desires than entertaining me, because the toy that I was offered was Mother's diamond engagement ring. I remember seeing it many times in later years. I always admired the brilliance of the diamond and the grace of the Tiffany setting. Mamie should have known better and if she did have misgivings about the ring's use as a toy, they must have been overridden by the fact that I was Mother's and Daddy's first child.

The fact is that one of them gave the ring to amuse me. I was entranced with it and enjoyed several variations on playing with the ring. When one of the adults retrieved the ring after I tired of it, he (or she) was shocked to find the setting only – no diamond. I can easily assume that there was general consternation, as well as wonderment as to why anyone would give a two-year-old a ring to play with. Why, she could have swallowed the whole ring or the diamond. I have no idea how I might have spent the time while those three adults frantically searched all the areas where I might have played with the ring, all the possible nooks and crannies, each one again and again. No diamond. Some time later, when they had exhausted all of the possibilities, again, no diamond. Sometime later when the adults had exhausted the possibilities of search, Daddy thought perhaps I had wandered out to play in my sandpile, even though no one remembered letting me outside.

Alas, the diamond was not immediately visible on the surface of the white sand, but Daddy was desperate enough to sift the entire sandpile. With a fine-meshed sieve, he carefully transferred all the sand to a large container and back again. No diamond. Finally, they abandoned the search. No part of the story, as I remember it, indicated the mood of the searching party, but I fancy I demanded some time from one or all of the adults, and to their credit I did survive their frantic search.

The next day, Mamie began the daily hand washing of my clothes. When she came to my blue-checked apron, she turned out the little pocket to remove any lint which might have accumulated there. Behold, safe in the bottom of the pocket, was the diamond! When I think of all the places that diamond could have been, including somewhere in my digestive tract, I rejoice, even today. I heard Mamie, Daddy, and Mother tell that story

many times, always with the same amazement that the diamond was found and with the comment that some objects may be attractive but aren't, by virtue of that alone, necessarily appropriate playthings for toddlers.



(See also “A Family Story”)