

Born at half-past three on a February morning, the world having been decked with a slight snow-fall, it was then that my mother's aunt, Mrs Emily Smith, opened the bedroom door and emerged on the landing. My father had gone outside to lean over the gate, and was still leaning there when she opened the door, but my mother's mother, with another of my mother's aunts, were standing with bowed heads at the foot of the stairs. Prone in the parlour, and stretched in uneasy attitudes, five of her eight sisters were snatching a troubled sleep, while two fellow-members of my mother's Mothers' Guild were upon their knees in the back kitchen. But for the fact, indeed, that two of my mother's sisters had not, at that time, had their tonsils removed, the whole house would have been wrapped in the profoundest stillness.

My mother's mother was the first to see Mrs Smith, though she only saw her, as it were, through a mist. Mrs Smith was the first to speak, in a voice tremulous with emotion.

"Where's Augustus?" she said. Augustus was my father's name.

"He's just gone outside," said my mother's mother.

Something splashed heavily on the hall linoleum. It was a drop of moisture from Mrs Smith's forehead.

"Tell him," she said, "that he's the father of a son."

My mother's mother gave a great cry. My father was beside her in a single leap. Always, as I have said, highly coloured, his face at this moment seemed literally on fire. The two fellow-members of my mother's Mothers' Guild, accompanied by my father's five sisters-in-law, rushed into the hall. Mrs Smith leaned over the banisters.

"A boy," she said. "It's a boy."

"A boy?" said my father.

"Yes, a boy," said Mrs Smith.

There was a moment's hush, and then Nature had its way. My father unashamedly burst into tears. My mother's mother kissed him on the neck just as the two fellow-members burst into a hymn; and a moment later, my mother's five sisters burst simultaneously into the doxology. Then my father

recovered himself and held up his hand.

“I shall call him Augustus,” he said, “after myself.”

“Or tin?” suggested my mother’s mother. “What about calling him tin, after the saint?”

“How do you mean — tin?” said my father.

“Augus-tin,” said Mrs Emily Smith.

But my father shook his head.

“No, it shall be tus,” he said. “Tus is better than tin.”

Then his five sisters-in-law resumed the singing, from which the two fellow-members had been unable to desist, until my father, who had been rapidly thinking, once again held up his hand.

“And I shall give the vicar,” he said, “the first opportunity of becoming Augustus’s godfather.”

Then he took a deep breath, threw back his shoulders, tilted his chin, and closed his eyes; and with the full vigour of his immense voice, he, too, joined in the doxology.

– from “[Augustus Carp, Esq.](#)”, by Sir Henry Bashford [[epub](#)]