

**THE
FANTASTIC
FAMILY
WHIPPLE**

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THE MOST EXTRAORDINARILY ORDINARY BOY ON EARTH

All the members of the Whipple family had managed to be born in the same month on the same day: March the first. All, of course, but one.

Arthur Whipple had been so eager to join his amazing family that he decided to make a surprise arrival into the world at eleven thirty-four P.M. on February the twenty-ninth, just twenty-six minutes ahead of schedule. But to Arthur's astonishment, his family was not as delighted by the surprise as he had hoped. When the doctor placed Arthur in his mother's arms, she smiled lovingly down at him—but he could sense a hint of sadness in her eyes. And when the nurse came and carried him out for his first bath, he turned back to catch a glimpse of his mother quietly crying as the door shut behind him.

THE FANTASTIC FAMILY WHIPPLE

Arthur's father sent the marching band home early that night, after they had performed but one song. Charles Whipple was a good man, but he found it hard to conceal his disappointment in his new son's poor sense of timing.

Seeing that something was troubling the baby's father, the doctor sought to reassure him. "Congratulations, Mr. Whipple. You have a healthy baby boy. His heart rate is normal, and he is breathing very well. Furthermore, he has the proper number of fingers and toes, and—"

"Really?" Mr. Whipple interjected. "Well, that *is* good news! I was under the impression he only had ten of each, but . . ."

"Well yes," replied the doctor. "Ten fingers and ten toes. That's generally considered to be the proper number."

"Oh. I see," sighed Mr. Whipple. "No one must have told you."

"You were expecting a different number of digits?"

"We were really hoping for *at least* fourteen of each. . . . Are you quite sure there were only ten?"

"Uh, yes. Quite sure."

"And there is no way he might sprout a few extras in the near future?"

"Um. No," replied the doctor, who was beginning to look noticeably uncomfortable with Mr. Whipple's questions.

"Oh, well, there you have it," said Mr. Whipple with more than a hint of despair. "This is just a disaster."

The doctor made an expression that was somewhere



between a smile and a grimace, then turned, whispered something to the nurse, and walked out of the room. One could hardly blame him for feeling uneasy. He was used to people being overjoyed when he gave them the news that their child was healthy and normal.

But, of course, the Whipple family was anything but normal, and Arthur's being so had shocked his parents to their very cores. In truth, they would have been less surprised if Arthur had been born a duck-billed platypus. For the Whipples had long been regarded as extraordinary, due to one simple fact: the Whipple family had broken more world records than any family on earth.

After a few minutes, Arthur was brought back into the room and returned to his mother. Perhaps sensing he wasn't measuring up to his family's expectations, the baby looked as though he might be trying to think of something remarkable he could do to prove himself worthy of the Whipple name. Unfortunately, he had just been born, and apart from gurgling, there wasn't a whole lot he was capable of. In the end, he apparently decided on attempting the world record for Longest Time without Blinking—but only made it forty-two seconds. Luckily, no one really noticed. He didn't know it then, but this was the last time his shortcomings would go undetected. From that moment on, each of Arthur's failures would be documented, analyzed, studied, and graphed.

Outside the hospital room, the crowd of well-wishers was buzzing with anticipation. In some parts of the crowd,

THE FANTASTIC FAMILY WHIPPLE

there was a rumor circulating that the latest addition to the Whipple family had been born with polka-dotted skin and a full set of teeth. In other parts, it was whispered the baby had weighed 22½ pounds and was covered with fur. Some people were even saying the infant had refused the doctor's help and simply delivered itself.

A crack of the door sent a hush over the crowd.

Mr. Whipple stepped into the hallway. He stood smiling awkwardly for a moment and then addressed the onlookers.

“Thank you all so much for coming. I am happy to report that my wife has given birth to a son—and that he is healthy, happy and . . .” Mr. Whipple paused, grappling with the next word “. . . normal.”

The crowd looked puzzled. Surely he was exaggerating. He couldn't have meant *normal* normal. After all, this was a Whipple they were dealing with. Certainly the word “normal” had an entirely different meaning in that family.

One man spoke up. “So what records has the little one broken in his first hour? Birth weight? Shoe size? Arm length?”

“Actually,” replied Mr. Whipple, his smile straining a bit, “Arthur has not broken any records at this time. We are sure, however, that with the proper guidance, he will soon join his siblings in the pages of *Grazelby's Guide to World Records and Fantastic Feats*.”

“But what about your streak of Coincidental Birth Dates? This marks the sixth member of your family born on the first of March. Surely, *that* is a world record?”

Mr. Whipple's smile grew even more strained. "Unfortunately, Arthur was born several minutes before midnight, giving him an actual birth date of February the twenty-ninth. But we are perfectly satisfied with continuing to share our record of five coincidental birth dates with the Nakamoto family in Osaka."

The crowd looked stunned. They had come to rely on the Whipple family's unbeaten track record in the realm of world-record breaking. Nothing was certain anymore.

Stepping forward through the crowd, a grizzle-faced reporter peered out from under a dark-brimmed hat.

"Mr. Whipple," said the man, "do you think this setback might be explained by—how shall we say—*other-than-natural* means?"

Mr. Whipple arched his brow, his smile vanishing altogether. "I'm afraid I don't take your meaning, sir."

"My apologies, Mr. Whipple. What I mean to say is: mightn't your son's unremarkable quality be the result of a certain *family curse*? A curse that has gone so far as to claim the life of—"

"Who is this man?" cried Mr. Whipple. "Who let him in here? Wilhelm!"

A burly, handlebar-mustachioed man rushed forward, clapped the reporter about the shoulders, and proceeded to drag him down the hall as the crowd looked on with wide eyes.

When the two men had disappeared from view, Mr. Whipple straightened his shirt and cleared his throat.

THE FANTASTIC FAMILY WHIPPLE

“Terribly sorry about that,” he addressed the onlookers. “We can’t have just anyone attending the births of our children, you understand. But please, let me assure you—the so-called Lyon’s Curse has nothing whatsoever to do with my son’s momentary recordlessness. Any family tragedies resulting from such a curse are all in the distant past.” Mr. Whipple wiped his brow with his handkerchief. “And besides, this is hardly a tragedy: I have every confidence Arthur’s unfavorable status won’t last more than a matter of days—certainly no more than a month or two.”

The crowd said nothing.

Amidst some awkward shuffling of feet and a few nervous glances, Mr. Whipple thanked everyone again for coming.

It was not until Mr. Whipple’s valet and butler, Wilhelm, returned with a forklift—and presented the men with the World’s Largest Box of Cigars—that the memory of the strange interruption faded.

After distributing the seven-foot, three-hundred-pound cigars into giant cigar holders, Wilhelm—whose title of World’s Strongest German had made him uniquely suited to the task—promptly donned a flamethrower and proceeded to light them.

The men sat about smoking their colossal Cubans through large funnel-shaped tips while the women formed gossip clusters and flitted from one to the next. Just before dawn, when all had had their fill of gossip and smoke, the



guests offered their closing compliments and bid the Whipple family farewell.

Mr. Whipple gazed out of the maternity ward window onto the procession of cars leaving the hospital, each with a giant half-smoked cigar strapped to its roof or secured to its tail, as the sun rose in the distance, drenching the whole scene in a warm amber glow. He looked back toward the hospital room where his wife lay holding their recordless newborn son, and thought about the past. He couldn't help but wonder if his family's incredible legacy had come to an end.



When the octuplets arrived—on schedule—the world could finally relax. The Whipplés had returned.

Seven years after Arthur was born, Eliza Whipple was in labor again. The doctors had told her she was to have plain old quintuplets—but Abigail, Beatrice, and George had been hiding behind their siblings in order to surprise the family. It was true, of course, that Arthur had tried to surprise the family at his own birth—by arriving early—with unfavorable results. The octuplets, however, proved to be masters of surprise. They waited until the last minutes of March the first—and then made their move.

The world had expected a repeat of Arthur's recordless birth, but when the quintuplets showed up just before midnight and brought three extra Whipplés with them, everyone was astounded with joy. At the moment they were born,

THE FANTASTIC FAMILY WHIPPLE

the Whipple octuplets broke two world records: Highest Number of Healthy Babies in a Single Birth, and Highest Number of Coincidental Birth Dates.

The Nakamoto family soon telephoned to concede defeat.

