

The Foundling

By Theodora Horton

"If you darling auntie," exclaimed Stephanie clasping the watch bracelet on her pretty wrist and holding it out to be admired. Then she pushed aside the letters and papers that lay strewn about the breakfast table, and jumping up began hugging the grey haired lady who was presiding over the coffee pot, until they were both breathless.

"It's just what I was longing for," she said as she reseated herself, and taking up a lovely sheaf of roses buried her tip-tilted nose in it, while she looked at her aunt with loving eyes.

"I am so glad you like it, dear," said Miss Trevaine, who was busy settling various hairpins and whisks of hair that had become displaced during her niece's caress. "And the roses, I suppose I may guess who sent them?"

The dark lashes dropped for a moment as Stephanie answered demurely, "Oh, there's no harm in guessing is there?"

"And does Mr. Mainwaring say if he is coming to dinner this evening?" asked her aunt, glancing at the letter Stephanie had picked up.

"Yes, he's coming all right. Heigh ho, I can hardly believe I am really twenty-one, I ought to feel very old."

"I wonder if you can spare me a few minutes in the library after breakfast," said Miss Trevaine. Her voice sounded so grave that Stephanie looked up wonderingly.

"Why yes dear, of course, as long as you like," she answered, "Why I do believe you're going to give me a nice little birthday lecture as you used to do when I was a little girl with a pig-tail."

Miss Trevaine did not answer, but asking Stephanie to ring the bell she went slowly off to the library, and Stephanie joined her there a few minutes later.

"Sit down dear child," said Miss Trevaine, "I have something that I want to tell you."

Stephanie looked grave; something in Miss Trevaine's voice and manner told her that her aunt was troubled over something.

"You have often asked me about your father and mother, Stephanie," said Miss Trevaine.

"And you have never told me anything," rejoined Stephanie in a somewhat aggrieved voice. "Are you going to tell me about them now?"

"No, dear, I have nothing to tell," answered Miss Trevaine, "I never saw your father, and I am not sure that I ever saw your mother."

"Oh, auntie," exclaimed Stephanie, "Never saw my father? Why he was your own brother!"

"You have always thought so, dear, since you were old enough to puzzle your head over your parentage, and I have not contradicted you, but now you are twenty-one I feel that you should know all that I know about you. Dearly as I love you, Stephanie, more perhaps than any niece was ever loved, you are no relation of mine, and if you will listen I will tell you all I know, and all I surmise about you, but I must warn you that the greater part of it is surmise."

Stephanie did not speak, but waited for Miss Trevaine to go on.

"I have often told you that I was left an orphan before I was thirty, but I do not think that I ever told you that I was engaged to be married for nearly three years. My fiancé obtained a good position in India, but as I was only eighteen at the time, and we had not been engaged very long, my parents desired me to wait until I was a little older before we were married. After he had been out nearly three years there was an attack by the Indians on the northern frontier, and Guy volunteered for service. He was killed." Miss Trevaine paused.

"Oh, auntie, dear," cried Stephanie, "how sad for you, you poor, dear auntie."

"During the next five years," Miss Trevaine continued, "I lost both my father and mother, but I was left with a comfortable income, and I kept on the old

house at Downwold as you know till two years ago. Here I lived alone with the old servants who had been with us since my childhood, and it was here that I always believed, though I have no proof of it, that I saw your mother."

"Twenty-two years ago Downwold was a much smaller and quieter place than you remember it. It was just such a day in June as to-day, when I recovered sufficiently from a rather trying illness to stroll outside the garden. You remember the old green door at the end of the garden that opened on the cliff; I went out this way, intending to stroll along the cliff and perhaps go down to the beach, but I found I had overrated my strength, and turning faint, was obliged to rest on a seat just on the outside of the garden wall. A girl, just such as you are to-day Stephanie, though after all these years I cannot say that

den I heard a faint cry. It sounded to me something like a kitten, and I peered about in the half light to discover what it was. A bundle wrapped in a large shawl lay just at the side of the garden walk. Amazed I stopped and picked it up. It was a baby. I hurried into the house; old Margot, you remember her Stephanie, was the only servant I had in the house then, and she was standing in the hall as I came in, waiting to lock up the house. Together we unrolled the wraps and shawls and discovered you, very hungry and puckering up your little face for another wail. We fed you and warmed you, and presently you fell asleep, but there was no sleep for me that night. I searched over your little garments to see if I could find any name on them, and the only thing I discovered was a paper pinned to your shawl, on which was written, 'Stephanie, born July 21, and underneath, 'Out of pity for a heart-broken mother and helpless babe keep her and shield her, and tell no one as you value her happiness and safety.

"I give this to you my darling," she said, "it contains the ring and the message. Now you know all I can tell you and it is for you to judge if you will try to find out your parentage."

"Oh, Auntie, I don't know," said Stephanie, quite bewildered by all that she had heard; "She could not have cared for me to have left me like that."

"We may not judge, dear," returned Miss Trevaine, without knowing all the circumstances. Think well before you decide to rake up the ashes of the past; all I can say is, if you wish to make enquiries I will help you all I can."

That evening Stephanie, looking lovely in her simple white evening gown, sat gazing into the fire, her thoughts full of Miss Trevaine's story.

"Many happy returns of the day, birthday princess!" said Kenneth Mainwaring as he came softly up to her side. "Thank you for the good wishes and for the roses," said Stephanie, smiling up at him, then as he still held the hand she had given him she looked away and blushed.

"Stephanie," said the young man, earnestly, "Stephanie dearest, I have been waiting for to-night, oh, so impatiently, to tell you how I love you, but you have known it haven't you my own, own love?"

Stephanie turned and placed her other hand in his. "Yes, Kenneth, I have known it, I could not help but know it," she answered, but, but . . .

"No, you must not say you do not care for me, tell me dearest, do not keep me in suspense, I have so hoped."

"I do love you, Kenneth," she said simply, "but before I say more I must tell you what Auntie told me this morning, and hear what you have to say."

"As if it would make any difference my own precious," said Kenneth, after the story had been told from beginning to end. "What do I care who your parents are, it is you I want."

But I do not even know my name," said Stephanie rather piteously.

"All the more reason you should have mine," returned Kenneth. "Now just say nothing more about it for I hear Miss Trevaine coming, and I have twenty-one kisses to give you."

It was now five years since the young solicitor Kenneth Mainwaring had come to the little town of Rainham and bought a partnership in the old established firm of Graham and Strong. Old Mr. Strong had died a short while before, and the name of the firm was now changed to Graham and Mainwaring. Kenneth had had rather a dull life in the quiet little town until Miss Trevaine and her niece had come to the Red House two years ago. Mr. Graham was a silent taciturn man, who rarely spoke to his partner except on matters of business. An old housekeeper looked after his house, and he seldom went anywhere outside his office. But with the coming of the Trevaines all was changed for the younger partner of the firm. Miss Trevaine and her niece became very popular, and Kenneth's circle of acquaintance greatly increased after their advent. Almost from the first he had fallen in love with Stephanie, but he was resolved he would say nothing until he was more settled in his new sphere of work. He had taken a great interest in his profession and was now a very prominent member of the firm, and he felt that there was no longer any reason for delay. As he went to his rooms that night he seemed to be walking on air. Stephanie loved him, had promised to marry him, and that at no very distant date, and Miss Trevaine had beamed on the happy pair.

The story he had heard from Stephanie had not troubled him in the least. He agreed with Miss Trevaine that it was wiser not to try and rake up the dead past, it would do no good and might cause Stephanie pain, and Stephanie had allowed herself to be persuaded to let the matter drop.

They were to be married early in the new year, and the days that followed were busy ones for Kenneth. Mr. Graham was taking the first holiday he had allowed himself since his new partner came, and now the doctor had ordered him complete rest, and had told him that he must avoid excitement or violent exercise as his heart was badly

The Prairie Flower



"H prairie flower, in thee I see
Borrowings from immortality—
Thou dost not strive to fill a place
Adorning mankind's troubled race.
Yet here amid the rankled grass
I fain would praise thee as I pass.

Thine is a beauty made to fill
A humble world with a humble will.
Thou dost not know that the world outside
Rolls on in its grasping greedy tide—
Men come and go, or they rise or fall;
But thou knowest not: God is thine all.

Thou carest not for their paltry dress,
For the sheen that oft hides wickedness,
Nor dost thou think of the human tide
Forgetting their God in the world so wide.
'Tis enough for thee that thy God above
To thee is clothing, meat and love.

Thou'rt happy, oh flower, to be so free.
I would that the tribes of men could see
That all their strivings for happiness
Oft leads to where there is most distress,
While out with God on the prairie here
Thy life is sweet and thy God is near.

Thy peace, sweet flower, I envy so,
For I know that my life must onward go,
With its trials, its cares, its fields of pain
And I may not pass this way again;
Yet there is much of joy to be possessed
If I come to Nature and ask for rest.

Thy world is full as well as mine;
The bees buzz round and the black ants climb,
While beside thee rises the roses red
'Neath the fleecy clouds in their balmy bed,
The wailing note of the coyotes howl,
While the evening breeze brings the waterfowl.

—Geo. H. Hambley.

I recollect any likeness to you, was seated there reading a letter. She saw that I was not, well and asked if she could do anything for me, but by this time I had recovered. In her haste to lend me a helping hand an envelope slipped from her knee, and from it fell the photo of a young man. She blushed and smiled as she picked it up, and I glanced at the ring on her finger. She was staying at Downwold for a short time, and I saw her twice after. I never knew her name, but she told me as we said good-bye the day she was leaving, that she was to be married the next week, and she showed me her engagement ring, a chased gold band without a stone. I felt strangely interested in her, and I remember I said something of this kind to her, "May you have the happiness of wifehood and motherhood that I have been denied," and she looked at me wistfully and said, "You are what I have always thought my mother must have been like, I cannot remember her."

More than a year went by and one August evening I went out as was my usual custom to walk round the garden and gaze out over the quiet sea. As I neared the gate at the end of the gar-

Tied round your little neck was a chased gold ring. I told no one how you came to me, I called you my orphan niece, and as such you have always been regarded by all who knew me, and that, Stephanie, is all I know and surmise of your parentage."

Stephanie had listened breathlessly; "And you think the girl on the cliff was my mother?" she asked.

"I feel almost sure of it," Miss Trevaine answered, but what terrible trouble had befallen her I cannot imagine. I used to fear that she would come and claim you, but now all these years have gone by I have given up all idea of ever hearing from her."

"And did you never make any enquiries?" asked Stephanie eagerly.

"No, dear, I could not at first bring myself to disregard that appealing message, and afterwards I grew to love you so fondly that I dreaded to think of anyone coming to take away my treasure."

There was a long silence, and then Miss Trevaine rose, and unlocking an old davenport took out a small packet which she handed to Stephanie.