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da with mild curiosity. "And what do you suppose is a reasonable rate?"

"You will see if you finish it," my wife answered shortly.

"Oh, I see—thirty pounds down, and no questions asked. Who isn't to ask questions, Melinda?"

"Do go on!"

"She says that 'she could let the child come at once with the clothes it stands up in.' Do you want an orphan that can stand up, Melinda?"

"No, of course not—that's only a figure of speech."

"I hope it won't be a figure of fun." I murmured. "It is eight months old, with grey eyes and golden hair—ah, carrots, no doubt."

"Nothing of the kind!" said Melinda indignantly. "I think it sounds awfully nice. Carrots, indeed! little darling! I think we might almost decide on this one, John."

"Don't be in a hurry," I said, picking up the letter which smelt of thick twist; "we ought to give the others a chance first. Now, this is written in a bold, manly hand. This person is a grandparent, Melinda. The child isn't exactly an orphan, he says, but its parents have eleven others, so the writer does not think it will be missed. He says it is a fine, healthy child, and he would be sorry to see it go, only it keeps him awake o' nights. He says he would be willing to smuggle it away without its parents' knowledge, and risk their displeasure when they found out, for the small sum of fifty pounds down. This orphan is rather expensive, Melinda, considering that it lives in the Old Kent Road, and keeps its grandfather awake o' nights."

"Read the others. We don't want to adopt a child with eleven brothers and sisters and grandfathers and things."

"I don't think it has eleven grandfathers," said I. "You can read the one that is disinfected with carbolic acid yourself."

Melinda held it up gingerly.

"Dear Madam—"

"I have a nice lot of orphans needing comfortable homes, from the ages of from six to fifteen years. If you wish it, I could bring a couple of them up for you to see. They have all been brought up to a trade, and have had of course a thoroughly sound religious training. They—"

"That will do," I said. "I don't think you are a fit person to continue the training—religious or otherwise—of a child from a model home, Melinda. You had better begin at the very beginning. Give me the one about the child that has been brought up on onions."

"Madam—"

"I take up my pen to say would you please like a lovely little orphan with orburn 'air an' no parents livin' i am that sorry to part with this orphan on account of its father who was obliged to leave England in a hurry a year sin which he 'as not rote to us. i would like—"

"Enough of that—we don't want an orphan with a living father who has left England in a hurry. It might complicate matters if he returned to claim his child—in a hurry. What about the others?"

"The others aren't much good," said Melinda hurriedly. "You won't care about the others. Read the clean one again—the one that doesn't smell of anything in particular."

I picked up the desirable orphan with golden hair.

"It would look lovely dressed all in white China silk," Melinda said dreamily, with a rapt look on her charming, expressive face, "and big muslin hats."

"For heaven's sake!" I said, with some severity, "try to look the thing sensibly in the face, Melinda. You are not a child. The orphan will not be a mere doll, to be dressed and undressed for your amusement, to be taken up and put down as the fancy takes you. It is a great responsibility—a great care—not a thing to be lightly—"

"I know!" Melinda said quickly. "I quite understand all that—only don't be sensible and horrid about it yet. There will be plenty of time for that when it comes."

I groaned. "There will indeed," I said. "Do you want to decide on this one, then—thirty pounds down and no questions asked? I suppose you don't want to close the bargain without seeing it?"

"I thought we might have it down for a day on approval," said Melinda, brightening visibly.

And so it was settled. Two days later a stout, clean-looking person of middle age called upon us at the hotel—a large bundle in a grey plaid shawl, which Melinda seized upon at once, and proceeded to unroll from its numerous and motley coverings, whilst I interviewed the owner. She was a person of many words, but I gathered presently that she wished to leave the baby in a happy home before she went abroad with her husband the following week. She lived in the country, and was no relation to the child, she said, but she was that fond of it! It was a loving little thing, and her heart was near broke to part with it. It was as good as gold, and as quiet as a lamb, as the kind lady could see for herself.

Melinda had just taken off the last fold of red flannel, and she uttered a little cry as the kernel of that thick shell was disclosed to view.

"Oh, the dear!" she said: "it is fast asleep. Speak very quietly, John. It would be such a pity to wake it."

The woman smiled. "Lor' bless ye," he said, "she won't wake for your talkin', not'er! She's used to a deal of noise, is Everline."

She pronounced it as if it rhymed with evergreen, and I saw by Melinda's eye that there would be a speedy rechristening of this particular orphan.

The woman must have seen, too, I think, for she turned to her and said quickly: "Yer can call it annythin' as yer've a mind. It's only been registered, an' that don't signify."

Then she went away, and we were left with the bundle and a bottle. Melinda rang the bell and ordered quantities of milk and somebody's food; but she needn't have troubled. The desirable orphan lay on the pink cushions all day, and slept. It was certainly as pretty as a picture, and its head was covered with nice little tight curls

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