

little rest we had lost, and to quiet our shattered nerves. By the time we came back to the cottage we both felt decidedly better, even moderately cheerful; and Melinda said, as we went up our tiny garden path, that she was quite longing to see the dear again. I didn't for a moment pretend that I was. Personally I wished the dear at the other end of the world, but Melinda always has her own way, and she generally repents it.

Mrs. Priddam met us at the door. "If you please, ma'am," she said, in a tone of disapproval which was severe even from her, "your brother's come, and he's been waiting in the drawing-room a good hour."

Melinda's face grew white—she looked at me appealingly. Her only brother died in Australia two years ago under very sad circumstances, and I could see that this sudden news quite upset her.

"You are making some mistake," I said sternly. "Your mistress has no brother living."

"He said he was the baby's Uncle George," replied Mrs. Priddam, with an injured sniff. "And he's sitting there now, nussing it, and calling it his precious Everleen."

I groaned. Melinda gasped; and well she might, alas! In the drawing-room we found a stout and elderly stranger of sandy hue, who greeted me effusively. I waved him off.

"I understood that this child had no relations living," I said sternly.

"There's only me," said Uncle George, "an I brought 'er up from a week old. I've come to 'ave a last look at 'er. Sit up, Everleen, and talk pretty to yer Uncle George."

"You brought it up?" I cried. "You?"

"I brought her up," repeated Uncle George. "Me, an' no one else. The times I've sat up o' nights by the kitchen fire with Everleen in one 'and and a bottle in the other—Lord, it makes me that sad only to think of it!"

I thought of the last three nights, and I didn't wonder that the memory made him sad; then I remembered suddenly the woman to whom I had paid ten pounds.

"Then the woman who sold me the— the serial rights of this particular orphan was telling lies when she said that she alone stood between the child and starvation?"

"She was," said Uncle George heavily. "She was always a champion liar, was Maria."

"Oh!" I said slowly. "Then I suppose you have come here because you want the baby back again?"

Uncle George looked alarmed. "Not by no means," he answered hastily. "I wouldn't take her from her present 'appy 'ome for anything; though"—with an afterthought—"it fair 'urts to part from 'er."

"Then what have you come for?"

Uncle George hesitated, and cleared his voice. "I just thought—I don't like asking, but I 'oped as you might perhaps spare me a trifle on account of the trouble and expense she's been."

I had expected this. "I will give you a sovereign," I said, "to clear out of this for once and for all. You need not come again. See?"

"Ye-es," Uncle George saw.

"Then get out."

Uncle George got out.

"He will come again," I said despondently, directly the door was shut; "I know he will come again."

"He won't find us here if he does," replied Melinda wisely. "He would hardly follow us to Canada, I should think."

I can't help thinking that Mrs. Priddam mapped out that child's hours rather thoughtlessly. She assured me that it had been as good as gold that day, and slept as peaceful as a lamb; but when I pointed out to her that the day was the time for wakefulness and conversation, and the night for sleep, she was quite hurt. The next morning I was in a frame of mind only to be described as murderous; and when Melinda tried to pacify me by assuring me that the orphan was going to be a comfort to us in our old age, I went out to the cottage and slammed the door.

At five o'clock in the afternoon we had a second pleasant surprise. The

neat little maid we had taken with the cottage opened the door gently, and announced timidly that "the baby's aunt had called to see Everleen."

I was not at all surprised; but my spirits, from some unknown reason, rose again. The lady was portly and red-faced. She had come to see the precious baby, for the last time, that she had brought up from a fortnight old, and to say goodbye. And she, like Uncle George, requested a small loan in consideration of the care and anxiety she had expended on the friendless orphan.

I didn't give her anything, but, as Melinda wasn't in the room, I told her she could take the orphan home with her if she liked. To my disgust she declined this offer with much haste; and although I was not much surprised, knowing as I did her niece's character, I explained with a few forcible and well-chosen words that if she didn't go at once she should have her precious Everleen sent back to-morrow to her own house for once and all. This threat was quite successful. She went.

An hour later, when we were having tea under the trees in the cottage garden, I told Melinda this, and her charming face grew quite grave.

"I think," she said seriously, "that we had better go back to Canada at once. We mustn't stay here till the end of the month. We might—why, we might even lose the baby again."

"I don't think you need be afraid of that," I said gloomily. "Nobody seems at all anxious to deprive us of the orphan. But the constant visits of

doors. I wish to speak to this person alone."

"I think I would rather stay here," she murmured rebelliously; but she knew by my tone that I meant what I said, and picked up the orphan at once to carry it indoors, once more in screams.

"And now," I said, "who are you, and what do you want?"

"Everleen—" he began.

"Are you Uncle Joseph, or Uncle Henry, or Uncle Abraham?" I asked. "You needn't trouble to explain that you've brought it up yourself since it was a week old, because I know that already, and I believe every word you say. What do you want?"

The man stared in mild and vacant wonder till I had finished my outburst. I think he thought I was mad.

"What relation are you to this orphan?" I repeated impatiently.

"I'm her father," he said slowly.

"Everleen's the youngest of seven."

I must confess I hadn't expected this. An uncle or aunt, perhaps—or even cousin, or a grandparent; but a real live father!

"Then she isn't an orphan at all?" I said blankly.

"No!" said the man, heavily. "If Maria told you that our Everleen was an orphan, she's a blasted liar."

"She is indeed," I murmured.

"She sailed for America yesterday," he went on, "and she's taken everything with her she can lay her hands on."

"Except Everleen," I amended.

"She wrote an' told us what she 'ad done," he went on, "an' left the letters to be posted when she sailed. We knew nothing till then—we thought she wanted the baby to stay with 'er a bit for company like."

"Then of course you have come to take your daughter home again?"

Everleen's father shifted uneasily from one foot to another. "I'm a poor man," he said slowly; "I'm only earning eighteen shillings, an' there's six besides 'er. I can see as how the child's happy an' well looked after—"

"You are quite mistaken," I interrupted quickly; "it is far from happy—its always in tears."

"I daren't tell the missus that the child's been adopted," he pursued, disregarding my words.

"Oh! then your wife is alive?"

"She's never bin dead," said Everleen's father quickly. "But she thinks Maria took the child to America. I've not told 'er nothing. I've let 'er think it."

"It seems rather cruel," I said thoughtfully, "if she is fond of the baby."

"She'll get over it," he said uneasily. "Poor folks learns to get over things a deal quicker than you'd think."

"Then you wish me to keep the baby?"

"Yes,"—after a moment's silence.

"Do you want to see her again?"

"I'd better not. If she begins laughing an' calling me her Dad-dad, I shall want her back. I'd a deal better go without."

He went, and as he walked clumsily and heavily down the path, I asked myself what would be the next incident in this chapter of the desirable orphan's history.

That evening my wife undressed and put the baby to bed herself, and no doubt it was in consequence of that that its howls were all night louder and more determined than ever. In the morning even Melinda acknowledged that our adopted daughter, regarded merely as a comfort, was not entirely a success.

"We are too old and selfish to begin all this over again," I said gravely; and although Melinda replied, with some heat, that she didn't see where the age and selfishness came in, she allowed that in the main I might possibly be right.

"Let's go back to Liverpool to-morrow," she said, "and sail on Tuesday. Perhaps the sea will have a soothing effect."

Alas for our plans of escape without further hindrance! At twelve o'clock another visitor arrived—a distracted visitor with red eyes and untidy hair; and when Melinda saw her face she knew that this time the game was really up. This last visitor didn't knock at

the door—she walked straight through the hall into the dining-room, and caught up the orphan from the hearth-rug with a strange little cry. With podgy outstretched arms and an idiotic gurgle that infant instantly responded, and the next moment it was pressed to the visitor's shabby grey shawl.

"Mother's own pretty Everleen!" said a muffled voice from the depths of the snowy silken bundle—"mother's own darlin' little lamb!"

We watched her in silence; a little ray of sunshine gradually entered and filled my heavy heart. She took no more notice of us than if we had been the copper coal-scuttle and the fire-irons, or the two easy-chairs; but I didn't mind at all—neither, I think, did Melinda; and the baby crowed and chuckled and gurgled to its heart's content. Melinda told me afterwards that her heart went out to the woman on the spot.

"If I could just get hold of that Maria," she said at last, "I'd teach 'er! She's taken fourteen-and-ninencepence from the teapot, as I was savin' up for a wringin' machine, an' she's gone off with my Sunday bonnet, an' the clock as I've had since I was married. An' as if that wasn't enough she ups and sells Everleen—sells 'er for thirty pound."

"I only gave her ten," I said humbly and apologetically. "And it wasn't my fault. She said the child had no parents."

The orphan's mother stared. "No parents? Then where did she say me an' Jim had got to?"

"She said she hoped you were both in heaven," Melinda replied, softly and wickedly. "I am sorry for Maria if she ever returns from America."

"But she wasn't quite sure about you," I added. "She never did think much of Elizabeth," she said.

Our visitor murmured something under her breath, and I felt for her.

"Do you really want to take the baby away from us?" Melinda asked, sadly. "Wouldn't you like her to be brought up a little lady?"

Elizabeth shook her head. "I can't get on without a baby about the 'ouse," she said slowly. "I'm that lost without Everleen!"

Melinda sighed—I don't know how she could. I wanted to burst into song myself.

"Look at all her pretty clothes," she murmured. But the orphan's mother cast an eye which was merely contemptuous over the spotless white of her child's garments.

"I don't think much o' them things," she said. "The child 'ull make 'em as black as your 'at in an hour. She looks a deal nicer in her turkey red frock with a clean check pinny."

"We shall miss her very much," Melinda continued; and I could have danced round that tiny room for pure joy, when I remembered the only way in which that departing lamb would be missed. At last I couldn't bear it any longer, and went out into the kitchen to relieve my feelings by giving Mrs. Priddam a month's wages and telling her she might go at once, as we should not require her services any more.

"Melinda," I said an hour later, as we packed our boxes together with light and happy hearts, "do you really mind very much?"

"Yes!" said Melinda quickly, "of course I do."

"Are you dreadfully disappointed?"

"Frightfully," said Melinda. "It has upset me very much."

"Then shall we advertise again—for another orphan?"

"Not for anything!" said Melinda quickly.

And we didn't.

Rye came, originally, from Siberia.

Oats originated in Northern Africa.

Parsley was first known in Sardinia.

All our yesterdays were once to-morrows.

The mark of a royal man is that he rules himself.

It is a waste of money trying to feed people on bread labels.



MISSSES RUBY AND BONNIE SANDISON,  
DAUGHTERS OF MR. AND MRS. SANDISON  
IN THE CARMAN DISTRICT.

Everleen's relations are beginning to pall on me a little."

"They are a nuisance," Melinda agreed, suddenly going down on her knees on the grass, with the agility of a girl of sixteen and a wild disregard of possible rheumatism. "Was the dear, sweet, precious little thing trying to put its boo'ful little tootsie into its boo'ful little rosebud of a mouth?" she asked.

The orphan, for once both amiable and wakeful, was wallowing in a sea of muslin frocks and petticoats and things, on a red rug spread carefully over the grass by Melinda's devoted hands; and the sun came through the trees in a streak of light to the baby's tight yellow curls. I acknowledged to myself that, as it lay there, unattached for the moment, and smiling, it didn't look half bad. It was even beginning to know us and to treat us as well-meaning friends, and for the moment it crowed and chuckled and gurgled and bubbled and made unintelligible remarks in the most condescending and (to Melinda) fascinating way.

"I shouldn't ha' know'd the child—I'm danged if I should," said a voice at my shoulder; and I turned with a start to find a middle-aged and respectable-looking working man standing by my side.

I groaned. This was too much. I thought. Two relatives in one day!

"Melinda!" I said, "take the child in—"