Romance in Lives of Adopted Children

Queer Turns of Fortune in the Histories of Waifs Who Have Been Committed to Institutions

ROMANCE has many places of keep in or permanent habitation, but none where more fantastic tricks are played than in orphan asylums and institutions for the foster and care of children in general.

The eighteenth annual report of the American Female Guardian Society and Home for the Friendless, recently issued, is an ordinary looking little pamphlet telling of the work of the organization for a year past. It contains the usual figures to show the number of inmates in the home at Woodycrest avenue in The Bronx, the funds disbursed and on hand, the list of the officers and the patrons and patronesses, all in fact that goes along with a proper and comprehensive report. But no report is ever issued telling of the partings, the separations, the adoptions and the desertions that have come to the inmates of the home. It would do no good and serve no end to tell of the heartache and the sorrow and long mourning. It would not be fair to the many children happily adopted to make public the unhappy incident leading to their enrolment among the scores of other little waifs at the home.

For eighty years the society has received, sheltered, fed, clothed, educated and placed in respectable homes hundreds of children. They have been cared for, when first received by the home, in a manner superior in every way to that in which they were treated theretofore. Ragged, dirty and ill very often, they have been nourished and clothed until hardy and strong. Then they have been adopted or indentured.

It is in these adoptions that romance takes a frequent part. When an unnatural mother or a drunken father neglects or deserts a child its commitment to the home seems a very prosaic and routine sort of thing. It is a pitiful sight to see a suffering child, but the home has seen and helped so many hundreds of them that one more taken in and sheltered is nothing out of the ordinary. So the child becomes part of the institution's life, and that's all there is to it—until adoption time arrives.

Take a case at random. A comparatively young widow was left with five children, ranging from one little more than a baby up to a child 8 years of age. These children were placed in the home by their mother, and for a time she did what she could to help toward their support, but did not surrender them.

She became acquainted with a Chicago physician of moderate practice and they were married and went to Chicago. After this the mother did nothing for the children. Gossip had it that she had not dared to tell her new husband that she had the five children. The home had to plan for their future.

Once or twice letters were received at the home from the mother begging for information about the children. She entreated secrecy and gave the address of a post office box she had hired in another name. But the home managers refused to give out any information or to enter into any negotiations that could not be conducted openly. So the five children lived along until they were all adopted.

Romance took tight hold in another case that became part of the home record. A boy of 5 and his sister of 7 were taken from a drunken father and mother and placed in the home. Now and then the parents would straighten up for a spell and demand their children back. Finally the city authorities committed the children permanently.

The parents died. The girl was indentured to a fairly well to do family who did their best to bring her up properly. She developed into a forward, aggressive sort of girl, always seeking trouble. Although she had received a good grammar school education she did not seem to wish to profit by it and finally entered the service of a wealthy family as a domestic. In that place she seemed to be as contented as possible for her.

She had often visited the home and talked with her brother before she left her foster parents. On going to the home one day she found that her brother had been adopted. She asked where he was, but the management, having had reports of her disposition, thought it best to withhold the information until they consulted with her foster parents.

The girl flew into a passion and used such language that she had to be ordered from the home. She brooded over the refusal for a long time. When she finally went to service with the wealthy family she was not long in interesting her employer with her story. He was a big hearted, philanthropic man and became her champion. The matter was taken into court to compel the home to reveal the whereabouts of the girl's brother. But the courts sustained the refusal of the managers.

In the meantime the other end of the romance was knitting. The boy had been adopted by a man who was a teller in a bank. He was a handsome child and his foster mother idolized him. As the years flew by his foster father became cashier and then president of the bank. When he died he left his entire possessions equally divided between the boy and his widow. The boy, now wealthy, entered the banking business and became a leading figure in the middle Western city where he had been raised.

During all these years he had thought now and then of his sister. One day, while the suit his sister finally brought was threatening, his foster mother received a letter from the home setting forth the facts and asking for advice as to what she thought it best to do. The foster mother thought deeply over the matter and finally concluded to tell her adopted son. This she did, reading him an extract from the letter, which, summed up, set forth the situation practically like this:

"Your foster son's sister is employed as a domestic in this city. She has had opportunity for occupation in more exalted callings, but seems to prefer the one she is at. She is persistent in trying to discover her brother's whereabouts, and we are sorry to say we do not think affection prompts her. If you reveal where you are we feel sure she will burden you with demands and bother you about trifles. She is in a different niche of life. We should advise that you think seriously about what will happen after she gains the information she desires and the first meeting is over with. Think it over well and let us know. We shall defend the suit if you do not care to reveal your whereabouts."

The widow and her foster son talked the matter over at great length and for several days. Finally the young man concluded that it would be best not to reveal his foster parents' name and his whereabouts. So the girl had the suit brought and it was lost.

The home has also witnessed the very happy marriage of one of its little girls to the wealthy nephew of her foster father. She came blushing and happy with her husband to revisit the home in which she had dwelt six years, and before her departure the society received a substantial check for the carrying on of its philanthropic work.

There are tears shed a-plenty in many cases of adoption. All children placed with responsible persons for adoption are not permanently indentured until after a trial period. Childless men and women often come to the home to obtain children. They all desire good looking, strong children. They have to prove their responsibility of course, and then may take their pick. After the trial period has expired it is for them to say whether they will keep the child for good.

One day there came to the home a man and his wife seeking a child for adoption. They were greatly taken with a little, pouting lipped, brown curled boy, who looked at them solemnly from big blue eyes, heavy lashed. The couple were investigated and found all right and the boy turned over to them. They had him several weeks and one day the woman brought him back. She explained that after thinking the matter over her husband and she had concluded that it was too much of a task to bring up a child and that they had overestimated their willingness and ability to care for a child when they had sought one for adoption.

The little shaver began to pine right away. He had no appetite, weakened and finally had to be put to bed. No particular organic trouble developed, only a wasting and pining away. The woman who had returned him began to annoy the management with telephone calls several times a day, asking how the little fellow was doing. When she didn't get satisfactory answers she wrote. At last she learned that the boy had been taken down the day she had brought him back and had been growing weaker. Within an hour she was at the home with her husband.

"Give him to me," she cried, running to the little crib, sobbing her longing as she lifted the little form to her breast. "Give him back to me, this time never to return. I didn't know how much I loved him and my husband didn't know how much he'd miss him. Don't put anything in the way of my taking him right back with me. I've got to have him with me to-night. I want him close to me to-night."

So the boy, tightly hugging the foster mother, from whom he was never to part again until her death, was dressed and carried out to the waiting taxi. The couple never wavered again in their devotion and the boy received a university training.

The twin sons of a reckless father and careless mother were committed to the home some years ago. The parents braced up once after the commitment and at their earnest pleading they were permitted to take them out of the institution. They soon lapsed into their old habits and it was not long before the children were brought to the home again. The father died shortly afterward and the mother got a place as companion to a wealthy woman. She was not exact enough in the performance of the details connected with her duties and later became a maid in the family.

The twins were eventually adopted, one being taken by a merchant of Cincinnati. He was 8 years old at the time and pined for his twin brother. His foster parents hoped to divert his mind with childish pleasures, but often at bed time he would burst into tears. He explained in answer to their questioning that he and his twin used to sleep near each other and had said their prayers at night together. The couple who had adopted him were greatly troubled over his childish sorrow. They took the matter up with their clergyman and prayed over it. At last they decided that great as the sacrifice seemed to be it was their duty to keep the twins together.

So the foster father went on to the home to get the other twin. He had already been placed with a worthy family. To this family the Cincinnati man wrote a letter, leaving it with the management of the home to forward. The letter was such an eloquent plea that the twins be no longer separated that the family to whom it was addressed relinquished their right to the other boy. The two little fellows were brought together and it was a touching sight to see the affectionate foster parents, each with a twin linked in arm, revisit the home whenever they came East.

Probably romance worked overtime in arranging the case of the school teacher who having made a secret marriage—secret because she wished to retain her position—found herself a widow with a year-old baby only two years after she had become a wife. She had obtained six months leave of absence at the time covering the baby's birth but had never regained her health. Her husband died and she was left dependent upon the bounty of strangers. They tired of the expense of caring for an invalid at last, and she and her baby were sent to a hospital. There it was pointed out to her that because of her ill health she was a detriment to the baby. She consented to have the child placed in the home. It began to thrive at once.

In the meantime it had been revealed to the school authorities that she had obtained a leave under false pretences. This barred her from seeking reinstatement when her health was reasonably restored. Satisfied that her baby was in good hands, she went to a Western city, where she learned of a remunerative place to be had in a woman's technical school. She had no sooner entered upon her duties than she was stricken with typhoid. The very first day of her convalescence a telegram was handed her reading: "Your baby died to-night at 6 o'clock." The shock was too much for her weak condition and she became unbalanced. She was sent to the city sanitarium, and for three years was considered hopelessly deranged. Then she began to improve and after another year was pronounced cured.

Meanwhile her boy was alive and growing big and strong. The telegram she had received had been for another woman in the hospital of a similar name, and of course was not from the home at all. Word sent from the home for information concerning the mother brought the reply that she was permanently out of her mind. So when the mother, after four years, had recovered her reason, the little chap had already been adopted a year and was healthy and happy.

His mother believed him long dead and was too crushed and reduced in circumstances to make inquiry as to the disposition of the body. Twenty-two years later she was the principal of one of the schools of the city. The newly elected school board of the city paid a visit to the school one day. One of the commissioners was a young lawyer who had already won an enviable reputation at the bar. When she was presented to him that subtle something of the heart and in the mother breast made her gaze at him as though she could never take her eyes away. The young man was also strangely attracted, although he shook off the feeling as he would any other unexplainable emotion.

But the school principal made inquiries. She wrote to the home and learned, after all the years, the truth about her child. In consideration of the circumstances she was informed of the name of the child's adopters and verified her mother conviction that the young school commissioner was her son.

Then it was, after a struggle in silence, that she decided on a course for the benefit of her boy. His foster father was a man of great influence politically and socially. The mother feared that if she disclosed her identity it would hurt her son's career. So when vacation time came that summer she went to a distant resort and from there sent her son's foster father a letter that was a masterpiece of melting logic.

She told the entire story and then left it to him whether she should resign her position and never return to the city, or whether she should meet her son, now and then, in a way to do him no harm socially or professionally. The answer came in a totally unexpected way: the next train brought the foster father and the widow's son.

Since its first child was received eighty years ago the Home for the Friendless has sheltered and cared for 36,416 boys and girls, helpless and destitute. It is a rule in connection with the indenturing of the children that those who adopt them must pay the home $10 annually. This sum is placed to the credit of the adopted child to be given to him upon his coming of age.

WHERE THE GERMS LURK.

AN automobile stopped near the Fifty-ninth street and Eighth avenue entrance to Central Park the other day and a woman alighted. There is a drinking pump, or fountain, or trough—according as you view it—at that point and the woman happened to be thirsty.

She stepped toward the pump—or what you will—and prepared to quench her thirst. She was nicely dressed. So she approached the pump in a puzzled way.

It was splashing water over the side of its two iron bowls. The splash reached out at least a foot. There was a great wet spot at the bottom of the pump stand. But this could be overcome in a great measure by a judicious treading. The woman got to the bowl. Now to drink.

There were two pipes reaching up out of the bowl and from these water was spouting to the height of about an inch. The water was there all right. The trick to get to it.

The bowl and the water streams were about at the height of the lady's chest, possibly a little lower. She looked around and about and across and under for a solution of the drinking problem. How should she manage to get that water from where it gushed out up into her mouth, where it belonged and where it was needed?

Not a thing was in sight to drink from. The chauffeur sympathetically got out of the machine and started a hunt for a cup. But there was not even a tomato can or a cocoanut shell. And the lady was very thirsty or she would not have stopped the automobile in the public park to get a drink at a public pump instead of speeding home for it.

It was exasperating. The thirsty lady frowned. Just then a policeman came near, treading his measured way and wondering how 6 o'clock would look.

"Officer, will you kindly tell me how to get a drink of water from this—this—pump?" asked the lady.

Certainly, m'am, you just lean over, put your mouth close to the pipe and take a drink. I need one myself. It's just like this." And the policeman leaned over the pump, his head on a level with his belt line, and lapped—that's what you'd have to call it—lapped his drink.

"Were you able to swallow that water, officer?" the lady asked. "Were you able to get it down?"

"Sure, I got it down," said the policeman pityingly; "sure I got it down."

"But you drank it just as a dog drinks. It's really a dog's way of drinking, don't you think?"

The policeman was a trifle carmine in complexion as he answered stiffly: "There's no cups around here, m'am. They're unhealthy. There's germs in 'em."

"Oh, I see," answered the lady, "but I don't comprehend how you are able to do it. It's so like an animal accomplishment." The policeman stared after the automobile as long as he could keep it in sight.

NOTE BOTH A $20 AND A $10.

Freak Bill Has a Mate in Circulation Somewhere.

Chicago, Sept. 26.—At the First National Bank of Milwaukee a man to whom $300 had been counted out protested that the roll contained only $290. After several recounts the cause of the disagreement was discovered.

In the pack was a note which was of the value of $20 on one side and only $10 on the other. The freak bill reached Chicago to-day in the possession of Theophile E. Leon of Normal Park, secretary of the American Numismatic Society. The face of the $20 note was shown and the reverse side of the $10 note. The $20 was the issue of 1907, and was from the National City Bank of Chicago, bearing the signatures of President David R. Forgan and Cashier W. G. McLaury.

"The bill, although of the issue of 1907, has come out in the last six weeks and is Aldrich-Vreeland currency law money," said Mr. McLaury. "It was printed in that way as the result of carelessness of the printers. The notes are run off on plates with a $20 at the top and three $10 bills underneath. In place of turning the plate directly over so that the reverse side of the $20 would meet the face side of it the plate was carelessly upended, with the result that the reverse side of a $10 bill met the $20. This would indicate that there is another bill in circulation with a $10 face and a $20 reverse side."

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