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O. D. Jenkins
PHONE 1100

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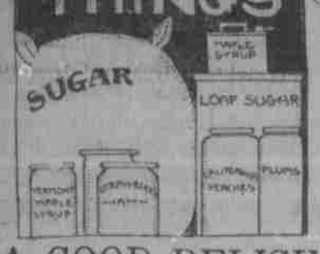

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THE VAL DONA STORE

ADOPTION OF PHEMIE

Good Resolution of Miss Celia Bennett.

By ELLA RANDALL PEARCE.

Miss Celia Bennett looked thoughtfully after the receding form of her late caller; then a faint smile crept over her face and she nodded her head slowly.

"P'raps you're right, Phebe Taggart," she reflected. "P'raps I am a selfish old woman, living here alone in this big, comfortable cottage, just a-hoarding my money when I might be doing good for some one. P'raps its my duty to adopt somebody—I don't know."

She sat down in a little low rocker and meditatively eyed the big gray cat that approached her in dignified fashion.

"What d'you say, Pickwick? Are we selfish—living alone together, you and I? You know it ain't just what Phebe Taggart says; but I've an inkling myself that this life is kinder aimless—and lonesome. There!"

Miss Bennett mused a while in silence.

"It's too big a responsibility, bringing up children when you don't know how. Now, grown-up boys and girls—they'd just be running away and getting married and leaving me in a little while; and old folks'd be getting sick and leaving me, too, p'raps. . . I wish Oliver'd come back! Well, if I'm to adopt somebody, there's—or, there's Phemie—Phemie Havens!"

A soft flush mounted to her cheeks and her mild blue eyes sparkled.

"I'll adopt Phemie—she's past the marrying age, and she's right companionable, Phemie is. I'll go right over and see her while the spell's on."

Phemie Havens looked up in startled surprise when her visitor made known her errand.

"Adopt me!" she faltered. "Why Miss Bennett, I've no claim on you at all. Why should you think of such a thing?"

"Because I want to do something for somebody; and you're a good girl, Phemie. You haven't any near of kin, and you're working your eyes out and your back crooked over those little embroidered things that barely keep your soul and body together. You'll have a good home with me and I'll give you an allowance. Of course, my property goes to Oliver—you understand that—but I've got enough and to

Her Worst Fears Were Realized.

spare. nd I—I need you, Phemie. I'm awful lonesome."

Phemie's face had been settling into an expression of stern renunciation, but now it softened and dimpled into a wistful smile.

"Are you sure you need me—that I can be of real service to you?"

"Yes, I settled on you because I've know you so long and you've got such an even disposition. I wonder some good man didn't show his appreciation long ago; but I guess there's no beaux around now to bother Pickwick and me, eh, Phemie?"

A slight embarrassed flush warmed Phemie's pale cheeks, but she shook her head carelessly. Miss Bennett never guessed what dreams had bloomed and faded within that quiet breast.

"Now," said the elder woman, briskly, "I'll drive over for you and your belongings Saturday. I've been wishing Oliver'd come back, but I don't suppose he ever will. He's a rover, just like his great-uncle Jason. Good boy, though; writes me and sends things from all the places he goes to. You didn't live here in Oliver's time, did you? Must be nearly of an age. Well, he's all I've got and I suppose he'll marry and settle down in some heathenish, far-away country. Now, remember, Phemie—Saturday, in time for tea."

Saturday afternoon found Miss Euphemia Havens in a state of unusual agitation. It seemed to her that she was taking a very important step, and she had dire misgivings; but, partly to conceal her dubious concern and partly in honor of the occasion—for it had been some time since she had even been invited out to tea—Phemie had put on her best gown of blue batiste and decorated her gray turban with a new pink rose. A white collar at her throat crossed with a little lace jabot, Miss Bennett had never seen her looking more animated and attractive.

As the two women descended from the carriage and walked up the gravelled path to the cottage, Pickwick came slowly to meet them; then, some one arose from the low rocker and stood on the top step leaning out between the honeysuckle vines—a broad masculine figure with a big Panama hat swinging in one hand and a genial smile of greeting on his bronze face.

"Hello, Aunt Celia!" boomed out a hearty voice. "Don't you know me?"

"Why—oo, it's Oliver! Oh, Phemie, it's my nephew. This is Miss Havens, Oliver. She—I've—"

"I've come to stay awhile with Miss Bennett," interposed Phemie, quietly, her cheeks deep-flushed and her eyes downcast.

"And I've come to stay for good," said Oliver Bennett, decisively. "Yes sir-ee! Going to quit my roving and settle down now. Aunt Celia, ain't you glad?"

Phemie sat alone in her room a few minutes later. Her worst fears were realized; she had indeed made a great mistake. Not only was she not needed now in Miss Bennett's home, but her presence would be undesirable. And, when the elder woman had told her story, what would this stranger think of her acceptance of his aunt's bounty? How might he misconstrue her motives? Well, she would have to stay awhile and see what happened.

What happened was that Oliver Bennett took complete possession of the little cottage and its gentle occupants. Never before had their lives been so full, so gay, so interesting. When they were not "faring forth on pleasure bent," he was telling them vivid tales of the strange places and people he had seen and the wonders of his travels.

Phemie thought it was the excitement of these stories of adventure that made her heart beat faster when in the presence of this fascinating newcomer. At no time, however, could she overcome the feeling she had that he secretly resented her coming to the house.

Sometimes she caught him looking at her in a way she could not understand. He seemed to be probing beneath the surface of her social manners and questioning her inner self. At such times she felt almost guilty.

The climax came on Saturday evening, just three weeks after Phemie's arrival. She was coming in through the rear doorway when a bass voice drifted down the hall from the piazza where Miss Bennett and her nephew were sitting.

"But, Aunt Celia, this talk of adoption is nonsense. You don't want her to stay here with you after all I've said! I'll speak to her tonight, myself."

Poor Phemie grasped the railing with trembling fingers and the hot tears gushed to her eyes. The blow had fallen—this was the end! Oliver Bennett himself had pronounced her sentence. Well, she would not wait for him to speak to her. She would escape such humiliation.

Quickly her small trunk was packed and preparations made for a hasty departure. She wrote a brief note to Miss Bennett, and, fastening on her gray turban and cape, stole down the rear stairway again, out into the shadows of the summer night.

Tears blinded her so she could not see the obstacle in the path against which her flying feet carried her. A pair of stalwart arms caught her as she staggered from the impact.

"Ginger! Running me down, eh?" cried a masculine voice. "What's your hurry? Why, Miss Havens, what's the matter? Wait, wait, little woman, you can't run away from me like this. There's something in the wind, and I'm going to know about it."

"You can't," sobbed Phemie, wildly struggling to escape. "Let me go—I'm going away. I knew I'd be misunderstood! You—you don't have to advise her not to adopt me. Oh, please, please let me go!"

Oliver Bennett's wits were working quickly. He drew the trembling figure he held to a nearby seat and spoke soothingly, but firmly.

"Miss Havens—Phemie Havens—listen to me. You didn't hear all I said. I told my aunt she shouldn't keep you here because I—I wanted to adopt you myself! There, the cat's out of the bag. You're the finest little woman I've ever seen, to my notion, and I'm going to marry you if you'll have me. I was waiting for a chance to tell you, but, of course, if you want to run away—if you want to go—now—Phemie, you go right along and I'll live here with Aunt Celia and Pickwick."

He opened his arms wide, and Phemie—well, after an instant of dazed silence, Phemie just gave a happy, fluttering, long-drawn sigh and settled back without a thought of the new pink rose on her turban.

"I—I guess I'll stay—Oliver!"

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The Night of Gasoline.

"Ask me to go to the theater any night in the week except gasoline night and I'll go," said the man.

"What night is that?" the woman asked.

"Saturday. Women get their gloves home from the cleaners on Saturday or else clean them themselves the last of the week, and the gasoline fumes haven't had time to evaporate. Half the women you meet in a crowd on Saturday night carry a gasoline odor about on their gloves. In a hot, stuffy place, that is pretty bad. On Monday night gasoline still perfumes the air, but it is getting faint and I can stand it, but not on Saturday."

Hated to Encourage It.

"Can you direct me to the nearest hotel?" asked the stranger.

"Yes," replied the old inhabitant, "I can, but I hate to do it."

"Why so?"

"It's one of those new-fangled places where you've got to take a bath along with your room, even if you only expect to stay three or four days."

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Queen's Apt Rebuke.

Queen Victoria, who hated unpunctuality, once administered an apt rebuke to a certain mistress of the robes:

A day and an hour had been appointed for a certain public ceremony in which the queen had to take part. The hour had arrived, and of all the court the duchess alone was absent, and her absence retarded the departure. The queen gave vent more than once to her impatience, and at length, just as she was about to enter her carriage without her first lady of honor, the duchess, in breathless haste, made her appearance, stammering some faint words of excuse. "My dear duchess," said the queen smiling, "I think you must have a bad watch." And as she spoke she unloosed from her neck the chain of a magnificent watch which she herself wore, and passed it round the neck of the offender.

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