

The decision



BY AMOS ARTHUR HOLMES

Almost twenty years ago I made a decision. That decision was probably correct and proper...but it created within me a sadness that shall never entirely disappear.

I was married, had two children, and was just beginning to feel a compulsion to write. There was a small orphanage near my home and I decided to do an article about orphanages and adoption.

Dr. Edith Manners was in charge of the orphanage and she was pleasant and helpful when I told her about my desire. She showed me through the building, the clinic, the nursery...and told me that the babies and children had a very short stay at the home before they were adopted out.

"Do all the children have such a short stay?" I asked.

"Yes" replied Dr. Manners, "The babies generally are adopted out within a few months. Of course we have some very sad cases where no one wants the child. Do you see that little girl sitting on the bench over there?"

I looked across the hall and saw this little sweet-faced kid of about six or seven. She had long, blond hair and blue eyes and I was struck immediately with how very pretty she was.

"Her name is Martha" continued Dr. Manners, "and she has been in this orphanage since she was eight months old. Her parents were killed in an automobile accident...and this child's chances of being adopted are minimal at best."

"But she's beautiful" I cried.

"Yes" replied the doctor, "She is beautiful. But she was born with a defect. Her left hand is deformed and the people coming here to adopt children seek only the physically perfect."

I continued my tour of the orphanage. Dr. Manners had left me and I wandered through the building alone. I would make notes and ask questions of the nurses, but my mind seemed to be constantly on that little girl with the deformed hand.

Finally I went back into the great hall and approached the bench where the little girl was sitting.

"Hello Martha...would you like a handsome man to sit with you?"

"You're not handsome," she smiled.

"Hey!" I pretended anger, "I'll punch you right in your big, fat nose."

She giggled. I sat down beside her and I noticed her hand. It was deformed.

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med. Hideously deformed.

"Do you like it here?" I asked.

She sat silent for so long I thought she wasn't going to answer. Finally, she said, "I like it here fine. But I will like it best of all when my Mama comes to get me."

Her answer startled me. Dr. Manners had told me that Martha knew her parents were dead. And then I realized that this was simply Martha's protection against reality. It eased the loneliness and made more bearable the fact that nobody wanted her.

As I walked home that afternoon my heart was in agony. What a lousy damn shame. The disfigured hand didn't make the child's mind less exciting or her heart less appealing. Why should fate deprive this little girl of the normal happinesses that all children need? Why should her life be shadowed with fear and longing and hurt?

When I got home I talked to my wife. I told her about the little girl and how the situation had made me so unhappy. I pondered the question of just why things like this should happen and I wondered how much agony a tiny heart could endure.

My wife knew (although I never made the statement) that I was considering the adoption of that child. She leaned forward, and said, "Amos, we do not have wealth. We do not even have the necessities of life. But we do have an overabundance of love in this house...wouldn't it be a shame to waste that love?" I knew then that there was nothing in my way if I wanted to adopt that sweet little girl at the orphanage.

I got up and went outside. The night was cold and the autumn wind was blowing the falling leaves. I walked for miles and I tried to subdue my emotions and to think with logic and wisdom. And

on that walk I decided not to adopt that little girl.

I thought of the two children already had and of the possibility that might be depriving them of certain essential necessities. I thought of the fact that my wife was pregnant and could I honestly ask her to take on that added burden. And I wondered if I had the right to satisfy my desires while those desires would influence and affect others that I loved.

I made that decision almost twenty five years ago. I have lived with it and haven't been happy about it at all. I believe that Martha found her happiness. I believe that some dear person came and filled that young child's life with warmth and love. I believe that Martha found her "Mama".

For if I didn't believe these things I doubt if I would ever smile again.