

The Doll's House

"This is the part of my job I love most," Mandy Briscoe said, welcoming Frances and Tim into her office "when the interviews and visits are done and it's the final paperwork. You'll soon be taking Lucy home with you."

"We don't normally get both parents to be at this stage" she added peering over her glasses.

Tim laughed; "I've come to make sure Frances sticks to one child!" he joked, squeezing his wife's hand.

Frances smiled "I'd love as many as possible, its been such a long road but....."

She stopped as the door burst open and Mandy's harassed deputy Sue, descended on them bringing with her in a weeping girl who was fiercely clutching a doll's house.

"What is it Sue?" Mandy asked.

"The usual – kids teasing", she shook her head "after all she's been through...."

"Here come and sit with me, Carla," Mandy said patting the seat next to her.

"What a lovely dolls' house" Frances said to the girl "I used to have one of those". She leaned over at Carla who stared at her mutely.

As Frances knelt closer Carla could smell her soap and face powder - a mum smell. More tears threatened as she remembered the last sight of her own mum frantically pushing her into the arms of firefighters before she was overwhelmed by smoke.

The doll's house was among thousands of toys donated to the community centre after the fire for those who had lost everything. Carla had appeared on TV as one of Grenfell's orphans but when the news cameras left, she was moved into foster care and retreated into herself – ignoring the children who sneered at her childish toy. "*I wonder if it still smells of smoke*" one girl had jeered nastily. This had been her third home placement in three years.

"It's beautiful" Frances persisted, "just needs some furniture."

Carla shrugged, "What's the point of having stuff that just gets burned in a fire? I sleep on the floor now anyways, it's safer...."

Frances' eyes filled with tears as she looked over at her husband.

Tim shook his head imperceptibly.

"Okay, let's get back to the task in hand" Mandy said briskly returning to her file, but Frances' mind was whirring, "*We could have two girls, I know we could....*" She thought.

A few days later Carla received a package at the Home and inside was a small bed for the doll's house. The week after a chest of drawers arrived and over the next few weeks, she received more miniature furniture until the bedroom was furnished beautifully.

The final delivery contained a note which read:

"Dear Carla

I hope you like the bedroom we've created for you. We really want you to come and stay with us for a while if you'd like. Your room is on the ground floor next to Lucy's and there is space on the dressing table for your dolls house.

Love, Frances & Tim."