

decided, but not unkind. He was already three steps above her when Christina found voice.

"Are you looking for a servant girl?"

The man turned, and for a moment stood looking at her without speaking. Apparently the scrutiny was satisfactory.

"But I'm from the country," he said, "from far out in the country."

"I thought you were," the girl replied, "that's why I spoke to you."

Again there was the moment of quiet scrutiny on the part of the man.

"It's pretty quiet out there," he said at last.

"I don't care how quiet it is," the girl answered, her breath coming faster as she spoke. "I can't stay in the city any longer. I feel as though it would stifle me. I want to get out where there's a whole sky above me, and sunsets, and winds, and I never want to hear the sounds of the city again."

The same quiet scrutiny for a longer period than before. This time it was broken by a question that startled Christina.

"Do you believe in God?"

It was the girl's turn to study the man for a short space before speaking. She answered by a counter question.

"Don't you?"

There was a touch of wonder in her tone that seemed to satisfy the man.

"I've a little one for you to take care of," he said, in a harsh tone, "and you'll have to tell him Bible stories, and hear him say his prayers."

"I won't mind that," Christina replied. "My mother used to tell me Bible stories. Anyone would like to tell again the stories their mother taught them."

A dull, slow red crept from the man's brow to throat. His eyes avoided Christina's, but he took her bag, and started to descend the stairs.

"When can you come?" he queried, over his shoulder.

"Any time," she told him. "I'm ready now."

"I'll give you whatever you've been getting here," he said, as they reached the street.

In the deepening twilight of the same evening, Christina followed Emmett Brooks up the short path that led from the wagon road to the house. It was a much more pretentious house than any they had passed on their twelve-mile drive from the station, and was built with some regard for the laws of beauty in its proportion and finish. In front of the house a flower garden had evidently once flourished, but this spring's growth was struggling up through a dense tangle of last year's weeds, and on a little rustic summer house new vines were mounting on the ragged remains of last year's verdure.

Within the house a lamp, with a cracked and dirty glass, gave forth a faint light. An old Indian woman, wrapped in the inevitable shawl, came forward. Her dark face, and the almost noiseless shuffle of her moccasins encased feet made her seem like some palpable form of the darkness. Emmett Brooks began to speak, but his words were drowned in the shrill outcry of a child.

The child's cry sent a strange thrill of awe through Christina. It was not the cry of an infant, neither was it the normal cry of an older child. Emmett Brooks dropped Christina's bag, and went towards a cot that became visible to her as her eyes became accustomed to the light. He lifted the child in his arms, and a conversation took place between the two. The child's words were unintelligible to Christina, but she got the drift of their talk from the man's part in the conversation.

"I have brought a nice lady to hear you say your prayers. I must go to the horses now."

"But Victor should be asleep. It is an hour after bed-time."

"Then I'll hear them, and put away the horses afterwards."

And then the man repeated a prayer, and the child, in halting, imperfect speech, followed.

Before a day had passed, Christina was absorbed into the life of the home. Emmett Brooks laid only one command upon her. It was given during the progress of breakfast on the following morning.

"You'll tell the child Bible stories whenever you have time, and hear his prayers night and morning. Do you know the prayer he said last night?"

He spoke without glancing up, evidently intent on cutting a piece of bacon.

"Yes."

"You noticed the ending?"

Christina repeated it.

"God bless mamma, and papa, and Victor, and bring mamma safe home to her boy."

"Never forget to add that."

Within a week Christina had made considerable headway in establishing friendly relations between herself and the dwarfed child. At first he had shed tears when she related Bible stories to him, and had utterly refused to follow her lead when she repeated his prayers, calling out in a frightened voice for his father, who intentionally absented himself from the house at such hours. And when the father did return, the boy had cried out for him to come and hear him say his prayers. At such times Christina noted that the man's voice broke often, as though in pain.

But before a second week had passed, the child had once followed her lead in prayer, and then gone to sleep in evident contentment. And on that occasion the man had dropped into a chair, and sat for a long time with head bowed on his breast, and even to Christina's unimaginative mind he seemed to be sunk in utter dejection.

It seemed a strange world into which Christina had come. Emmett Brooks seldom looked at her or spoke to her. The old woman squatted, silent, on doorstep or floor, and answered Christina's attempts at conversation merely by a succession of clucks and grunts. The child's weird attempts at conversation were as yet altogether unintelligible to her.

But, though Christina held little converse with the human beings around her, she revelled in communion with Mother Earth. The oppression of the city had dropped from her. This was the land of sunset and sunrise, of free roving winds, of daylight that faded into dusk, and of dusk that settled into quiet night. As she went about her humble tasks, the pure, fragrant breath of growing verdure greeted her nostrils. This was not the country as Christina had known it in her childhood, here Mother Earth wore another countenance, but it was the country, and here Christina was familiar, here her surroundings did not depress her, here she felt superior, as queen of this goodly realm.

Christina had been two months in the country before she met another woman. Then Mrs. Haddow came to call on her.

Christina was busy training vines on the summer-house when she arrived.

"I calculate he never told you to do that?" the woman interrogated, when the brief greetings were over.

"No," Christina admitted, "he did not." And then because the woman's tones had been full of insinuation, she questioned, "Wouldn't he wish me to?"

"Oh, I don't know, only he built it for her, and I reckon he doesn't take any more stock in things he once did for her."

But Christina was not a female of the inquisitive type, and Mrs. Haddow had to seek another opening.

"I reckon you hear the young un say his prayers?"

"Yes."

"Emmett Brooks told the preacher last winter that he heard the young un his prayers because now his mother had gone an' left 'em, all the pleasure the child had was in prayin' for her return. But he said he wouldn't never do it if there was only someone else to do it. As for himself, he said he'd never have any faith in God now she turned out like she did. An' she left 'em so kind o' heartless like. She just 'llowed she was goin' to the city for a few weeks, an' she would send 'em word when to come an' fetch her. An' when the days passed, and the weeks passed, an' she didn't send word, Emmett Brooks went to the city to find out, an' he found out she didn't ever intend to come back. She had gone clean away to some other country with some man. I 'llow Emmett Brooks jest worshipped the ground she walked on, an' when he found out she wasn't good, he jest said there wasn't no sech thing as goodness. But Emmett Brooks has been wonderfully tender to the child. Some say as how the woman died since, but we don't rightly know. I asked him pint blank last fall, but he only says to me, stern like, Missus Haddow, she's been dead to me ever since I knew that she could desert her own helpless flesh and blood. An' though that might satisfy another man, it doesn't jest naturally satisfy a woman. I 'llow perhaps he told you."

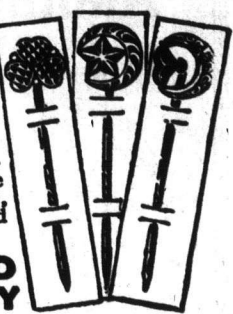
"No."

Christina's lone monosyllable proclaimed her utter distaste for the subject, but that did not mean that Mrs. Haddow would discontinue it. However, she had frequent rests while Mrs. Haddow talked to the Indian woman in her native tongue. The squaw replied in a series of angry grunts.

When Mrs. Haddow was leaving, she

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