

help choose the brilliant nothings that go to make the magic glamor of a Christmas tree.

Mark, with parcels heaped about him in the buggy, mentally fixing upon the tree he would find which should rival the one in the toy shop, absorbed in this new happiness, utterly forgetful of the past, was suddenly brought to abject confusion and misery.

As he drove past a saloon near the outskirts of the town, two men staggered out into the street. Mrs. Burns felt Mark's sudden jerk to the reins.

'Do you know these men, Mark? They are pointing at you.'

'No,' muttered Mark, frowning sullenly.

'Did he know them? He had endured their brutal company for six months in the jail. He shuddered, remembering their boasted civil deeds, for which had they been discovered they must have hanged. Mark became desperate as he thought of those horrible men. Had they recognized him? Would they find him out, and come after him? Should he have to go back to the old life, say farewell to this happy life at the farm—never see Chris any more?

He believed the power of these men to be all they had boasted. It did not occur to him that there was power in goodness as well as in evil. Above all, it did not occur to him to trust his new friend, to tell everything he feared to the farmer. His one fear overpowered all else. If they came he should have to leave, for he knew they would never let him stay there in peace.

Two days passed away. Mark began to hope that the men had not been able to trace him.

It was the afternoon of the third day, and Mark was busy in the barn. As he approached the hay pitchfork in hand, a voice said: 'Mark, old chap, how be you?'

Mark shook like a leaf. Mr. Burns was in town. It was market day.

'We don't scarcely know you, sonnie,' said Bill, emerging from the hay. 'You riding like a king and we scrawling on our two feet.'

Mark shrank back toward the cattle.

'Ay! We knew you'd got out here, and 'twas worth lookin' after, so we come after you.'

'Is,' gasped Mark, 'is Bloody Dick here, too?'

'Why—not exactly. He's on the road waiting for the farmer.'

To kill him?'

Bill laughed and rubbed his hands.

'Only quiet him a bit. Now, Mark, you hear, we'll do the square thing by you. Hes' got considerable silver.'

'I don't know nothin',' began Mark.

'We do, though. It's in a box under his bed. If you can get it out, all right; if not—well, we know how to help ourselves—spread it 'round as you was a jailbird, took for hookin' things and blame it on to you.'

'Where's Dick?' gasped Mark, looking round him fearfully.

'Dick's comfortable. He's 'way back in that dark bit of valley by the bridge. He'll come along soon as the coast's clear, and keep the woman in there and child from squealin', while we pack up what we want. I'll tap on that side door when we're ready, and you'll open kind of quiet and show us where the farmer keeps that chest. Understand?'

Mark nodded, his tongue refused service.

'Then mind you're on hand!' Bill's tone was fierce and menacing, and suddenly seizing the terrified lad in his arms he tossed him head foremost into the hay. Ere Mark, buried and suffocated, found his feet again, Bill had disappeared.

'Brother, brother! supper's ready.'

'Go away!' cried Mark, fiercely, as his idiot appeared at the barn door. He went on with his work, feeling that though unseen Bill's sinister eye was watching his movements. When Chris was safely indoors, he himself crossed the yard and entered. Softly yet swiftly he went the round of windows and doors, barring the strong shutters, rejoicing in the locks which he perceived would stand a siege.

'Why, brother, your face is all scratched up. What's amiss?' asked Mrs. Burns as Mark took his cup from her hand.

'I had a fall,' replied Mark, gloomily.

How peaceful and happy was this dear home. Chris, sitting on his mother's lap, was hearing about the Christ Child, born in Bethlehem. Mother and child seemed creatures in a clean, pure world, in which he had no place. He looked fearfully round—was there a gap anywhere in the shutter through which the evil beast outside might be overlooking this happy pair? No; the curtains were drawn. Bill had no chance for espionage. Somewhat relieved, Mark rose and took his muffler and cap.

The boy paused at the door.

'You're going out, Mark?'

'Lock it after me,' he said; 'and don't open it—not for no one.'

'Why, brother?'

Mark was gone. He slid through the narrowest opening possible, listened to hear the bolts driven home, then crept stealthily into the shadow of the bushes to the road. Suppose he was hiding there—what should he do? Bill would murder him! He paused to listen. An icy wind stirred the trees, set the larches moaning, while the pines shook cones in showers upon the snow. The idea that he could warn the farmer had not come at once to Mark. He had been too much absorbed in his horror of the men and what they might do to Chris; but it came and with it the way in which the end might be compassed. The road forked some distance before the bridge. Mark must reach the fork before the farmer. But how? By the short cut through the pine wood, down the precipitous cliff path to the valley. Mark had made the descent in summer. He gave no thought now to the dangers of such a path over snow and ice.

Yet he was not a courageous boy. He started at his own shadow—every sound terrified him. He knew that once this region had swarmed with bears and wildcats. In imagination he heard them at every moan of the wind rustling its way through the aisles of pines; but, nevertheless, he bore on his way swiftly as he could glide along, and the darkness, so gruesome to the timid lad, the gloom of night settled deeper and deeper upon the forest.

How long he had been there, battling these fears for ills to himself and his horror of the fate in store for the farmer, he could not tell. But here at last was the precipice which he must descend ere the good man reached the fork, before, in the bend of the valley road, Bloody Dick was crouching—waiting to 'quiet him.'

And far away in the distance the frosty air brought the clear click of hoofs and merry ring of sleigh bells. A team was coming swiftly onward.

Could he reach the road in time? A kind of blind fury possessed the lad as thoughts of the happy home, the good man and Bloody Dick chased through his brain. He threw himself on the cliff path, crawling, falling, rolling, stumbling—and he was there on the road as the farmer drove round the bend, heading for the bridge.

Just then the moon came out, and Mark's imperative voice:

'Stop! For God's sake, listen to me!' came just in time. And a moment later the boy was on the side of the sleigh, pouring out in half frantic haste the whole story, burning his boats behind him, all—anything to save the father of Chris, to keep him out of the clutches of Bloody Dick. For himself, this would be the end. His 'chance' was gone. He must go back to the desolate life in the slums. The old life rose in horrible distinctness before his eyes as he poured forth his acquaintance with those 'birds of prey' who had tracked him to the farmer's door. The shackles from which he vainly thought he had broken loose, were locked again closely about him.

When all was told Mark stumbled back into the snow, rubbing something out of his eyes. His voice choked and his words now were all but inaudible.

'Chris! Don't tell—I bin a thief!'

Suddenly, becoming giddy, he staggered as he turned away from the sleigh; but a strong hand clutched his collar and, struggle how he might, escape was quite impossible.

'My son,' said the farmer, tenderly, 'it's time as we got home.'

The horses were turned into the old disused road, and Bloody Dick, crouching on the bridge, heard the sleigh bells jingling fainter and fainter in the distance.

## Fighting the Current.

Instead of mourning and repining at the difficulties of life and of the Christian life, we ought to rejoice that the very magnitude and intensity of these hindrances testify to the fact that our movement is an upward one, and therefore feels hindrances from which we would be delivered if we were easily gliding down the current.—'Sunday School Times.'

## The Different Kinds of Sensitiveness.

The wrong kind of sensitiveness is born of selfishness and egotism. Men and women who think they deserve a great deal of attention, and then feel they are not fawned upon and flattered as much as they imagine they deserve, are ready to hang their heads or burst into tears with the broken-hearted expression, 'Nobody loves me!' Winifrid Black hits the nail on the head when she says that the right way to answer that exclamation is with the natural query, 'Why should they?'

Someone has well said that when a man looks either for slights or for opportunities of service he always finds what he is looking for. Haman was a good type of one kind of sensitive man. Haman fed on public applause, and he hungered for everyone to bow down to him. And everybody in town did bow down to him except one old Jew named Mordecai, but so sensitive was Haman that all the bowing and scraping of a city full of people went for nothing because that stiff-necked old Jew would not bend his head. Haman was one bow short, and therefore miserable. Who of us do not know such people? It is the same kind of thing when a mother gets vexed and sorrowful, and is almost ready to take her child out of Sunday School, because some other little girl or little boy is called on to speak oftener in Sunday School concerts than is the child who is the apple of her own eye.

Another kind of sensitiveness which is bad is typified by Martha, at whose home Christ liked to go and visit. Martha was sensitive because Mary, her sister, did not express her love for the Master in pies and doughnuts and roast beef in the same way as she herself did. But Christ told Martha not to worry about

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