

“AND A LITTLE CHILD”

A Dramatic Reading

by
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A broad sweep of untilled land--distance--a dark house--dim twilight in the sky.

A late bird flew screaming into the closing doors of day, and bats on smooth wings circled above the house--a sad house on a lonely hill.

Steve Grant appeared suddenly--opened the door and was inside--another, whose features twilight veiled, appeared, opened the door and entered--another--another, and the bolt fell in its place.

A pale girl, hands behind her, fingertips against the wall, surveyed the group and looked again at Steve.

“Did he leave it?” she asked.

“No.” Steve’s eyes ranged from floor to ceiling, “and we’re spotted--this mug--” he looked contemptuously at the man on his right, “was ransom-phonng--wires tapped.”

Willa James said nothing, only glanced to the small room where a child lay--kidnapped--and asleep now, then back to the ruthless eyes of Steve Grant, read the meaning and cried,

“No, Steve--we can’t--we mustn’t--not little Taddy--he’s been so sweet all these weeks.”

“Yeah? Fallen for the little mug, have you? Well, his old man ’ud soon put you up, whether you love his brat or not.”

“Steve, whose baby is he?” Willa broke in, “tell me--please do--you know me.”

“Sure I know you, and that’s why ‘Taddy’s’ all you’ll know--We’re going back--and if the money’s not there--well--the kid can finish his nap in the north swamp.” Steve glanced from the window, toward a dark outline of heavy trees and turned to his men who followed him from the house.

Willa stood motionless--cold. Her trembling hands like living vines on chill marble, clutched her breast, ran hysterically to her throat, over her eyes, and through her hair, as she cried.

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