

VIEW POINTS.

What matter pray tell, if I'm Gentle or Jew, If I do my work well, and my purpose is true? What matter I ask, to which church I may go.

SINGING WOMEN.

Elvina Rudd did not go forward to welcome her stepmother. She just stood in the open doorway of her father's dilapidated house held together by tough, ancient vines, and watched him bringing her home.

"Whoa!" shouted the wizened old driver who had outlived his horses and his day, setting his brake as the faint tracks of the weed-grown road disappeared in the long, tangled grass of Rudder's front yard.

Enjoying his jest in his senile way, for he had brought the Rudds directly from the courthouse, he proceeded to unload his passengers' baggage—a trunk, a little trunk, two suitcases, and a round leather box.

"That ain't the latest," the neighbor across to the north of her had asked. "But that music-show compny bein' stranded last week at the Center? Sure, I heard that," the woman three farms to the south had answered.

"That ain't the latest. The latest is Cephas Rudd married one o' them singin' wimmen today." Elvina had listened no longer. She had flung herself upon the couch, beating the dust from it with her bare toes in a fury of resentment.

"Ma's dead," retorted Elvina, without moving more than her eyelashes, thick and tangled like the grass. "I ain't got no ma, thanks. Ma's dead." "This is your ma, an' you'll treat her like it," announced Cephas Rudd, advancing toward her.

Elvina did not cringe. She feared him as she feared thunderstorms and bulls. Yet she knew he would not strike her. He never had. Though she was often sullen when he was severe, she had never offered him defiance before.

"Now, Ma, Rudd, don't!" begged the new wife, eating him by his heavy arm and squeezing it. At that Elvina could not have kept her black eyes in their sockets except for the barrier of her tangled lashes.

"Don't talk about scenery or I might get homesick." "No, you won't, Milly. You and Elvina'll be such chums you'll forget you was ever on the stage."

"What kind of whitewash do you use, Pierrette? I'd like to buy a gallon." "You can catch it in a rain-barrel, I bet. Want we should just come right in, Elvina, dear?"

"Set another plate, Elvina," said Cephas, noting that the table was laid for three, but deigning to show no surprise at the presence which had moved Elvina to arrange it so.

"Didn't know you was luggin' home a singin' woman to take my place, too," Elvina remarked dispassionately, crossing to the cupboard to do as she was bade.

The new light showed them plainly as they were, these three female creatures who were henceforth to share its rays. It shone on Elvina, a thin woman-child clad in a shapeless cotton garment.

"Yes," said Elvina solemnly, laughing to herself; for she thought Hen Thompson must be the funniest-looking boy in the world. "Oh, my, yes!"

"Come back again," she said, when he was leaving without ever having explained why he had come. "Life in the wildwoods won't be so worse if we got little neighbor boys like you to play with."

"Not if you sing to him," Elvina retorted crossly, thinking of the ragged dishtowel upon which he had not tramped.

When Hen had gone, Elvina turned on Milly, as she swung lazily and caroled a light tune to the throaty soprano of her mother's song. Elvina was miserable.

From behind her Tilly answered, clasping her hands under the quivering chin raised belligerently toward Milly, and drawing the white face back so that the moon and her own kind, pleading eyes shone down on it.

"When women sing, it's because they're happy, kid," she said. "Sure, that's true. Or else," she added tragically, gazing into the blackness of the grove beyond the house.

"Bedtime, Elvina," he said briefly, and sat down upon the doorstep. "Well, let's hit the hay, Vinie-vinegar," Milly suggested.

"Night, ma," she whispered at the door of the downstairs bedroom. Then she started up to the little chamber under the eaves, to the little bed which she had never shared before.

"I'll fill the water glasses," Tilly decided hastily. "See here at this gourd dipper, Milly. Ain't it a big one?"

"I don't neither. Pa don't like screedin'." "That was too much for Milly, with her spirits revived by the lighted lantern," she cried, flinging herself into a chair at the supper table.

"Set up," he said to Tilly as he seated himself. "Bring it on, Elvina." "No, indeed!" protested Tilly, smoothing his wet hair again with her own venturesome hands.

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per had been eaten, she did an astonishing thing. She pushed Elvina and Milly toward the open door. "Skip, you two," she said, "and get acquainted. I'll wash the dishes, and Mr. Rudd'll wipe 'em."

"When a woman sings, it's because she's happy," she would say, as she went humming about, doing twice the work Elvina could, in half the time.

Elvina sat cross-legged on the ground and watched the moon rise on the world that had become so strange and different since its last rising.

"Plants the taters in the dark of the moon, does he?" "No," replied Elvina. "No, he ain't never come of an evenin' before. He must of heard you was here."

"Yes," said Elvina solemnly, laughing to herself; for she thought Hen Thompson must be the funniest-looking boy in the world. "Oh, my, yes!"

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still hardened against singing women by whose coming she herself had so profited. There were new dishes, flower trimmed, in the cupboard. There were ruffled curtains at the windows, and grass rugs on the floor.

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think o' Tilly," said Elvina. "Luy still." Milly, thinking of Tilly and keeping her mouth shut, lay still while Elvina crept down the stairs.

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