

Children of Wrath

Samantha threw another piece of wood onto the fire and returned to her daughter's side. She pulled her close and made sure the blanket covered every inch of her. The cold was worse this year than that before.

"Mommy?" Adrian said, her voice a note above the wind.

"Yes, darling?"

"Will I go to school this year?"

"Of course you will," she lied. "You'll see all your friends again and have a great time."

"Will Daddy be there?"

"No, sweetie... Daddy went away."

"When will he be home?"

"I don't know... I don't know," Samantha muttered, her mind drifting from her daughter's side to the unknown fate of her husband. So many died she could not imagine him alive. But she stopped herself from thinking of him and stayed strong for her daughter. The night echoed a distant crash and Adrian clasped her mother, afraid.

"What was that?"

"Don't worry. We're safe here," she stated reassuringly. The broken home around them provided little shelter or hope. But they were more fortunate than most as the rest were dead. Samantha felt a chill having nothing to do with the cold—their supply of wood was dwindling and they could not afford to break the walls around them. "Mommy has to gather supplies," she told her daughter. "You remember what to do, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Tell me so I know you know."

“Stay hidden and don’t come out unless you say so,” Adrian said, not fully understanding her mother’s rules but obeying them all the same.

“Very good,” Samantha stated, bundling herself up for what she hoped to be a short journey. She made sure Adrian was well hidden before she stepped outside the shelter.

The sun was buried by eternal clouds—created on the last day. The streets were cluttered with rusted cars and broken homes. Snowflakes and ash lingered in the tender, brooding hands of the wind—falling one by one to join the dead on earth. Samantha hobbled on her bad leg that had broken, and healed, fighting to survive. Now it served as a hard reminder of better days that would never return. She tossed through rubble, saving bits of wood and paper to take back with her. On occasion she would find remnants of storage providing food enough to get by but not count on. However, this day, there was no such luck.

She thought to herself about their supplies, about how everyday she had to travel further and further from the shelter to get them. Her eyes fell on the black shaded ruins of skyscrapers scrapped by the sky. She had not been to the city since it happened, but she could hear the war continue to wage. Even after tomorrow was ruined, people still fought each other today... her husband... when she was not with her daughter, he came to her side and filled her heart. But he was dead. He had to be. She could not live with the hope of seeing him again if she hoped to see her daughter grow—it was their life now; nothing mattered but that.

She heaved a torn backpack onto her shoulder and looked through what she’d collected—it wasn’t enough. Her stomach growled and she tucked her hands into her pockets to warm them again. She would have to stay into the night to gather more wood. Her lip trembled and her chin shook—she had learned to be strong; she had to, for her daughter. But it wasn’t long ago that every care in her life was of the utmost irrelevance. It wasn’t long ago that food was plentiful, shelter was assumed and life was assured... value is measured by need, not desire. And, now, man’s desire was no more than shattered remnants to be picked through by the needy. Samantha collapsed to the ground and sobbed—releasing the pain that tore at her soul no matter what face she wore or what lie she told. Her tears cooled her face as her echoes died into the barren abyss.

She wanted nothing more than for her daughter to grow up and enjoy what every child deserves—a childhood: if not one of laughter and delight than at least one free of torment and misery. Instead, Adrian was left to cower in a desolate wasteland with no understanding of reality but for the lies her mother told her. Samantha felt her heart plunder a beat and remind her that she lived; reminding her that as long as she lived, her life, needs, and desires, were to see her daughter given as much a childhood as

the world would allow. It was hopeless... but if she died trying at least she would live dying.

Continued in The Collection: Volume One
