

THE TIMELESS CLASSIC OF LOVE AND FAITH

THE LILIES Of the FIELD

WILLIAM E. BARRETT



chapter one

There is a young legend developing on the west side of the mountains. It will, inevitably, grow with the years. Like all legends, it is composed of falsehood and fact. In this case, the truth is more compelling than the trappings of imagination with which it has been invested. The man who has become a legendary figure was, perhaps, of greater stature in simple reality than he ever will be in the oft-repeated, and expanded, tales which commemorate his deeds. Here, before the whole matter gets out of hand, is how it was. . . .

His name was Homer Smith. He was twenty-four. He stood six foot two and his skin was a deep, warm black. He had large, strong features and widely spaced eyes. A sculptor would have interpreted the features in terms of character, but Homer Smith's mother had once said of him that he was two parts amiable and one part plain devil. It was a verdict that he

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accepted, as he accepted the days that came to him. He lived his life one day at a time. There was laughter in him.

He was a buck sergeant when he received his Army discharge at Fort Lewis. The Army years had been good to him and he had accumulated a sum of money through some slight thrift, much moonlighting and occasional gambling luck. He bought a secondhand station wagon in Seattle, equipped it for sleeping, and started out to see the West. He had not believed much of what he heard in the Army and he did not believe the tales that Westerners told about their country; he was, however, a curious man.

On a morning in May, Homer Smith drove into a valley west of the Rocky Mountain Range. Spring, which had stood aloof from him on the higher levels, moved down the valley to meet him. Blue, yellow, and pink flowers twinkled in the tawny expanse of buffalo and grama grass. He had grown up in South Carolina, a far different land from this. On his left, as he drove south, blue- and purple-tinted mountains tipped with snow formed a

seemingly unbroken barrier against the East, and everything that the East represented. In this country, he had discovered, there was no South; "south" was merely an adjective prefixed to the noun "west."

Where the road curved away from the mountains to parallel a narrow, sluggish stream, he saw the women. One of them was working in an area of cultivated land and three more were building a fence behind a dilapidated farmhouse. There were no men visible and that was curious. The women wore bulky-looking garments and they had white cloths tied, scarf fashion, around their heads. Homer appraised the house and the out-buildings with one glance.

"Place needs a lot of work," he said.

He hadn't worked for a week. It wasn't necessary that he work unless he felt the urge. In that fact lay a new concept of freedom. He was a man of many skills and when he became restless with idle traveling, he had no difficulty in finding work to do; when work became onerous, or the road called to him, he moved on. Impulse turned the wheel and he drove into the

“Schmidt,” Mother Maria Marthe said,
“Ve build a shapel. I show you.”

She reached into her pocket and produced a sketch on a piece of coarse wrapping paper. It was a good sketch of a small church.

“Who builds it?” Homer asked.

The nun’s eyes drilled into him...

“If you think that I’m building that, you’re out of your mind,” he said.

Homer Smith, a black ex-GI, was a carefree man living the life of the open road—until he met a group of German-speaking nuns with a dream...



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