

"Wearyin' for Peace"

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"She wont worry none too much once I'm gone," said the girl, without emotion. She lifted her dusky eyes to his almost pleadingly. "Gawd knows I've loved my people—but I love yo' better'n them—or Him. I can't help what yo've done, I've got to rise up an' foller yo'." Her voice quivered and broke.

"Them people o' yours ain't never been none too kin' to yo', Ca'line," he remarked tentatively.

"No, they ain't," she assented, but without resentment. His eyes rested upon her lingeringly.

"Yo' ain't never going' to be sorry yo' come to me, honey-heart," he promised, with honest passion. "To-night, Ca'line."

"To-night," she repeated. He waved his hand, slung his gun across his shoulder, and disappeared among the trees; she stood still until his tall form was lost to sight, then turned swiftly toward home. And in the underbrush across the gorge lay the dead man, his gun beside him, his face buried in the grass and drifted leaves.

Caroline walked quickly through the waning evening, her pink sunbonnet on her arm, her thick black plaits hanging over her shoulders. Her lips, full and red, were compressed into a firm crimson line, her eyes smoldered like banked fires; deep in their brown depths one saw a glint of a flaming soul. Tiny spots of red, like little tongues of flame, burned in her cool, dusky cheeks.

Her mother was sitting on the doorsill, smoking a short corn-cob pipe, when Caroline reached home. Used to her daughter's whim of wandering around in the woods, she made no comment upon her long absence.



"Over the dead girl they confronted each other, panting."

"Yo' dad ain't home yet, Ca'line."

"No?"

"Ef he meets one o' them Rollinses he won't come home; or they won't, one or 'tother," said the old woman calmly, between puffs of her pipe.

"Did he 'spec' to meet a Rollins?"

"Uh-huh. That fool boy o' Baker's, Jed, tol' him somethin' las' night, an' this maynin' yo' dad took his gun an' went out. I 'loved he was on a wrong trail, but yo' know he's plum bent in his ways. Yo' heah anything like a gunshot, Ca'line?"

Caroline lifted her eyes dauntlessly. "No," she said.

"Which way'd yo' come?"

"By the sweet-gums an' the spring."

"Yo' ain't been by the gorge, mebbe?"

"No," said Caroline, tensely.

"Yo' dad was thah," said her mother.

Both relapsed into mountain taciturnity. The old woman smoked in stolid silence. Caroline sat on the sill beside her, her large eyes fixed mournfully on the waning glories of the skies above the pines.

Red, gold, and blue, with wavering glimmers of green; then a settled pearl-gray, rose, and silver on the edges; then a sadder gray, with fading rose and silver; and more and yet more gray; then darkness; and presently above the woods the misty beauty of the Milky Way, sewn with stars like seed pearls; and a little young moon, wandering in the big sky like a lost child. Now an owl hoo-hoo'd from the deepening dark, and katydids and crickets chirped shrilly from the clearing. Caroline sat in silence, awed and saddened. Some-

where down by the gorge a silent figure was lying, its stark face couched in the cool, sweet-smelling grass.

The old woman's pipe began to gleam like a red sinister eye peering out of the gloom.

"Seems like I heard a shot, 'bout a hour 'fore yo' come home, Ca'line," she remarked, removing her pipe and knocking out the ashes. "Hit was far off an' faint like, but I reckon hit was sho' a gunshot."

"I never heard it," said Caroline steadily.

Her mother turned her head and shot a sudden keen glance at the girl, but as well as her sharp eyes could detect in the twilight, the face was as calmly indifferent as the voice.

"Yo' better fix supper now, Ca'line," she remarked, after another silent interval.

Caroline moved lightly about the kitchen, and the supper of corn bread, coffee, and bacon was soon upon the table. They ate in silence, sparsely, Caroline removing the dishes when the meal had been finished.

"Yo' dad's sho' late," said the old woman, glancing out at the dark mountain side. "I don't reckon we'd better wait up no'mo' for him."

"No," said the girl almost inaudibly. "Tain't no use waitin' no more."

She undressed, flung herself across the bed, and slept, knowing that she could and would wake later, and that she must rest. The old woman lay beside her, with her eyes shut but with every sense wakeful. How cruelly long those hours were!

He had met one of the Rollinses she knew quite as well as if she had seen him fall. A flood of bitterness—the undying mountain hatred, the savage vindictiveness of a race which knows no forgiveness—welled up in her heart, and under her shut lids her eyes burned and smarted. Her strong old hands clenched. He was down! Her sons, also, had been shot by the Rollinses, after killing two of them. The quarrel had begun further back than her time, nor was she even aware of its cause. She only knew that when Hudson and Rollins met, some one died.

Jed Baker had foolishly told her husband that one of the Rollins boys had been meeting Caroline at the gorge. He, in hiding near by, had seen them once himself, he said. The dad, grim, relentless, fierce, had taken his shotgun and set out to watch. She knew that had he not fallen he would have come home. Somewhere out in the dark he was lying stark and alone, and Caroline—

Of Caroline she was almost afraid to think; anger and fierce hostility smoldered in her heart against her own child, the last one left her. She knew now that Caroline—knew. Her mouth hardened grimly as she lay, quiet and watchful; no coiled snake was ever more alert, more deadly with venomous intent.

Caroline stirred, and rose softly, then leaned lightly over her mother and touched the hard cheek with her soft lips—so might a falling flower have brushed against a granite ledge. The old woman made no movement, and Caroline, with a breath of relief, stepped lightly about, putting on her few garments. The listener heard the door cautiously opened and closed, and an instant later Caroline had gone.

When the light step had died in the distance, the mother rose, dressed in a fury of haste, and thrust her feet into her coarse shoes. In a corner behind her bed hung her dead boy's guns, which she loaded and slung across her shoulder. Stepping outside the house, she listened intently for a moment, and then sped after Caroline like an evil shadow.

The moon was high in the heavens now, its pallid light falling fitfully between the trees. The road was in spots filled with wavering shadows of trees. At either side beneath the trees the blackness was unbroken, and she kept to the side. Far ahead a slim figure fled through one of the silver lakes of light. The mother said, "Ca'line!" and fled after it.

The slender figure in its dark-red dress stopped at last by the ledge of rock beside the gorge, and the pursuing vengeance dropped in a pool of blackness farther back among the trees. Deep

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