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1

Will You Hate Me If There's a War?

Pineville, Kentucky, was so close to the state line that the Virginia mountains were clearly visible. The quiet little town had few celebrations. Usually the Fourth of July was the most important. However, on one cool day in March 1861, the streets were filled with people, music, and the sound of laughter. Fifty years earlier the village had been incorporated, and this celebration had been ordained to call attention to that time.

The day was raw and windy, but no one seemed to mind—least of all the pretty girl who was tugging urgently at the sleeve of a boy close to the square dance platform.

“Come on, Jeff—we’re old enough!”

Leah Carter was barely thirteen, but she’d been yearning to square dance with the grown-ups for a long time. Her honey-colored hair gleamed as the pale sun touched it, and the green dress she wore matched the color of her eyes. It was her best dress. She’d been hoping that Jeff Majors would tell her how pretty it was—but he had not.

“Aw, I don’t know how.” Jeff was tall for fourteen years and had the blackest hair Leah had ever seen. He had black eyes too—and brows to match. He was wearing a pair of stiff new jeans, a red-and-brown checked shirt, and a pair of new brown

boots. Digging the toe of the right one into the dirt, he said stubbornly, "Anyway, your pa would paddle you if he caught you dancing."

"He would not!" Leah tossed her long hair. "He's never paddled me!"

Jeff suddenly grinned at her, his eyes crinkling until they were mere slits—they crinkled like his father's and brother's. "I can think of a time or two when he should have tanned you. Like the time you and Walter Beddows—"

"I don't want to hear about Walter Beddows!" Leah interrupted, her face turning pink. She hated Jeff's teasing. They'd grown up together, their families were the closest of friends, but for the last year she'd suddenly become aware of how handsome a boy Jeff was—though she'd never admit it. "Come on, I'll teach you."

Jeff tried to draw back, but she caught his arm and pulled him toward the low platform. The square dancers were moving to the music of a five-piece band, including two guitars, a banjo, a fiddle, and a dulcimer.

"I feel like a fool, Leah!" he protested. But somehow he found himself on the platform. He kept his eyes on his feet, trying to follow Leah's instructions. He knew he'd take a great deal of ribbing by his friends.

Right now he heard one of them calling, "Hey, Jeff! Where'd you get that pretty gal?"

"Don't pay any attention to that old Jay Walters!" Leah whispered. "You're doing fine!"

Two men arrived at the long refreshment table just then, and one squinted at the square dancers. He was six feet tall, and a fine black suit set off his trim figure. Nelson Majors had the same dark hair

and eyes as his son Jeff. "Will you look at that, Daniel!" he exclaimed.

Daniel Carter was a smaller man than his friend, no more than five feet ten inches. His light brown hair was growing thin on the crown, and his eyes were a faded blue. His mouth was firm under a scraggly mustache, but there was a fragile quality in his features. A look of surprise swept over his face. "Why—that's Leah and Jeff!"

Nelson Majors laughed at the expression on his friend's face. "They're growing up fast."

"Not fast enough to start square dancing with the grown-ups, I don't reckon." Carter scowled. Then, in spite of himself, a grin touched his lips. "That girl! She's stubborn as a blue-nosed mule!

I'll give her a thrashing when I get her home!"

"Be the first one, I reckon. Say, look at that." He grinned as his older son, Tom, approached the young couple. "He's going to tease the life out of Jeff for this stunt!"

Jeff, concentrating on his feet, jumped when a hand tapped his shoulder. He whirled around to find his brother standing there, a smile dancing in his dark eyes. "Cutting in on you, little brother," Tom announced cheerfully. He turned to Leah, adding, "I make it a habit to dance with every pretty girl."

Leah almost giggled, but decided that was not ladylike. Instead she let Tom Majors direct her around the floor. She caught a glimpse of Jeff stomping away—and then she did giggle. "He's mad at you."

"Do him good to be jealous." Tom smiled down at her. "I didn't think anybody on earth could make Jeff get up and dance in public. What'd you do, Leah—put a spell on him?"

“Oh, you just have to know how to handle Jeff.” Leah nodded wisely. “He’s shy, Mister Tom, but I know how to get him to do things.”

“I’ll bet you do!” A merry light gleamed in Tom Majors’s eyes. “You’ve been bossing him around since you were six years old. What I want to know is, how—”

He broke off suddenly, as a shout caught their ears. “It’s a fight!” he exclaimed. Releasing her, he dashed off the platform. Shouldering his way past a circle of men, Tom stared at the two young men who were pounding each other furiously.

The crowd was urging them on, but Tom instantly stepped between the two.

“Royal—Dave—!” He caught a wild blow on the cheek that drove his head back, but he yelled, “Stop this foolishness!”

Royal Carter’s face was contorted with anger. “Get out of the way, Tom! I’m going to stomp him!” Royal was not tall, but he was muscular and strong. Blond-haired and blue-eyed, he tried to look older by wearing a large mustache and heavy sideburns. He was Tom’s best friend.

“You ain’t stompin’ nobody, Carter!” Dave Mellon was much larger than his opponent but had taken several blows in the face. His lip was cut, and a large bruise was darkening on his cheek. His face was crimson with rage, and he tried to push Tom aside. “You taking up for him, Tom? You ought to know better!”

“What’s all this?” Now Mr. Carter had arrived at the inner circle, followed by Nelson Majors. He took his son’s arm. “Royal, you know better than to brawl in public!”

Ordinarily Royal Carter was a gentle young man—the last person one would expect to see in a fight. He was nineteen and had the nickname of “Professor” among his friends. Now he was pale with anger, and he glared at Mellon. “He cussed the president and the Union,” Royal said. “I won’t stand for that!”

“You and the rest of your Yankee friends will stand for more than that, Carter!” Dave Mellon was an outspoken abolitionist—which meant he was for freeing the slaves even if it meant war. President Lincoln would fight only to preserve the Union. “This country can’t put up with slavery!”

An angry mutter ran around the crowd.

Mr. Carter glanced around. Mellon’s words had divided the men into two groups. All were his neighbors, but they differed strongly on the matter of states’ rights—and slavery.

It’s the same all over this country, he thought sadly. Men who’ve gotten along all their lives are ready to start shooting at each other!

“Come along, Royal,” he said quietly. He turned, and his son—giving one hard glance at Dave Mellon—obeyed. They pushed their way through the crowd.

A man said loudly, “Why don’t you just go South, Carter?”

But Daniel Carter ignored him.

When the men reached the refreshment table, they found their wives waiting. “Are you all right, son?” Mary Carter was younger than her husband. She was a strong woman—which was very good, because Mr. Carter was not always well. “I thought you and Dave were good friends.”

“Not anymore,” Royal said sharply. “You should have heard what he said about us!”

“You’re going to hear worse, Royal.” Nelson Majors was very fond of young Carter. The young man had spent much time in his home over the years. Now worry disturbed Mr. Majors’s dark eyes. “This business about slavery and states’ rights isn’t going to get any better.”

“Do you think there’ll be a war, Nelson?” The question was asked by his wife, Irene, a frail woman who wore a worried expression. In her youth, she had been a great beauty, but sickness had drained her, and now she looked frightened.

“I hope not,” Mr. Majors said quickly. But his eyes met those of Daniel Carter—and he knew they were thinking the same thing.

“There’ll have to be a war,” Tom insisted. “The Yankees will force it on us.”

“Why, you don’t own any slaves, Tom,” Royal said.

“No, and I never will. But a state has the right to decide for itself what to do!”

That was the real issue that faced the country — whether or not a state could leave the Union if it so decided. And though the two families said no more, the celebration was spoiled for them.

They all seemed to realize that the lifelong friendship between the Carters and the Majors family was in peril. Indeed, the United States of America was on the verge of disaster.

* * *

“Oh, Jeff, it’s the robin’s egg—the one we’ve looked for for so long!” Leah held the tiny blue egg

in her hand. Her face was alive with pleasure.

Leah and Jeff were high in a towering sycamore tree. They'd become expert tree climbers in their joint determination to collect a specimen of every bird's egg in the county. Leah was wearing her old overalls, and the two sat as easily on the limb as if it had been a solid bench.

"I was about to give up." Jeff stared down at the blue egg with satisfaction. "Well, now we can add this one—but we still don't have one from a woodpecker."

Leah began to count off the eggs they still needed to find. She had not gotten through the list, however, when the sound of horses approaching made her break off.

"Let's get down," she said hurriedly. "We'll look silly up in this old tree!"

"Too late," Jeff said. "They'll pass by us."

But the tree where they'd found the robin's nest was beside the road, and the road crossed a large brook at the same spot. Most riders paused there to water their horses, and this was exactly what happened.

"It's your brother!" Leah whispered in alarm.

"And that's your sister with him!" Jeff wanted to get away, but the buggy his brother drove came to a stop beneath their tree.

"We'll water the team," Tom said. "It's been a thirsty drive."

"Well, all right, but then you'll have to take me home, Tom."

Leah stared down through the foliage but could see only the top of the buggy. She could hear them, however, and she whispered, "We can't eavesdrop on them!"

“Cover your ears, then!” Jeff whispered back. “We can’t let them see us up here!” He wished he were up any other tree in the world.

“Sarah, you know I love you,” Tom said. “And I thought you cared for me.”

“Oh, Tom!” Sarah Carter was a beautiful girl. She had blonde hair, dark blue eyes, and a creamy complexion. Her simple blue dress set off her trim figure, and she was highly sought after by several young men. But her eyes were troubled as she said, “We can’t even talk about things like that.”

“Why not?” Tom demanded.

“Because things are so—so confused.” Sarah bit her lip. “There may be war next week. You know that, Tom.”

“Why, there’s always something for people to worry about. If people waited until there were no problems, nobody would ever get married!”

“This is different, Tom, and you know it.” Sarah went on, speaking softly but pointing out the difficulties. She ended by saying, “If war comes, you’d fight for the South, wouldn’t you, Tom?”

“I—I guess I’d have to, Sarah.”

“And my brother Royal would fight for the Union.” Worry crossed her smooth face, and she asked suddenly, “What would it be like if I married you—and you killed my brother—or if he killed you? Don’t you see how terrible that would be?”

Tom could only ask her to change her mind. Finally he said heavily, “I guess all we can do is hope there’s no war.”

Then he spoke to the horses, and the buggy pulled away.

Leah waited until she could not hear the sound

of the horses and wheels, then climbed down the tree.

Jeff slid to the ground too, keeping his eyes fixed on the buggy, which was turning past a distant grove of trees. "I wish we hadn't been up in that tree," he muttered.

"You knew he was courting her. Everybody knows that."

"Yeah, but I feel guilty about listening to them. That wasn't right!"

"I know. I feel the same way—but we couldn't help it." She put the tiny egg into a small box lined with cotton and closed the lid. The pleasure of the hunt was gone now, and she said, "I've got to get home."

"Me too."

They plodded along silently, each thinking of what they had heard. But when they came to the fork that led to the Carter place, Leah stopped abruptly and looked into his eyes. "Jeff—will you hate me if there's a war?"

"Why . . . that's a crazy thing to say!" Jeff blurted out. "Of course not!"

Leah studied his face for a moment, then whispered, "I'd never hate you, Jeff, no matter what!" There was a catch in her voice, and she whirled and dashed down the road.

Jeff watched her go. He almost ran after her. Then he thought of what Tom and Sarah had said. He whispered, "I'll never hate you, Leah—not ever!"

Then he resumed his slow walk toward his house. His shoulders were slumped, and his dark eyes were filled with doubt. A woodpecker drummed on a dead pine over his head, but young Jeff Majors was so troubled with thoughts of a war that he did not even glance up.

2

The End of Something

For many years people remembered what a fine spring Kentucky enjoyed in 1861. Perhaps the dread of war, which cast gloom over the state, made the skies seem more blue and the dogwood whiter. March with its gusty winds faded, and April brought warm, gentle breezes that seemed to draw the tiny green tongues of crocuses out of the dead clods.

Leah always remembered it as a golden time. She and Jeff ranged the woods, hunting—he for rabbits and squirrels, she for birds' eggs. She never forgot how the tiny buds softened the trees that lined the river bottoms or how the wild violets turned the ground into a fine lavender carpet. It was a spring to be remembered!

On one of their jaunts, they were returning home after a long afternoon in the woods. The sun was dipping behind the foothills in the west, and Leah murmured wistfully, "I wish we could do this every day!"

Jeff turned to grin at her. "We'd get mighty hungry, I reckon. Somebody's got to do the work." He hefted his bag in his left hand. "I like squirrel and dumplings—but not all the time."

"Oh, you're always so—so practical, Jeff Majors!"

"Somebody has to be. You can't eat birds' eggs and that poetry you like so much." He trudged on a

few paces. "Spring plowing tomorrow. No more days like this for a while."

Leah had put aside the memory of the time in the sycamore tree. Tom still came to sit on the Carter porch, but something had been lost. She could not say what it was, but there was a lack of joy in Tom and Sarah now.

"Maybe we can go hunting on Sunday afternoon," she said hopefully. These days in the woods with Jeff were the best times for her, and she hated to think they were ending.

"Not likely your pa would let you do it. You know how strict he is on the Sabbath." Jeff grinned again. "I don't reckon he'd eat an egg laid on Sunday!"

They came to the small wooden bridge that spanned the creek and, as usual, stopped to lean on the rail. The western sky was red, and the water below reflected the hue.

Suddenly Leah stiffened. "Look—there he is, Jeff!"

Jeff followed her gesture and whispered, "It's Old Napoleon!" He stared at the huge bass. It rose to take a mayfly and then sank back into the depths. "Wish I'd brought my fishin' pole! I'd get him!"

The large fish had eluded Jeff's efforts for months. Leah knew the boy had tried every bait and every time of day and night—all to no avail.

"Let's go get the poles at our house and come back. Maybe we'll get him." Leah didn't care about Old Napoleon—so named for his craftiness—but she longed to make the day last longer.

"All right. But your pa won't stand for it."

"I'll talk him into it. Come on, Jeff!"

The two broke into a run, turning off at the lane that led to the Carter house. They grabbed the poles that leaned against a shed, but as they were raking bait out of the worm box, Leah's father stepped around the corner.

"What are you two doing?"

"Oh, Pa!" Leah held up a huge night crawler that wiggled frantically in her grasp. "We just saw Old Napoleon at the bridge. Jeff and me are going back to catch him!"

"Why, it'll be dark by the time you get back!"

"I don't care, Pa!"

"Your mother's about got supper on the table, Leah. You know how it frets her when anybody's late to a meal."

"Pa, we may never get another chance at that old Napoleon!"

Daniel Carter stood silently in the fading twilight, his face stiff and his shoulders stooping.

Leah looked up at him with a startled expression. "Pa . . . is something wrong? Are you sick?" She was well aware of her father's poor health, and in the dusk he looked weak and frail.

"No, I'm not sick. But bad news has come."

"Bad news?"

"Yes, Leah . . . very bad news."

Jeff shifted awkwardly, as if he felt he was intruding into private affairs. "Well, I'll just be moseying home . . ."

Mr. Carter turned his gaze on the boy. "It's bad news for all of us, Jeff. For your family too."

"What is it, Pa? Is it the war? Is that it, Pa?"

"Yes, Leah."

Leah felt a coldness in her stomach, and fear ran along her nerves. Though the threat of war had lain

over them for a long time, somehow she had always thought that it would never really come. Though she'd heard the grown-ups talking about it, it had seemed like something far off. Now it was here.

She moved to her father's side and took his hand. "Is it certain, Pa?"

"I'm afraid so, Leah. News just came today. It started in South Carolina. There's a fort just off-shore—Fort Sumter, it's called. There were Union soldiers there—and the Southern forces began shelling it."

Jeff spoke up quickly. "Maybe the North will let the South be a different country, Mr. Carter."

Daniel Carter shook his head. "No, Jeff. President Lincoln has made it plain that he can tolerate slavery but that he won't stand for secession. It's his view that the Union must be held together."

Jeff stared, then muttered, "Guess I better get home, sir." He whirled and ran out of the yard, his lean form fading into the gathering darkness.

Leah watched him go, and a great sadness came over her. "Will Royal go to the war, Pa?"

"I expect he will, Leah." Her father stared after Jeff, then murmured, "And Tom Majors will go too. And that will break Sarah's heart!"

* * *

The dining room seemed to have become smaller, for it held not only all of the Carters but the Nelson Majors family as well. For years the two families had entertained each other, and as Mr. Carter looked around the crowded table, he said, "We haven't done this in a long time, Nelson. I've missed it."

Jeff's father looked down the table at Mrs. Carter. "I remember every meal I've ever had here, Mary. You're the second-best cook in the world!" Reaching out, he clasped his wife's hand and smiled. "No offense, but I've got to live with this woman for a long time. Pays to keep on the good side of her."

Jeff's mother was expecting a child, and she had not been well. She had eaten almost nothing, and her face was pale and drawn. But with an effort she smiled at her husband. "You'd do anything to get a chocolate cake out of me, Nelson!"

A laugh ran around the table.

Tom said, "Dad's not afraid of anybody—except my mother!" He was sitting across from Sarah, and Leah had noticed that the two of them had hardly spoken.

Then Tom looked across at Royal and said, "Well, Professor, when do you go back to college?" He grinned, adding, "In my opinion, you've been educated beyond your capacity!"

Royal looked up with a faint smile but said only, "My teachers would probably agree with you."

The meal went on, and then all of the women helped to clear the table. They returned from the kitchen carrying huge chunks of apple pie and steaming cups of coffee.

Leah set the largest before Jeff, whispering, "If you eat all that, you'll probably die!"

"I'll risk it." Jeff dug his fork into the hot dessert. When his mouth was full, he said, "This is good, Miz Carter!"

His father laughed. "Why, Jeff, the worst piece of pie you ever had was good. You never taste any-

thing, I don't think. Now slow down and show some manners!"

"Let the lad be, Nelson." Daniel Carter smiled. "I remember how I ate the same way when I was his age." His blue eyes grew soft. "I would go out into the garden and dig up a big white onion, hot as fire! And I'd just eat it like it was an apple." He stared down at his small slice of pie and shook his head sadly. "Only a boy can eat like that."

"I eat onions like that!" Royal exclaimed.

"I'd rather have this pie than an old onion," Leah piped up. Apple pie dribbled down her lip, but before her mother could rebuke her, she dabbed at it with her napkin.

The talk ran around the table. Only Morena Carter said nothing. She was a beautiful girl of eight but had never spoken. She had a sweet expression on her face—but somehow it was blank.

Leah reached out and fed her from time to time, spearing a fragrant piece of apple on a fork. Morena ate it daintily with a smile. She would never grow any older mentally, Leah understood, but she loved her little sister with a fierce devotion.

Her mother sat talking quietly to Mrs. Majors, speaking about the child that was to come. She was very concerned, for Irene Majors was somewhat old to be bearing a child. Mary remembered the hard time that Irene had gone through when Jeff was born—and she knew that Dr. Kinsman had advised her not to have more children.

"We'll have that baby of yours dressed up like a prince, Irene—or a princess." Mrs. Majors smiled. "I've still got some of that fine silk Daniel brought in from Lexington."

Jeff's father was listening, and something came into his face. "I guess you won't be able to help with the baby, Mary," he said quietly.

The talk that had been humming fell off, and Mr. Majors stared down at his coffee. When he looked up, his jaw was set, and Leah could see that he was unhappy. "It's good of you to offer—but we won't be here."

"Won't be here?" her father echoed. "Why you're not leaving, Nelson?"

"Yes, we're moving." He glanced at his wife and nodded. "We've sold our place—and we're moving to Richmond."

His words sent a chill through Leah. She twisted her head to look at Jeff—but he kept his eyes on the table.

Royal said, "I don't think that's wise, sir."

"I agree," her father spoke up at once. "I've been afraid of something like this. It's the war, of course—but the South can't win. Why, they have no army, no munitions factory, no navy! It can't survive. I see your mind is made up, but wait for six months, Nelson!"

"I know you mean well, Dan—" Jeff's father shrugged—"but Irene and I are agreed. You know Virginia's our home."

"Yes, and Nelson went to West Point. He was trained as an officer in the engineers, you know." Mrs. Majors's face was pale, but she said, "It's got to be."

"Irene, stay here with us—just until the baby is born," Leah's mother urged. "Then we'll take you to Richmond."

"No, I'll go with my family—but it's kind of you to offer, Mary."

Royal looked across the table toward Tom. "You'll be going too?"

"Yes. I'll go with the South, Royal—just as you'll go with the North."

The cheer had gone out of the room, and it was Jeff's father who finally said, "We've been close, very close. I don't reckon we could think more highly of anybody than we do of you folks. But we've got to go. I heard that General Scott offered to make Robert E. Lee commander of the whole Union army. But Lee said he had to go with his state—which is Virginia. I've got to do the same thing, Dan."

After the Majors family had left, Leah came to sit close to her father. "Do they *have* to go, Pa?" she asked plaintively.

He reached over and pulled her close. "I guess they do, Pet," he answered, calling her by her baby nickname. "And I guess all over the country families are being divided—friends are saying good-bye."

"I hate it, Pa!"

"So do I—but God will see us through it!"

* * *

"Sarah, come with me!"

"Oh, Tom, you know I can't!"

Sarah stood beside the towering pine tree that shadowed the family's small herd of milk cows. Tom knew her habits well enough to have found her. She'd been startled when he'd suddenly appeared. And she'd known at once why he'd come.

He put his hands on her shoulders. "I love you so much, Sarah! Come with me to Virginia. We'll get married—"

“No, Tom.” Sarah could not meet his eyes, for the longing she saw there was a reflection of her own feelings. “You know it’s impossible.”

Tom argued for half an hour but finally said heavily, “I guess I knew it was hopeless—but I had to try.”

“When will you be leaving?”

“Next week.” He suddenly took her in his arms and kissed her. “Wait for me, Sarah!”

And then he wheeled and ran to where he’d tied his horse.

Sarah watched him go, wondering if she’d ever see him again.

* * *

Jeff had known he’d have to say good-bye to Leah. “Pa, you all go on. I’ll catch up to you.”

Nelson Majors looked down. It was clear that he understood the misery in the boy. “All right. Tell her good-bye for all of us, son.”

Jeff mounted the roan mare and rode out of the yard. His mother was already in the wagon, and Tom was driving the second team. Everything had been sold except what was in those two wagons, and a sense of loss came over him as he left. This was the only home he’d known, and he hated the idea of leaving.

He galloped the mare, his head down, and when he arrived at the Carter place he saw Leah working in the garden.

When she saw him, she dropped her hoe and ran to meet him.

As Jeff slipped off the mare, he saw that she was close to crying. "I—I just came to say good-bye," he muttered.

Leah swallowed hard, her voice unsteady as she whispered, "You promised to write me, Jeff."

"Sure—and you've got to write back."

"I will—I promise."

Then they just stood there awkwardly.

Finally Leah cried in a forlorn voice, "Oh, Jeff! I won't have a friend!"

"Course you will!"

"Not like you!"

Jeff knew he had to go—or act like a baby! "Good-bye, Leah," he whispered hoarsely.

He ducked his head, meaning to leave—but Leah abruptly threw her arms around him. She was crying hard now, and her fingers dug into his back.

Jeff blinked hard, patting her clumsily on the shoulder. Then he pulled away and mounted his horse. As he rode down the trail he heard Leah crying after him, "Jeff! Jeff!"

When he was out of sight, he drew his sleeve fiercely across his eyes and clamped his teeth together. "Good-bye, Leah!" he muttered, then kicked the startled horse into a dead run.

Later that day the Majorses' two wagons crossed a rise, then came to a halt. Jeff's father said heavily, "Well, there's Virginia."

Jeff stared at the hills that rose in front of them but said nothing. Glancing at Tom, he noted that his brother's face was gloomy.

His mother said, probably as cheerfully as she could, "Well, it's hard to leave Kentucky—but Virginia's our home now."

“So it is, Irene.” His father spoke to the team, and they moved forward.

Soon they passed down into the valley and on to the green foothills of Virginia.