

***MARY NOAILLES
MURFREE***



***'WAY DOWN
IN LONESOME
COVE***

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One memorable night in Lonesome Cove the ranger of the county entered upon a momentous crisis in his life. What hour it was he could hardly have said, for the primitive household reckoned time by the sun when it shone, by the domestic routine when no better might be. It was late. The old crone in the chimney-corner nodded over her knitting. In the trundle-bed at the farther end of the shadowy room were transverse billows under the quilts, which intimated that the small children were numerous enough for the necessity of sleeping crosswise. He had smoked out many pipes, and at last knocked the cinder from the bowl. The great hickory logs had burned asunder and fallen from the stones that served as andirons. He began to slowly cover the embers with ashes, that the fire might keep till morning.

His wife, a faded woman, grown early old, was bringing the stone jar of yeast to place close by the hearth, that it might not "take a chill" in some sudden change of the night. It was heavy, and she bent in carrying it. Awkward, and perhaps nervous, she brought it sharply against the shovel in his hands.

The clash roused the old crone in the corner.

She recognized the situation instantly, and the features that sleep had relaxed into inexpressiveness took on a weary apprehension, which they wore like a habit. The man barely raised his surly black eyes, but his wife drew back humbly with a mutter of apology.

The next moment the shovel was almost thrust out of his grasp. A tiny barefooted girl, in a straight unbleached cotten night-gown and a quaint little cotton night-cap, cavalierly pushed him aside, that she might cover in the hot ashes a

burly sweet-potato, destined to slowly roast by morning. A long and careful job she made of it, and unconcernedly kept him waiting while she pattered back and forth about the hearth. She looked up once with an authoritative eye, and he hastily helped to adjust the potato with the end of the shovel. And then he glanced at her, incongruously enough, as if waiting for her autocratic nod of approval. She gravely accorded it, and pattered nimbly across the puncheon floor to the bed.

“Now,” he drawled, in gruff accents, “ef you-uns hev all had yer fill o' foolin' with this hyar fire, I'll kiver it, like I hev started out ter do.”

At this moment there was a loud trampling upon the porch without. The batten door shook violently. The ranger sprang up. As he frowned the hair on his scalp, drawn forward, seemed to rise like bristles.

“Dad-burn that thar fresky filly!” he cried, angrily. “Jes' brung her noisy bones up on that thar porch agin, an' her huffs will bust spang through the planks o' the floor the fust thing ye know.”

The narrow aperture, as he held the door ajar, showed outlined against the darkness the graceful head of a young mare, and once more hoof-beats resounded on the rotten planks of the porch.

Clouds were adrift in the sky. No star gleamed in the wide space high above the sombre mountains. On every side they encompassed Lonesome Cove, which seemed to have importunately thrust itself into the darkling solemnities of their intimacy.