

Our Forest Girl

by Nathan Gor

She is sweet, and small. Thin, like a sapling; quick, like fox; beautiful, like the feel of a fresh, wet breeze in the morning.

She is our girl.

Our forest girl.

Her hair is dark and soft, like the warm living earth. Her face is smooth, like stones long polished by the stream.

Our forest girl is part of us.

She has been here only six Springs. So little time. Some of us were growing here a thousand Springs ago. Yet we know she belongs. Her laughter flows up to our canopy, like the song of a bird long since quieted. Her smile shines at us brighter than the sun, now shrouded in grey cloud. Her small, warm body, curled up amongst our roots at night, lies like a precious golden fruit, fallen from the somewhere.

Our own fruit sustains her. She lives among us, and sleeps among us, and when she is happy, she sings to us.

Beauty never before known flows from her lips when she sings, and we feel a little stronger, and we grow our roots a little deeper, when her voice, high and soft, floats among our trunks.

She is a part of us, our forest girl.

Tramp. Tramp. Tramp.

We feel the marching boots. They are coming. They are coming here. The wind, cold and sharp, brings us news.

They are coming. The crushing boots. The harsh voices. The shots. The shots.

They are coming.

Tramp. Tramp. Tramp.

Our forest girl cannot feel them. Cannot understand the warning of the wind. She sings softly to herself, gathering flowers in the clearing.

Tramp. Tramp. Tramp.

They are drawing closer. Both of them.

Two armies.

Both terrible.

Both full of hatred.

Tramp. Tramp. Tramp.

They are coming.

She looks up from the flowers. The birds are quiet. The breeze has faltered.

She can hear them.

She clutches her flowers, and crouches behind one of us.

She thinks she is safe.

But they are here.

Tramp. Tramp. Tramp.

“Halt!”

They stop. The armies stand on each side of the clearing. Watching each other. Fearing each other.

Hating each other.

“Surrender now!” calls one.

“Will we not!” cries the other.

“For freedom!” they both cry, and aim their guns.

Our forest girl has been watching them. She sighs, and the sound is soft and flowing and sad, like the whispers of the moon to the earth.

She stands, and places her hand gently on one of our trunks, stroking our rough bark with infinite love.

“I must,” she says, and her voice is full of dread and fear and peace.

We understand.

She shows herself to the armies.

“Do not fight!” she calls, her voice high, and sweet.

They stare at her.

“But we must fight!” they say, “We must destroy the evil.”

“No,” she says, and sighs again, “You must let the evil be destroyed.”

“But we must win freedom!”

“Who in hating his brother has ever been free?” she asks, and her voice is laden with memories and pain.

They look at her. They are nodding. Their eyes are filling with tears. They are putting away their guns.

Our forest girl is smiling. She thinks that War has ended. She thinks that men want to do good. We have been growing here for too many Springs to believe that. We know what will happen. But it can't be helped.

“No,” whispers one soldier. One, lone soldier.

“No,” he says, and the others look at him, question in their eyes.

“No!” he shrieks, and he shoots our forest girl, right through the heart, “For freedom!”

She is dead. One lone heart of hate killed our light of love and peace.

The armies slaughter each other.

“For freedom!”

They suffer and scream in pain.

“For freedom!”

When all are dead or captured, they march away. Limping. Bleeding. Hating each other more than ever.

Leaving us with the body.

The body of our forest girl.

It is not right.

We mourn that night when the moon rises. We whisper our sorrow and heartache to the wind. The pain we remember well is ours now again.

Then we hear a song, low and still and hurting.

A song of grief.

He comes through the shadows, still singing his pain. His feet make no noise, and as he walks among us, he lays his hand on our trunks, stroking our rough bark with infinite sorrow.

He was a soldier in the battle. A yelling, killing, hating soldier.

But he isn't a soldier now.

He is a man.

A forest man.

He is strong, and walks upright. At the body of our girl he kneels.

“I am sorry,” he whispers, more softly than the rustle of our leaves, “I am sorry for what he did to you. I am sorry you suffered for his hatred.”

And the forest man cries, soft tears, gleaming like the sad stars above, on his cheeks.

“You were right. Evil will never be destroyed by hatred. Never by us alone. I will remember.”

And softly crying, he buries our forest girl. The wind blows around us, swirling through our leaves.

And above her body, he plants a seed.

It is right. It is right for our forest girl to be buried among us, by a forest man.

The Springs flow over us. Her seed grows. The seed of peace and love. Her tree becomes one of us. A tree tall and strong and straight, planted by one lone man who understood. One lone heart who our forest girl touched.

It is right.

She was sweet, and small. Thin, like a sapling; quick, like fox; beautiful, like the feel of a fresh, wet breeze in the morning.

Her touch has not faded.

Her sacrifice is not lost.

She is our girl.

Our forest girl.