

An Evil Day in Georgia (University of Tennessee Press, 2015)

The Osborns retired to bed early in the evening of 5 August as was their custom. The night filled with the noises of crickets and katydids. They had not been long asleep when a solitary figure approached Osborn's front porch. An evening visitor was a familiar occurrence for the Osborns. Because they did not keep evening hours at the store, local people and passers-by wanting service called up to the bedroom window for attention. Sadie Osborn complained that such visits hindered her and Coleman's sleep but they thought it their Christian duty to serve those who needed help. It was therefore with some reluctance that Sadie answered this caller on his fourth knock on the porch. From the window, she could not see the visitor standing behind a rocking chair but asked what he wanted.

"Gas." the man replied in a low voice.

Sadie told him that she did not want to wake Coleman, arguing that her husband had been nervous for two or three years and would not get back to sleep. The caller insisted, however, pleading that he was from Dalton, needed a five-gallon can of gas, and "would be mighty glad if he would get up and get the gas for him."

Sadie's point was moot; Osborn awoke on the first knock. Ending her conversation, Sadie turned to Coleman and explained the problem. "That is the same white man and negro that was here the other night," Osborn replied, moving over to the window. Sadie got up to put on the light while Coleman spoke to the man. Turning to Sadie, Coleman asked for his revolver then dressed. His request marked this visit as something unusual because this was the first time that he served a customer while armed. If he was frightened or expected trouble, however, he did not tell Sadie. She gave Coleman the revolver and he left through the back door.

Sadie did not see the transaction but heard Coleman drawing the gas. That procedure took about thirty minutes then all fell quiet. To her horror, the next sounds Sadie Osborn heard were two gunshots ripping the night air and the cry of "You!" from her husband. A second gun barked out in rapid fire before silence returned. In a dread panic, Sadie switched off the light, picked up the still sleeping Sue, and ran into the dining room. She put Sue down on the bed. Lee and Billy rushed through and they all climbed into the closet, whereupon Sadie locked the closet door. Coleman did not return.

Sadie and Lee talked quietly to each other as they waited for events to unfold, but on hearing a car start near the schoolhouse, they assumed it was safe to go out. Sadie hurried to the store still dressed in her nightclothes. The awful truth of what had transpired rushed in on Sadie as she stood outside the silent and darkened store too terrified to enter. She sensed in that moment that her husband was probably dead but ran anyway to the old Osborn house to get Lish Rich's help.

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