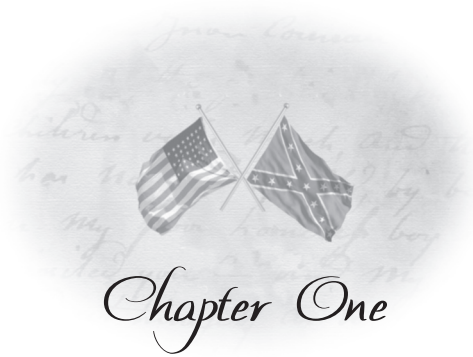




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Chapter One

The Holloway Farm, Adams County, Pennsylvania
Friday, June 26, 1863

Shhhh. Someone's coming." Liberty Holloway cocked her head toward the window as the muffled rhythm of hoofbeats rose above of the drumming rain. "Rebels?" The word sat, bitter, on her tongue as her fists sank deeper into the bread dough she'd been kneading. They had taken enough from her already, long before a single Confederate soldier had set foot in the North. Were they now here to raid her property as well?

"Traveler, looks like." Bella Jamison wiped her hands on her flour-dusted apron and peered between the curtains without parting them. "Wet and hungry, I'll wager. You know Black Horse Tavern and Inn down the road are full up right now, and you just hung that sign out by the road last week."

Libbie exhaled, her pulse matching her fear. Though she was a grown woman of nineteen years, she had yet to tame her runaway imagination.

But perhaps her hired help was right, and a traveler would be welcome, provided he could pay in greenbacks.

“Then again, we just can’t know for sure.” Bella backed away from the window, her coffee-with-cream complexion darkening in the shadows. “Rebels don’t always have proper uniforms, you know. I only see one on the road, but there could be more coming.”

Serves me right for not heeding Governor Curtin’s proclamation. Libbie pulled her hands from the sticky dough and went to the window herself. “If he doesn’t break into a gallop, we’ll have just enough time.”

Before the words had left her mouth, Bella had already moved the worktable away from the bricked-in fireplace and slid out several loose bricks. The cast-iron stove and oven served for their baking and cooking, but the summer kitchen’s walk-in fireplace still had its purpose. Together, they hurriedly filled the space to keep their stores out of sight: jars of molasses, peach and strawberry preserves, applesauce, tomatoes, and sacks of potatoes, onions, flour, and oats.

Drip. Drip. Drip. The leak in the corner marked time like a metronome as water dropped into a tin pie plate on the floor. Soon, all that was left was the freshly baked rye bread cooling on the sideboard, the abandoned lump of dough, and bunches of parsley and oregano hanging from the rafters to dry.

After replacing the bricks and the table in front of it, Liberty stole another glance out the window. “We can still hide the horses. Make haste.” Resolve pierced through her anxiety as she hung her apron on a wooden peg and stepped out into the rain with Bella close on her heels.

Hurrying into the barn, Libbie swished her skirts to scatter the clucking chickens in their path. The horses, Daisy and Romeo, twitched their tails as the women bridled them, then led them past the summer kitchen and into the great hall of the two-story stone farmhouse.

“We’ll be fine here.” Bella stroked Romeo’s withers to calm him. “Remember, you are the lady of this house. Stand your ground.”

“If it’s a Rebel—”

“I can take care of myself. Go.”

The hoofbeats grew louder outside. Liberty patted the thick, black braid that circled her head and hurried over to Major, the 140-pound Newfoundland sprawled on the rug inside the front door.

“Wake up, boy. Time to look menacing,” she said as she buried her hand in the scruff of his massive neck. Not that he could hear anything. “Come on, Major.” She hooked a finger under his collar and tugged. Groaning, he lumbered to his feet, yawned, and turned his head slightly to wink at her with his one good eye.

“Come, he’s almost here,” she whispered, and immediately regretted her choice of words. *I could swear that dog can read lips!* Major perked up and jumped at the door. “No, Major, not Levi.” She shook her head. “No Levi.”

Liberty led Major out onto the porch and pointed to the splitting wooden floorboards beside her. “Sit.” He obeyed. Wild roses the color of lemonade hugged the porch from all sides, lifting their faces to catch their drink. Their heady fragrance infused the air as a man on a gaunt horse rode up the lane to Libbie’s dooryard in no particular hurry, as if it weren’t raining at all, as if the shelter of a covered porch didn’t stand right in front of him. Feeling a pull on her skirt, she glanced down to find Major sitting sideways on one of his haunches, leaning against her leg. *So much for my canine protector.*

The stranger drew rein and dismounted his horse with graceful ease. A rain-soaked denim shirt and brown woolen trousers revealed a lean, muscular body, the kind that was used to work. A farmer perhaps? Carpenter? *Or a soldier.*

“You don’t look like a Rebel.” The words escaped her without thought.

So did Major. Before she could stop him, he ambled down the steps to the dooryard and slammed right into the man, stumbled back a little, then nuzzled his big furry black head under the man’s hand. Liberty sighed. Major’s sense of balance was lacking since he’d lost his eye.

The man bent to scratch Major behind the ears and on the white patch on his chest. “I take that as a compliment, ma’am.” His accent was

Northern, a blessed relief. Straightening again, he doffed his felt hat and bowed slightly before appraising her with moss green eyes. Rain darkened his hair to the color of polished oak and coursed down his stubbled cheeks. He took a step forward. "Miss Liberty?"

"How did you—"

"The sign by the road. Liberty Inn." He rubbed his horse's nose before glancing up at her again. "I'm guessing you might be Miss Liberty?"

Liberty spun the thin gold band around her finger. "Yes." She hoped he would not also guess how very new this venture was. She had three rooms ready for guests on the first floor of the farmhouse, each complete with quilts stitched by her own hand, but not one had yet been used.

"You've lost someone." His voice was quiet, tentative, but for all the world, Liberty could not think why. Two years into the war, women in mourning were a common sight. She crossed her arms across the pleated waist of her faded black dress and wished she had at least worn her hoops under her skirt this morning. She never did while doing chores, they got in the way so much. But now, the way he looked at her, she felt practically naked without them. "You'll forgive me if I ask you to kindly state your business, sir." She caught Major's eye and stabbed her finger at the porch floor again until the dog returned to her side.

He cleared his throat and offered a smile. "I'm a long way from home, and I sure could use a little hospitality."

"Do you mean to say that you need a room?"

"I have neither time nor money for a room, but my bread basket's been empty for quite a spell." He laid a hand on his stomach. "Could you spare anything for me to eat?"

She sighed. Times were tight at Holloway Farm, but she'd never been very good at saying no, to anyone. "Your mount looks as though he could eat something too." She led them both to the barn where the horse could eat hay and oats, then took the stranger into the summer kitchen. Twenty feet behind the house, this was the small outbuilding where she did most cooking, baking, preserving, and laundry during

the hottest season of the year. It would serve to feed a stranger without allowing him into the house.

“Sit there.” She pointed to the rough-hewn table butting up against the old fireplace and crossed the room to slice a loaf cooling on the sideboard. Major spread himself out to dry on the floor in front of the warm stove, the smells of wet dog and fresh bread thickening the air.

When Libbie turned back to the table, she found the man still standing. He shrugged, his hat still in his hands. “I never sit when a lady still stands. Won’t you join me? Or do you mean to make me stand while I eat alone, like a common beggar?” His smile dissolved any argument on the tip of her tongue, and she allowed him to seat her at the worktable, her face flooding with warmth that did not come from the oven. Even Levi’s manners had not gone this far. But to be fair, Libbie had not expected it. Aunt Helen had raised her to believe that manners were not meant to be wasted on the likes of her. Liberty swallowed. She should not think anything uncharitable of the dead. Either of them.

The man’s stomach growled as she set the loaf of rye on the table, yet he made no move for it. “Are you waiting for me to serve you?” The question sounded more prickly than she intended.

“Ladies first.” He nodded at the bread. “You baked it. You should be the first to enjoy it.”

“Well, you certainly don’t act like a beggar,” Libbie admitted as she helped herself to a steaming piece.

“Wouldn’t Mama be proud.” He laughed, but a shadow passed over his face. He took a slice for himself then, but before taking a bite, bowed his head for a moment.

Then he ate. And ate—until the loaf was gone.

Finally, when the last crumb had disappeared, he leaned back in his chair and raked a hand through his hair. “I haven’t been full in a very long time. Thank you, ma’am.”

She nodded and stood, and so did he.

“It doesn’t suit me to take something for nothing, though.” He flicked a glance at the water dimpling in the pie plate. “I can fix that for you.”

“You needn’t trouble yourself.”

“Your husband certainly didn’t.” He dropped his gaze to the ring she twisted on her finger. “Perhaps he is away.”

“Quite. He’s dead.” Libbie bit her tongue in punishment for its bluntness.

His eyes softened. “I do beg your pardon. I meant no disrespect.”

“I can get along just fine by myself.” Liberty dropped her voice. “This is my property, and—”

“Yours?”

Libbie blinked. Most likely, he thought her too young to own property. “Yes, mine. So I should manage it myself. It wouldn’t do to let you spoil me.”

One eyebrow hitched up as he looked down at her. “Every woman deserves to be taken care of every now and then, no matter how capable you are.” An easy smile curved his lips. “I’d consider it a pleasure to help.”

“That isn’t necessary.” To be alone with a man, even for this long—it was almost indecent. Liberty hoped the warmth she felt in her face did not color her cheeks.

“Necessary? Neither was your sharing your bread with me. But courtesy, kindness, and good manners are all necessary now more than ever.”

“Thank you kindly, but I’m sure you have some place to be. God-speed on your journey.” She waited for him to take his leave. But, rolling the brim of his hat in his hands, he remained planted in the doorway. Rain fell on the ground behind him, speckling his trousers with tiny flecks of mud.

“I am sorry for your loss, truly.” His eyes probed her face, and she wondered if she looked sorry for her loss, too. Or just guilty. “How long’s it been? Since your husband died.”

She swallowed. “Since the Battle of Bull Run. The first.”

“Almost two years. You should be out of mourning soon.”

Liberty stiffened. “If I so choose. Some widows wear black for the

rest of their lives.” *Will I forever be told what to do?*

“And bury yourself with the dead? I can’t imagine that kind of life for you.”

Liberty stared at him. “I can’t imagine why in heaven’s name you—a perfect stranger—feel compelled to even comment on such a private matter! It’s not your place to judge.” She turned her back and pummeled the bread dough she’d left on the sideboard earlier that morning.

“There’s enough death in this war as it is, ma’am.” His tone was tender, not spiteful. As hers had been. “Just when do you plan to come on back to the land of the living? There’s so much more to life than death, you know. Sure would hate for you to miss out on it.”

An unwelcome tingle ran down her spine. “It’s not your concern.” She pounded the dough again.

“Just remember what I said. There is more to life than death. Whatever happens. There is more.”

“You speak in riddles.”

“You’ll see soon enough.” He stepped outside, and Liberty followed, her doughy fingers gumming together in the rain. “If I were you, I’d go visit kinfolk somewhere else. And don’t come back for a few weeks.” As if she had family to visit. As if she had anyone at all, aside from her hired hands and her horse.

Her mouth went dry. “What do you know?”

“There’s trouble brewing.”

“We’ve been hearing that for months.” But her pulse quickened at the intensity of his gaze. “You’re crying wolf along with the rest of them.”

He looked down at her for a moment, as if testing his reply in his mind before speaking. “Don’t you remember? In the end, the wolf actually came.”

“It will take more than a wolf to scare me off my farm.”

The mysterious stranger shook his head and sighed. “Good day to you. Be well.” He held her in his gaze for a heartbeat before tipping his hat and fading back into the rain.

Liberty's heart thundered as she entered the farmhouse, still dripping with rain. *It could have been worse.* She told herself. *It could have been a raiding party.*

But it wasn't. It was just a man passing through. Now if only his words weren't still echoing in her mind.

As she passed her bedroom on the way to the great hall, she caught a glimpse of herself in the looking glass on her bureau, and paused to weave an errant curl back into her braid.

She walked closer to the mirror. At a mere five feet two inches short, if it wasn't for the gentle curve of her waist and the way her corset filled out her bodice, she could pass for a tall child. She ventured a smile, and dimples popped into her cheeks. No one would guess she was old enough to be married, let alone widowed. But her sapphire blue eyes were shadowed by the valley of death the war had carved into her life.

When do you plan to come on back to the land of the living?

The question was, when would her conscience allow it?

She picked up a framed daguerreotype of Levi in his new uniform and studied it. She was sure he had been told not to smile while they captured his image, but he couldn't help it. He was so happy to fight for the Union, even though it meant taking a break from his studies at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg to do it. *I want to fight while I have the chance,* he had told her. *The war will be over before you know it, Libbie, and I have to do my part.* They married first, right after she had come out of mourning for Aunt Helen. It had seemed like perfect timing, and a dream come true for the orphan girl. A family of her own. A new beginning.

But I barely knew him. She was seventeen when they married, a mere child. They knew nothing, absolutely nothing. They believed he would be fine, would come back and finish his schooling and take over the Holloway Farm, and they'd have the rest of their lives to discover exactly what it was they loved about each other. The thought of his possible death was only fleeting. The idea that he may be wounded—

wounded beyond recognition and yet still alive—never occurred to either one of them. Her mind reeled back to the day she learned the news.

She had not responded well.

Struggling to bridle her memories so they would not run away with her again, Libbie sat on the edge of her bed and absentmindedly traced with her finger the pattern of the colorful patchwork quilt that covered it. Her first. She smiled wistfully as the last two years flashed through her mind. When other girls her age were having fun together and being courted by their beaux, Liberty Holloway was home, forced into the social isolation of widowhood, learning to quilt and preserve the harvest she grew with her hired hand.

Not that it was that different from before . . . As an orphan living with a spinster in a community of large families, Libbie had always been an oddity, a curiosity, but never really a friend. Levi's death had merely changed the reason for her solitude. She went from being Libbie the Orphan to Libbie the Widowed Bride.

But that was two years ago. *There's so much more to life than death.* Levi would have agreed. He had told her, in his one passing moment of gravity, that if he died, he would be happy knowing he had died in the service of his country. That he wanted her to find a way to be happy, too.

Maybe it was time, at long last, to try.

Kneeling on the rag rug at the end of her bed, Libbie pried up a loose floorboard, dug out the key she placed there nearly two years ago, and unlocked the cedar chest in front of her. The smell of a sunbaked forest greeted her as she lifted the lid, and she inhaled deeply. Slowly at first, and then like a child on Christmas morning, she lifted out dress after dress that she hadn't seen since those first bewildering months of the war. They were simple, practical, made by her own hand. But they weren't black, and some of them were even pretty.

Liberty's eyes misted over, and suddenly, she couldn't get her black crepe off fast enough. After unfastening the fabric-covered buttons she could reach, she cast her mourning into a rusty black puddle on the floor and stepped into the blue muslin, perfect for a summer day.

“What are you doing?”

Libbie jumped at the sound of Bella’s voice from the hallway. Nervous laughter trickled from her lips at the sight of her standing there with two horses in tow, smelling of damp earth and hay. “I’m so sorry to keep you waiting. I was on my way to get you. The danger has passed, we’re alone again.”

Bella’s velvety brown eyes widened as she looked at the discarded mourning dress and back to Liberty. “Those mourning clothes were your protection, Miss Liberty. No man, no matter how roguish, would try to take advantage of a woman in mourning.”

Liberty set her lips in a thin line. For hired help, Bella certainly could be outspoken. “Am I not free to make my own decision?” She shook the ring off her finger and into the jewelry box on her bureau. “It’s been long enough. Now fasten me up, please.”

Bella’s brow creased, but she obeyed. “I don’t think your mama would approve.” It was barely a whisper.

Libbie caught Bella’s eye in the looking glass, and with uncharacteristic sharpness, said, “My mother? You know she’s not around. She never was.”

Guilt trickled over Silas Ford as he rode east on Hagerstown Road, away from the Holloway farm. He hated what he had become. And there was no place like Gettysburg to remind him of just how far he had fallen.

The Lutheran Theological Seminary loomed ahead on Seminary Ridge, its cupola white against the pewter grey sky. Silas thought he’d never see it again—not after what happened before his final year as a student there. Yet here he was, near enough to see that the brick building remained unchanged, while he was so far from being the pastor the seminary had trained him to be that the contrast nearly choked him. *Hope deferred maketh the heart sick.*

But regret accomplished nothing. Silas swallowed the lump in his

throat and clucked his tongue, urging Bullet up the hill. It was an odd name for a horse whose owner refused to carry a gun. Named before it had come into Silas's possession, Silas had tried to change it, but the horse only responded to "Bullet." As a Lutheran, Silas wasn't supposed to believe in penance, but that's what it felt like. Not that he needed such an ever-present reminder of the sin that had changed more than just his life.

Mud sucked at Bullet's hooves as he carried Silas over the ridge and down the other side, toward town. With Holloway Farm out of sight behind Seminary Ridge, Silas breathed easier.

At least Liberty hadn't recognized him. He almost gave himself away back there, calling her by name like that. It was pure luck that he remembered the wooden sign by the road, the U.S. flag unfurling behind the lettering. If he hadn't known better, he would have thought "Liberty" was some reference to a Northern ideal, and not the name of a girl.

"Woman," he muttered, correcting himself. She was not the girl of fourteen summers he remembered, wilting beneath the scrutiny of the spinster who had hired him to repair her fences. No, Liberty had grown into a woman.

"And I've grown into an old man." The soft body of a student had been chiseled into muscular leanness. The fair skin and butter-blond hair he'd brought with him to seminary were now darker. The last time he'd seen a looking glass, he'd seen grey hair sprouting at his temples, and lines framing his eyes, though he was only twenty-eight. It should not have surprised him, not after what he'd seen. He doubted that anyone in Gettysburg would recognize him. It would be far easier if they didn't.

Thoughts of Silas's past scattered as he entered Gettysburg, carefully riding slow enough to appear casual, but fast enough that he did not look aimless. He had a purpose, indeed. He was oath-bound. The fact that it had been against his will had no bearing on his situation now.

"Whoa, Bullet." Though this stop was not part of his assignment,

Silas drew rein and dismounted in front of Christ Lutheran Church on Chambersburg Street. Removing his hat out of habit, he relished the gentle shower streaming over his body. Oh, how he wanted to be clean.

After tying Bullet to the hitching post in the street, he climbed the stone stairs, passed through the white columns under the portico, and slipped inside the arched door.

And waited. And hoped. Maybe here, in this church, he would feel closer to God than he did in his saddle. Silas did not bother to sit down, knowing his rain-soaked trousers would dampen the oak pews. And if God could meet him on a bench, He could just as well meet him standing in the back. He had met him here before. This was where Silas had worshiped alongside his fellow seminary students. That pew—fourth from the front on the left side—that was where he sat when Rev. Samuel Schmucker had fanned into flame the fire that had been kindling in his belly for the freedom of all men, regardless of color. When Schmucker's wife brought slaves into their marriage years ago, he taught and trained them to live as free men and women, then freed them. The reverend was the seminary founder, Silas's professor, and his role model. *What must he think of me now?* Silas shuddered. With any luck, he'd forgotten him all together.

Rolling the brim of his hat in his hands, he surveyed the narrow stained-glass windows. If the sun were shining, mosaics of vibrant color would depict inspiring stories from the Bible.

But the sun was not shining. So he closed his eyes, listening for God to speak to him anyway, and heard—nothing. Felt nothing. He sighed. *If I were God, would I want to talk to Silas Ford?* His mama had called times like these dry spells. "But the important thing," she had said, "is to keep talking to God anyway, even if He isn't talking back."

Forgive me, Silas prayed. *Show me the way out.* And he left the church feeling as much like a hypocrite as he ever had.

Chambersburg Street was springing to life as he reached Bullet and untied him, with women and children and a handful of men all headed toward the center of town.

“Excuse me,” he called down to a young lady carrying a tray of bread down the sidewalk. “Is there a parade somewhere?”

The girl beamed up at him. “Better,” she chirped. “Our soldiers are back!”

He raised his eyebrows. “Did they take a holiday? You must forgive me, I’m not from around here.”

“I know.” She laughed. “I’m sure I’d remember you if I’d seen you before.” She flashed a smile that made his skin creep, but he waited for more information. Girls were always ready to talk. “Last week, after President Lincoln called for a hundred thousand more volunteers to defend us from the Rebels, Governor Curtin issued a call asking for fifty thousand of those men to come from Pennsylvania.”

Silas swallowed his surprise. Fifty thousand? One hundred thousand? Did they have that many men to spare?

“So about sixty—or was it seventy?—of our boys from the college and seminary here signed up and went to Harrisburg. They are part of Company A, of the 26th Pennsylvania Emergency Infantry regiment. And now the 26th has just arrived by train!”

“Is that so?” Silas’s gaze followed the people now streaming past them into the square. College and seminary recruits? They’d be as green as the apples he’d eaten yesterday, and softer, too.

“Yes indeed!” The woman’s chipper voice grated on him. “They were supposed to arrive last night, but their train hit a cow on the track and it derailed them.” She giggled. “Let’s not bring that up to them. I’m just glad they’re here to protect us now.”

“Protect you from . . .”

“My goodness, you really are not from anywhere around here, are you? Haven’t you heard? The Rebel army is around here somewhere! They’ll be on to Washington next, if we don’t stop them!”

“We?”

“They.” She laughed brightly. “I meant ‘they.’ Women have no part in war. Come on, we’ll miss them!”

Soon Chambersburg Street opened into the town square, or The

Diamond, as locals called it, and the girl ran off to join some friends. A young boy tugged on his stirrup and offered to sell him a plug of tobacco.

“No thanks, can’t stand the stuff.” Silas smiled at the puzzled expression on the boy’s face before the child shrugged and tried for another customer.

Silas remained on the edge and watched smooth-faced boys in blue peacock about. *So you traded your textbooks and Bibles for rifles, did you?* His stomach soured for them, for their mothers and sweethearts. The beat of a drum hammered in Silas’s chest as the high-pitched fife played Yankee Doodle to a backdrop of feminine cheers. Even the dripping, sullen sky seemed unable to dampen the throng now filling The Diamond.

How pitiful. How pathetic. They would not cheer if they knew what he knew. They would not believe him if he told them.

Their march ended, the uniformed students milled about the crowd, accepting pies and coffee from grateful townsfolk.

“You a seminary student?” Silas called down to a soldier near him. With cheeks bulging with cherries, the boy nodded in the affirmative. “Is Rev. Schmucker still teaching? He was my professor once upon a time.”

The student-soldier’s eyes brightened. “You don’t say! When did you graduate?”

Silas rubbed a hand over his stubbled jaw. “Let’s see—I was there in ’57 and ’58.”

“Why then, you must have known Silas Ford!”

“As a matter of fact—” He stopped himself. “Why do you say that?”

“Oh every student from ’57 on knows him. For pity’s sake, the whole town knows about him. He’s a legend! You know—‘Silas Ford, man of the Lord?’”

Silas was stunned. “Man of the Lord?” He dared to believe it was true of him once, but—

“Of course! ‘Silas Ford, man of the Lord, took slaves to bed and shot Pa dead!’ Remember him now? Did you have any idea he was a bad egg?”

His blood turned to ice in his veins. “No, no, you must be mistaken.”

The boy shook his head. “Hardly. Watch this. Hey Blevens!” he shouted to another soldier. “Finish this rhyme: Silas Ford, man of the Lord . . .”

“Took slaves to bed and shot Pa dead!” Blevens hadn’t missed a beat.

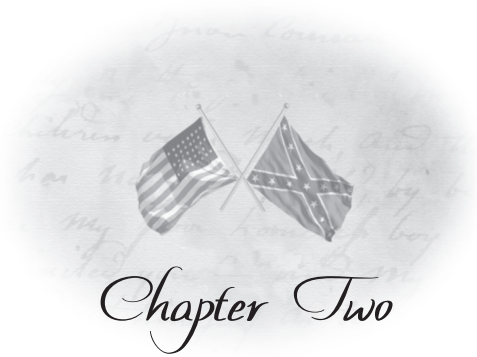
Silas was going to be sick.

“You see?” The boy took another bite of cherry pie. “I can’t understand how you don’t know about him. Silas Ford is a cautionary tale. His mother wrote a letter to Rev. Schmucker explaining why he wasn’t coming back, and word got out quick. Just goes to show no matter how close we feel to God, we can all fall away as he did . . .” Another bite of pie.

Silas had heard enough. Clucking his tongue to Bullet, he began threading his way out of The Diamond.

Then he saw Liberty on the other side of the square, a simple blue dress gracing her frame as she climbed down from her buggy and joined the crowd. So she decided to put off mourning after all. *Does she know the rhyme too? Does she believe it?* Silas was glad she didn’t see him. He wanted to watch her, unnoticed. She hadn’t recognized him this morning, but what if she had a sudden recollection? Still, he couldn’t help but watch Liberty one more moment as the old protective instinct for the orphan girl swelled in his chest.

Then he remembered why he was here in the first place, and the smile faded. Protecting the innocent was not part of his line of work. And it was certainly not what he was known for in Gettysburg.



Chapter Two

Bella could still smell that rye bread and rhubarb pie she'd made at the Holloway Farm as she let herself into her modest two-story house on South Washington Street. She was tempted to bake a pie for herself just to have that heavenly smell of buttery crust and tangy-sweet rhubarb permeate every corner of her comfortable home.

Large pink flowers bloomed on the creamy papered walls of her kitchen above wainscoting painted a mellow green. Open shelving revealed crocks of coffee beans, flour, lard, and sugar, while jelly pots sparkled with cherry and peach preserves. It was not furnished as finely as the homes of the white women she worked for, but it was her home— together with Abraham—and that was what was important. No mistress above her here. No master, no overseer, no driver. Here, she was her own mistress. As long as Bella had a choice, she would never consent to live in someone else's home again.

But there was no denying she still needed white folks as employers. Her eyes drifted to the baskets of laundry waiting to be ironed, and a sigh escaped her. At least it was already washed. Just the thought of

toiling over a washboard in a bucket of water made her back muscles tie themselves up in knots. She much preferred tasks that allowed her to stand straight. Some days, judging by the way she felt, even she didn't believe she was only thirty-six years old. Maybe her body still suffered from years of bending over harvesting rice down on Georgia's St. Simons Island. Maybe the memory alone was enough to cause the ache.

Balderdash. She scolded herself as she dropped some kindling into the stove and lit the fire that would heat the iron on top. *That was a lifetime ago.* But a nest of hornets had buzzed in her belly this morning when she was hiding with the horses. Her past was not so distant that the idea of repeating it couldn't shake her to the core of her being. She had been lucky today.

Foolish is more like it, she could almost hear her friend Missy Pratt say. Not that Missy was anywhere near here anymore. She and most of her neighbors had packed up their belongings as best as they could and skedaddled as soon as Governor Curtin announced the Confederate army was now in Pennsylvania. Balancing bundles on their heads, pushing wheelbarrows or driving wagons of their earthly possession, some fled to Yellow Hill, seven miles north of Gettysburg, some to the capital, Harrisburg, and some to Philadelphia. Others took the path of the Underground Railroad farther north, as if they were runaway slaves and not free blacks minding their own business in a free state. The western section of town was now all but vacant of its nearly two hundred colored folks.

The rain drummed harder outside, and Bella shivered as she tossed a glance at the Log Cabin quilt draped over the couch in the next room. How many times had she thrown that quilt over the clothesline outside as if she were airing it out? To the people who needed to hear it, the message was clear: *Welcome, night travelers. This is a safe house on your journey.* Only seven miles north of the Mason Dixon line, Gettysburg was among the first stops for many of them. The passing of the Fugitive Slave Law thirteen years ago gave slave catchers every "right" to come hunting for humans with their bloodhounds, and hunt they did.

Even Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of six months ago did not entirely stem the tide of runaway slaves. Freedom did not apply to slaves within the border states of Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky, and Missouri. Bella and Abraham would harbor the souls seeking freedom until it was time to secret them away to the McAllister Grist Mill where they would hide under the mill wheel until it was time to move again. Everyone hoped that Rock Creek and the pond by the mill would throw the dogs off the scent.

Humming "Wade in the Water," Bella gripped the iron with a potholder, turned it over and spit on the surface to test the heat. It was ready. As she ironed Mrs. Shriver's blouse, Bella wished it were as easy to smooth out the wrinkles in her life.

A sharp rapping on the door snapped Bella out of her reverie. As soon as she opened the door, the shining black face of old Hester King, or Aunt Hester, as everyone called her, beamed up at her.

"I saw a light in your window, baby, and just thought I'd step in to check on you." She entered, and a whoosh of humid air came with her, like a puff of hot breath, sticking to Bella's skin.

She latched the door behind her and bent down to kiss Aunt Hester's cheeks in greeting. "I thought you'd be working at the Fosters' today."

"I have today off. I was fixin' to work in the garden, but not in this wet mess." She hung her shawl on a wooden peg inside the door and sat at the kitchen table, her usual sign she was planning to stay for tea. Bella moved the copper teakettle to the spot on the stove that was still hot from heating the iron, then sat across from her old friend.

"It's mighty quiet around here now, isn't it?" Bella folded her arms across the red and white checked tablecloth.

"Should be, after all that racket they all made skedadddling the place. Did you hear the way they were carrying on? The mamas and daddies scaring their children to death to keep up the pace."

"But you're not scared."

"No. If things turn ugly, the Foster family said they'd protect me."

It was only right. She'd been their washerwoman for more than a decade. "And you? You're not afraid?"

Bella shrugged. "My feelings have little to do with my options."

Aunt Hester nodded slowly. "Don't I know that's right."

"If I leave, who will protect our home?" Bella raised her eyes. "Besides, three of the women I work for have all told me if I leave I won't be getting my job back."

"Ain't there no money coming in from Abraham?"

Bella clenched her teeth before responding. It was a question she'd asked herself every time the mail failed to bring her the answer she so desperately desired. "No. I don't understand it. He's off fighting only God knows where—and still no sign of a paycheck."

She clamped down on the rest of her thoughts on the subject before they spilled out of her. She wasn't proud of her sentiments. But how she wished she would have hidden the copy of *The Christian Recorder* advertising the fact the Frederick Douglass was speaking in Philadelphia in March! If he hadn't gone, if he hadn't heard the call for colored men to serve in the 54th Massachusetts, he'd still be here. She wouldn't be alone.

No, those were thoughts best kept hidden in the dark corners of her mind—the ones that needed to be swept out the most, but were most often neglected out of pure denial. Instead, all she said was, "My work is all I've got to keep us afloat right now. If I leave, we'll have nothing left."

Aunt Hester reached across the table and squeezed Bella's hand.

"It's not right that he should be fighting for freedom somewhere else when ours is in jeopardy right here."

"Don't you be listening to no nasty stories now, baby. You free, and I is too. Our days in bondage are over. We in charge of our own lives, and ain't nothing going to change that."

Steam billowed out of the teakettle's spout, and Bella jumped up to pour two cups, glad Aunt Hester couldn't see the tears welling up in her eyes. The truth was, she felt less like the mistress of her own life than she had in a long time, and the feeling chafed her raw. There had been

a time when she had been able to shrug off stories of kidnapped colored folks. But that time was over. Now the stories weren't just rumors—they were headlines.

In spite of herself, her hands were unsteady as she placed the mismatched porcelain cups and saucers on the table. “Didn't you hear what Jenkins Confederate cavalry did, just eleven days ago?”

“I heard.” Aunt Hester grinned.

“Why are you smiling?” Bella was incredulous. “In Chambersburg, they captured between thirty and forty black women and children—*women and children*—and started driving them in wagons back down South.”

“I smiling because the good white folks rescued them. The captives were freed.”

Bella sipped her tea before saying that not all white folks would be so bold. Before reminding Aunt Hester that the entire town nearly paid the price. Jenkins demanded \$50,000 in compensation for the blacks, who he claimed were his property. When the town leaders refused, Jenkins threatened to return in two hours to burn the town. Fourteen of the black women who had just been freed met with the town leaders and offered to give themselves up to Jenkins to spare the town. The town leaders refused, but Jenkins never returned. But not all such stories had happy endings.

Bella tightened her grip on her cup. “Did you see Tuesday's paper? *The Adams Sentinel*?”

“You know I can't read. Only news I get is what other folks tell me.”

“Well, let me tell you. Rebels took possession of Hagerstown last Monday, and when they left two days later, they carried off with them horses and ‘quite a number of colored persons.’ But, the paper says, other than that, they did ‘very little damage.’ Isn't that a relief?” Sarcasm edged Bella's voice. “Very little damage! I'm sure the people on their way to the auction blocks would say otherwise!”

Slowly, Aunt Hester sipped her tea and replaced the cup on its saucer before folding her hands on the table. “And yet you still here.

Ain't you? You gotta know that you will be protected from such a fate, otherwise wouldn't you be gone, too?"

Bella stared at the steam curling up from her tea for a moment before answering. "Chambersburg is twenty-three miles to the west. Hagerstown is in Maryland, thirty-two miles to the southwest. Gettysburg may be spared."

"Just so." Aunt Hester nodded, eyes twinkling. "The good Lord didn't bring you up from slavery to send you back down to it. You gotta grab on to hope, child, and make sure that hope is tied to God above. He is our hiding place."

Bella had too much respect for Aunt Hester to point out that God had not hidden the colored folks of Hagerstown very well. Most likely, it was sacrilegious even to think it, but she could not help herself. They were probably in the deep South by now, their lives forever changed. The old woman sitting across from her was serene, confident. Content. Bella would not take that from her. Instead, she nodded and dredged up a smile.

Aunt Hester's gaze flicked to the window. "Rain stopped! Well, baby, I do believe it's time for me to check on my spring vegetables. Stop by if you get lonely." She brought her cup and saucer to the dry sink, plucked her shawl off the peg, and let herself out the door.

After watching Aunt Hester amble down the wooden sidewalk, Bella returned to her chore as their conversation rolled over in her mind. Biting her lip, she pushed the iron across the linen, back and forth, over and over. Truth be told, protecting her home and keeping her jobs were not the only reason she remained in Gettysburg. She had another reason for staying.

But that truth would not be told. Not ever.

Suddenly, her windows rattled. *Thunder? I thought the rain had stopped.* Bella stepped outside. Just a few blocks north, a dozen horsemen crashed pell-mell past South Washington Street on Chambersburg Pike. They were yelling. What were they yelling? Bella trotted toward the intersection, her heart rate quickly matching the horses' speed. People came

out of their houses and lined the streets as the men raced up and down, their horses kicking up chunks of mud from the road. It was Robert Bell's Independent Cavalry. They were shouting the news, all of them, at the same time. Bella strained to make sense of their wild cries.

"The 26th has been routed!" *The 26th? The town's defenders? Already?*

"Most of them have been captured! The survivors are retreating to Gettysburg now!"

"Rebels in pursuit! They'll be in Gettysburg within the hour!"

And they left.

The 26th was in tatters. The Philadelphia City Troops, sent to reinforce the 26th, were nowhere to be found. Gettysburg's Independent Cavalry had just delivered their news and run away for their lives. Bella turned back. Her legs propelled her down the wooden sidewalk while women all over Gettysburg stood in their doorways and called for their children to come home. Windows shuttered. Doors slammed and latched. Quiet pulsed in her ears as Bella reached her house.

The rain had stopped, but another storm was rolling in. And the women and children were completely unprotected.

Liberty had gone to the Ladies Union Relief Society meeting expecting—no, hoping for—a sense of belonging. Support, even, for her decision to put mourning behind her. What she got instead, before she even opened her sewing basket, felt more like a slap in the face.

"You were a symbol," Geraldine Bennett said matter-of-factly. "A reminder to all of us here of the sacrifices our boys in blue are making. You were an inspiration to the town, a living remembrance of the ultimate price for freedom. You were the Widowed Bride. The Widow of Gettysburg."

The words were shards of glass, carving away her own delusion. *How could I not have seen it? They accepted me only because my husband died in the war.* If he hadn't, she would have still been on the outside looking in.

“I’d rather be known for who I am than for what—for who—I’ve lost.” Liberty’s voice sounded small. She did not want to anger Geraldine.

“My dear, any one of us can stitch and sew, scrape lint, and rip bandages. You were special.”

Were. Tears pricked Liberty’s eyes as the message washed over her, seeped into her pores. *You were valuable as a symbol. Taking away the symbol takes away the value. You are no longer special.*

“We were hoping you would be in the parade again this year, representing the Ladies Union Relief Society.”

“I can still do that. I’m still a widow, aren’t I? I still support our soldiers.”

“But if you refuse to wear mourning clothes, why would we put you in the parade? Would anyone recognize you without your Widow’s Weeds?” She trailed off. “You must understand, Liberty. You were a symbol.” The hateful word, again.

And here I thought I was a person. Knowing full well she was breaching proper etiquette once again, Libbie swept out of the church without so much as a goodbye, leaving a group of tittering women in her wake. Whispers of “selfish” and “impertinent” chased after her into the street, but not one of the women tried to stop her.

Climbing into her buggy, Liberty slapped the reins on Daisy’s back and the mare lurched into motion, never slowing until she stopped at Evergreen Cemetery.

Kneeling in front of Levi’s tombstone, her body rocked with the torrent of emotion. She appeared braver this morning when a strange man came to her farm than she did when faced with a group of women. *Because I care what they think of me.* Maybe she shouldn’t. Life surely would be easier if she didn’t. But heaven help her, she did.

“Oh Levi,” she said to the plot of earth in front of her. In the last two years she had said more to him right here than she had while they were alive. “If you wanted me to be happy, that should be enough for me. Please give me peace so I can live my life . . .”

A shadow darkened the tombstone, and Libbie looked up.

“Excuse me, Liberty. Were you praying?” It was Elizabeth Thorn, acting as the cemetery groundskeeper in her soldier husband’s absence.

“No—why?”

“I thought I heard you ask for peace.” Her hands rested on the swell of her belly. She’d have her fourth child by fall.

“I did.”

“*Ja*, I thought as much.” For having moved with her parents to America from Germany only nine years ago, her English was very good. “Lots of people talk to their loved ones in the ground. If they would talk to the good Lord nearly half as much, they’d be so much better off.” She paused. “Do you pray, Liberty?”

Such a personal question. But then, she and Elizabeth had a close relationship—one of the very few that was genuine. It was impossible to stick to small talk and pleasantries when you only met in a graveyard. Elizabeth had comforted her after the deaths of both Aunt Helen and Levi. Her three boys had melted her heart and made her laugh. Elizabeth had earned the right, in the last few years, to ask the questions that dug deep.

“I pray.” She looked up, thankful the summer breeze had blown the clouds from the brilliant blue sky. “But I must admit, it’s hard to pray to a God I can’t see, who doesn’t talk back to me.”

Elizabeth eased herself down on the ground next to Libbie, paying no mind to the wet grass that would dampen her skirt. “But you talk to Levi. Does he talk back to you?”

Words webbed in Libbie’s chest, and she looked away. Levi had been quiet, studious. Still, “If I can remember what he said when he was here,” she tried, “I can imagine what he would say to me now.”

Elizabeth wrapped her arm around Liberty’s shoulders, as she had done so many times before. “*Ja*, this is good. That’s exactly right. Prayer works the same way. Share your heart. Remember what Jesus said when He was here—read the Gospels—and try to imagine what He’d say to you now.”

Liberty sighed. "I'll try."

"I am proud of you." Elizabeth pinched the sleeve of Libbie's blue calico dress and gave a little tug. "For moving on. It is the right thing to do."

With a crooked smile, Liberty pushed herself up from the ground. "Speaking of moving on, I best be on my way." She lent a hand to Elizabeth and helped her pregnant friend up. Without bothering to visit Aunt Helen's grave, they walked back to the brick-arched gatehouse where Elizabeth's family lived and looked down from Cemetery Hill.

Everything looked so peaceful from up here. Split-rail fences stitched together rolling fields of green grass and purple clover with golden fields of ripening wheat, as if the landscape were a quilt spread over the earth, with seams of dirt roads and rushing creeks holding it in place. A little less than a mile to the east, Seminary Ridge bristled with oak and hickory trees. Farmhouses sprinkled the countryside. Just north of Cemetery Hill, white steeples gleamed in the sun while red brick houses clustered together. The village of Gettysburg was a hub, with spokes leading out in all directions, each one named for the town to which it led: clockwise from the north, it was Carlisle, Harrisburg, York, Hanover, Baltimore, Taneytown, Emmitsburg, Hagerstown, Chambersburg, Mummasburg.

"Elizabeth, look." Liberty pointed to Chambersburg Road. As far as the eye could see, it teemed with galloping cavalry. Dozens of them—hundreds—streamed into Gettysburg and collected in The Diamond like trout rushing down Willoughby Run.

"Do you recognize any of them?"

Libbie squinted. "No." Some of the townspeople appeared in their doorways, but no one rushed out with pie and coffee to greet them.

"Wait." Elizabeth disappeared inside the gatehouse for a moment before returning with her father and his field glasses. Muffled shouts carried on the breeze while Mr. Thorn took the first look. He cursed in a thick German accent and handed the glasses to the women, Elizabeth first, then Liberty.

Her hand trembled, blurring the view. The soldiers were not wearing blue. Some wore grey, but not the same shade—iron grey, sheep grey, old wood grey, and butternut, the telltale color of a faded Confederacy uniform. But many wore simply rags. It was surreal watching them like this, from a distance, and yet able to see the sweat running down their weather-hardened faces, the greasy strands of hair falling loose about their shoulders. Collarbones protruding against their skin. One man's spurs were strapped onto his bare feet.

A shudder passed through her as she passed the glasses back to Elizabeth. She did not need them to hear the hint of a crazed Rebel yell: "Aaaaaiiiiiieeeeeeeeee!" Sunlight glinted off gun barrels raised in the sky. Shots that must have terrified the people below sounded like sporadically popping corn.

Breath hitched in her chest as her gaze followed the current of men still streaming down Chambersburg Pike, through the town and into The Diamond, until it overflowed with Rebels and spilled over, flooding the surrounding neighborhoods. More than a thousand, more than two thousand, swarmed. Not long after someone raised the Confederate flag in the town square, a regimental band set up very near to where a band had been playing with the 26th earlier that morning.

They did not play "Yankee Doodle."

"Nicht gut, nicht gut," Mr. Thorn was saying, his face carved with wrinkles.

Elizabeth grabbed Libbie's arm, and she jumped. "Get you home, girl. Take not the main roads. Make haste!" Her eyes flashed, held Libbie's stunned face in their reflection. "They're here."

Baltimore, Maryland
Friday, June 26, 1863

The train to Frederick was already hissing in its impatience to depart by the time Harrison Caldwell arrived on the platform at the Bal-

timore & Ohio Railroad station. White puffs of steam and black clouds of coal-flavored smoke belched from the engine as he bounded up the steps to board.

Threading his way down the narrow aisle, he pressed a handkerchief to his perspiring forehead and willed his heart to return to a normal pace. Missing this train could have cost him his job as war correspondent with the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Not only did he have to get to the front, he had to get there before any major story unfolded without him. Being witness to a battlefield was never pleasant and always dangerous. But it was the price Harrison paid for a chance at earning distinction that could propel his career for the rest of his life.

“Caldwell?” A vaguely familiar voice called. “Harrison Caldwell! I’d recognize that carrottop anywhere! Join us!”

Harrison instinctively put a hand to his orange-red hair as he turned and smiled at the sight of the best battlefield correspondents in the country sharing a compartment: Whitelaw Reid for the *Cincinnati Gazette*, Samuel Wilkeson of the *New York Times*, and Charles Carleton Coffin from the *Boston Morning Journal*. He had covered battles with them before. He should have known they would be following this lead, too. *Better to join them than to trail them.*

“White, shouldn’t you be in Ohio covering that copperhead political meeting?” Harrison jibed as he pumped the hands of his fellow journalists. Like him, and unlike most gentlemen travelers, they carried cotton haversacks and canteens rather than suitcases and umbrellas. Though not in military uniform, slouch hats, not bowlers, topped their heads.

“Not when Lee’s whole army is moving through Pennsylvania!” His lips quirked up beneath his bushy brown mustache in the grin of a newsman on the hunt. Whitelaw’s smooth fair skin and full head of curly brown hair testified that he was the youngest of the group at age twenty-six. He had already earned the reputation of a distinguished reporter during the war. When he had first taken his job at the *Gazette* in June 1861, he had prepared himself by reading the standard manuals of war

and studying the campaigns of Napoleon and Frederick the Great. When reporting from the front, he refused to gloss over Union mistakes or paint a cowardly picture of the Confederacy for spite, and Harrison respected him for it.

It took courage to be an objective war correspondent—and to be that correspondent’s employer. When the *Philadelphia Inquirer* had run a story proclaiming the Confederate victory at the first Battle of Bull Run, an angry mob, fevered with Union patriotism, tried to burn down the paper’s building. The next month, reporter Ambrose Kimball was stripped, tarred, and feathered in Haverhill, Massachusetts, for his perceived Southern-leanings in his editorials. They paraded him on a rail through town before releasing him. Harrison shuddered in sympathy at the recollection.

The train screeched and chugged into motion, and Harrison dropped onto the seat next to Whitelaw, facing the two older correspondents. With twelve years of experience as a news correspondent under his belt, forty-six-year-old Sam was the veteran of the group. Deep lines divided his mouth from his smooth-shaven cheeks, and an upside-down smile gave him a look of perpetual displeasure. Charles, or Carleton, as he preferred to be known, was forty, but would have appeared younger if not for the shadows beneath his sparkling blue eyes and the slight tremor in his hands, due to an overreliance on coffee to keep him going. Sitting across from Harrison now, his eyes looked tired already, and Harrison could relate. Being a war correspondent meant assuming the soldier’s lifestyle to get the eyewitness accounts. Even Harrison’s thirty-year-old body ached in anticipation of what lay ahead. “Well, gentlemen, are you ready for this?”

But the question had no real answer. No matter how many battles they had covered, they would never get used to the sights and sounds. Or the smells.

“Could be like finding a needle in a haystack, but I’m hoping to catch a glimpse of my oldest son.” Sam’s piercing black eyes bore into Harrison’s with that peculiar intensity he and his family were known

for. His wife, Catherine, was the sister of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, outspoken abolitionist and women's rights leader. Elizabeth's Declaration of Sentiments, presented at Seneca Falls fifteen years ago, was still causing a stir. But now, at least for Sam, the focus had shifted to another family member. "Bayard is in the Army of the Potomac. Battery G, Fourth U.S. Artillery. If there's to be a fight—and we've no doubt about that—he's sure to be in it."

"I pray he'll be safe," said Carleton.

"Better to pray the boys do their duty, come what may." Sam's reply was quick and sharp. "You can trust that Bayard will."

"I've no doubt of that, my good fellow, no doubt whatever," Carleton offered before lapsing into silence. Outside the rain-splattered window, the brown and grey blur of Washington gave way to fertile green fields under a wool grey sky.

"Well," White broke in. "And what does Philadelphia have to say about all of this?" He motioned to the copy of the *Inquirer* on the seat beside him. "Come, Harrison, let's compare notes. Let's see if our stories match up." His eyes twinkled with good humor. "That is today's news, is it not?"

A wry smile spread across Harrison's face as he nodded and gamely unfolded the paper. It was only too true that the news, reported from so many different angles, and in such haste, was often contradictory. At worst, it was wildly inaccurate, reporting generals dead who were still alive, or giving victory to one side when the other had won the day.

"Our letter from Harrisburg," he began, then read directly from the paper. "At the present writing a comparatively large force of the army of the so-called Confederate States is in close proximity to the capital of the commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Jenkins holds Carlisle." He paused to glance up, and saw three nodding heads. So far, agreement. "The enemy is now within eighteen miles of Harrisburg . . ." Harrison skimmed down further. "Many are the speculations as to the numbers and true character of the forces advancing toward us, but no definite and reliable conclusion has yet been arrived at. Refugees represent the

force to be in the neighborhood of eight thousand, with reinforcements coming after, which is, in all probability, an exaggeration—”

Grimacing, Harrison stopped reading. In another column in the same paper, a different correspondent quoted a nameless source as estimating Lee’s army to be one hundred thousand strong. Not eight. *Humiliating.*

Harrison cleared his throat. “For the past few days the scene at the bridge which spans the Susquehanna, at this point, has been pitiful in the extreme,” he continued. “The main road leading out of the Cumberland Valley has been literally jammed with carriages, wagons, and vehicles of all descriptions, bearing whole families of refugees, men, women and children, who have been driven from their once peaceful and happy homes, with the little of all their world’s goods they have been able to save from the hand of the ruthless invader. Two or three thousand of these refugees have already passed through here. Many are still on the road, some of whom have not yet arrived, and others of whom are journeying on.”

“Ruthless invader.” Carleton’s voice was low, thoughtful, as he absentmindedly stroked the neatly trimmed beard on his square jaw. “Ironic, isn’t it? Has the North not invaded at Vicksburg, even as we speak? Have we not laid siege to a town of innocent civilians, shelling their homes and cutting them off from any source of food or news for the past thirty-nine days? And do we call ourselves ruthless?”

“Careful, Carleton, you’ll be accused of treason, soon.” Harrison winked at the serious gentleman across from him, but there was little mirth in it. He didn’t have to be the Vicksburg, Mississippi, correspondent to imagine the havoc wreaked in that town. It was enough that he had seen the destruction in Virginia and Tennessee.

Sam glowered at Harrison.

“Listen, Wilkeson, I’m not unsympathetic to the plight of the Cumberland Valley refugees.” Harrison pulled a package of Necco-brand licorice-flavored wafers from his haversack and offered it to the others before popping a piece into his own mouth. “But you do realize that far

more than three thousand refugees have been created in the South. And you can bet they are all rejoicing right now that it's the North's turn, once more, to be the host of war." The last time the South invaded the North was at Sharpsburg, Maryland—Antietam Creek—last September.

The candy soured in his mouth as unwelcome images, washed in red, flickered in Harrison's mind, as they always did at the faintest memory of the event.

"They are the ones who seceded from the Union, Caldwell." Sam's eyes darkened. "It's only right we should fight on their land."

"I don't want war in Pennsylvania any more than anyone else. This is my home state, for pity's sake! But if we're going to call the Confederates 'ruthless invaders,' we must be willing to admit we've done the same thing to them, but more often."

"Just which flag are you flying, sir—"

Harrison held up his hands in mock surrender. "Right or wrong, the facts are plain. We invaded them. Now they are invading us."

"Spitting mad, too," White jumped in. "Lincoln didn't just free their slaves. He armed them too. What's the absolute worst nightmare of a slaveholding family? That their slaves will rise up against them. And then—the way they see it—a foreign government tells the slaves they are not only free, but they're morally obligated to take up arms against their homeland, including the people who once clothed and fed them."

"And enslaved them, abused them, kept them illiterate, treated them worse than dogs! If I didn't know better, Mr. Reid, I would say you are defending them."

White cocked an eyebrow. "Not defending anyone. I'm saying that under the circumstances, I predict that Lee's army is going to pour out its vengeance upon this land and its people the likes of which we have not seen before. Not at Sharpsburg. Not anywhere."

The chugging of the train through Maryland's fields filled the compartment as White's words hung in the air between them.

"The question, then, is where will this great battle be?" Harrison

ventured as he tucked the rest of his candy away. "Harrisburg? Carlisle? Philadelphia?"

"No." Carleton's voice was steady, confident. "Not likely. I pick Gettysburg for the fight, or near it."

"Gettysburg, you say?" Sam wrinkled his brow. "Never heard of it."

"From what I've been able to learn, it's a small village, about twenty-four hundred residents. The main trade is carriage and wagon-making, but they also have several fine educational institutions as well, Pennsylvania College and the Lutheran Theological Seminary being the foremost among them. On the map, it appears to be surrounded by farmland and topography ripe for a battle: ridges, hills, fields and valleys. Creeks and runs provide water sources throughout the area."

"If you're right about this, we'll see for ourselves, won't we?" said White. "What else do you see in your crystal ball?"

"Buy a paper and find out, whippersnapper." A rare chuckle escaped Carleton as he rapped White on the knee with a rolled-up copy of the *Boston Morning Journal*.

Harrison snatched it up and unrolled it to the front page story, written by Carleton himself. He read aloud:

IF LEE ADVANCES WITH NEARLY ALL HIS FORCES INTO PENNSYLVANIA, THERE MUST BE A COLLISION OF THE TWO ARMIES NOT MANY MILES WEST OF GETTYSBURG, PROBABLY AMONG THE ROLLING HILLS NEAR THE STATE LINE, ON THE HEAD WATERS OF THE MONOCACY . . . I BELIEVE THAT WASHINGTON AND BALTIMORE WILL NOT BE HARMED. I EXPECT TO SEE ADAMS, FRANKLIN, CUMBERLAND, AND YORK COUNTIES RUN OVER SOMEWHAT BY THE REBELS, AND I ALSO EXPECT TO SEE LEE UTTERLY DEFEATED IN HIS PLANS. HIS ARMY MAY NOT BE ANNIHILATED. HOOKER MAY NOT ACHIEVE A GREAT, DECISIVE VICTORY. BUT I FULLY BELIEVE THAT LEE WILL GAIN NOTHING BY THIS MOVE.

Harrison paused and rubbed his chin. “I hope you’re right, Carleton —although your fortune-telling could be improved upon with a Union victory decisive enough to end to this war soon afterward.”

Just not before I launch my career from it first.