

A woman struggles to survive the Civil War in Missouri.

An Uncivil War

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An Uncivil War

By Linda Easley

ONE

July 8, 1861 My ability to ignore what is going on always surprises me. I have lived so long with the belief the situation would not come to this, that nothing I do now eases my anxiety ...

Outside the weaning house, I stood clutching a blue and white Wedgwood platter - the one surviving piece of my grandmother's wedding china - as Daniel packed our belongings into the wagon. I peered through the wavy glass of the cabin's small, six paned window. The window, brought all the way from Springfield, had been Daniel's wedding present to me.

Running my fingers along the glass, I listened to the soft squeak it made. Foolish, I suppose, but Daniel's gift had made me feel loved and at home for the first time since I was ten years old, when my stepfather had dragged Mother and me from Cincinnati to this wilderness in the White River hills of southern Missouri.

"I'm nearly finished, Livy," Daniel said.

"All right." Anxious reality replaced the hollow sensation I'd retreated into over the last few days. I glanced down at our two-year-old son, Nathaniel, who played in the dirt beside me - so like his father, with his blue eyes and blond hair. "Nate, don't get your shirt dirty," I said. Drawing in a long, shaky breath, I tried to shut out the memories I was leaving behind.

Behind me, reflected in the window, dawn slipped in. The sun, still below the rim of Pine Ridge across Bull Creek, colored the billowy clouds and tinted the gray-blue sky with soft pink. The still, early morning air prickled with heat against the back of my neck.

Staring through the window, I searched the cabin where Daniel and I had lived since our marriage three years before. For a moment, my reflection hovered like a yellow-frosted ghost over the oak bed Daniel and I had shared. The bed still held the straw-stuffed ticking we'd slept on. I traced the bed's outline on the window glass as if I might draw the love out of it through my fingertips.

My darling Nate had been born in that bed. I stared down at the empty trundle that had held the goose feather mattress I'd made for him. Unlike the straw mattress, the featherbed had been too precious to leave behind.

Raising my eyes, I watched the sunrise behind me. I'd always loved that the cabin faced the morning sun. The sunlight had brightened the dark cabin and rough furniture, enlivening the constant gray-brown of the old wood.

Set near a hillside covered with oak and pine, surrounded by dogwood and red bud where the woods met the near meadow, the cabin seemed to have grown from the earth itself, sturdy and protecting.

Jeremiah Toliver, Daniel's father, had built the cabin when he and his wife, Martha, settled the two hundred acres along Bull Creek in 1833. It had been their first home after they married.

They had loaned it to us when we married, as was the custom here. The weaning house was supposed to have been a place where we had time to adjust, to save and make plans before we struck out on our own.

I fought a sudden lump in my throat. Our weaning was over. In a few days, Daniel and I would say good-bye and he would go off to war.

Daniel hadn't understood why I wanted to move out of the cabin.

"Why do you want to take Nate out of the only home he knows?" he'd said. "My parents are just a half mile away."

"I know." I couldn't tell him the truth. I couldn't take the chance he'd understand. "I just don't feel safe alone here with Nate."

He stared at me. "It's your step dad, ain't it?"

My drunkard stepfather lived only a few miles away and, although he was terrified of Daniel, would not be above trying to take advantage of Daniel's absence to wheedle money for his drink. But that was an excuse. The truth was too terrifying to share – even with Daniel.

"You know Pap would never let your step dad hurt you --"

"And how would your father know until it was too late?" Tired of the argument, I turned away.

He'd had no answer, so we left it at that. I would live with my in-laws until Daniel returned.

I studied Daniel's reflection while he loaded my trunk into the back of the wagon. Perhaps if I traced his outline I could draw enough courage from it to last until he came home. I took a deep breath and gathered my strength before turning back to face him. The War of Secession was upon us. Everything else would have to wait.

Daniel tucked the last of the household goods into the wagon and tied the two crates of white chickens – descendants of those my mother had brought from Ohio - to the back. I wrapped my shawl around the Wedgwood platter and slipped it into a pile of straw back under the wagon seat.

Daniel closed the door of our home and drew the latch. The sound of its closing sucked the heart out of me for a moment.

"Is that all of it?" Daniel said. He would not look at me. I knew my thin face must seem pinched and accusing with the misery I felt.

“Did you get the canned goods I left in the spring house?” I said. “I’ll put them in your mother’s cellar.”

Daniel nodded.

“The mattress for the baby’s trundle.” I pointed to where it lay in a heap against an oak sapling. He grabbed hold of it and went behind the wagon to search for a place to put it.

I took Nate’s hand and looked across to the cornfield. It would be ready to strip for fodder and pick in a few more weeks. Along the zigzag rail fence, the showy orange flowers of a trumpet vine had begun to open amid dark green leaves, lording it over the patches of yellow sneezeweed beneath.

Nathaniel pulled at my hand and whimpered.

“Shhh, Baby. It’s all right.” My heart ached for him as I looked down. He was losing a father - perhaps, as I had, forever. Nevertheless, I was grateful that, unlike my stepfather, Daniel had never struck me, never yelled, or said cruel things to Nate and me. I swiped the back of my hand across my eyes against the sudden sense of dread. *Stupid girl. Take control of yourself ...*

Daniel came around the wagon, leading the brown milk cow and her calf. He tied the cow behind the wagon. The calf would follow. “Best be going, Livy.” He followed my gaze to the cornfield. “Pap and the boys will bring it in.”

I nodded and gave Nathaniel to him. Taking my arm, he helped me into the wagon in silence before he lifted Nate to me. Going around the wagon, he scrambled up beside us.

Daniel released the brake, cracked the whip and hawed the ox. The wagon jerked as the sturdy red and white beast turned left and began its slow amble along the rutted path toward the stream.

Behind us, the chickens clucked and grumbled at their cramped quarters in the crates. I looked around, wondering where the geese had gotten to and whether they would keep the garden weeded until the vegetables ripened.

In the distance, I heard the high-pitched ‘hear, hear’ of a red tailed hawk as it searched for mice. I wanted to scream, “Stop”, and race back to the little cabin. Instead, I made silent plans to come back for the vegetables in my garden behind the house.

I still couldn’t grasp the need for immediacy in my husband’s leaving. The war news from back east had grown more alarming, to be sure. I knew of the secret meetings the Unionists held nearly weekly across the county.

Daniel and the other men had attended many of these meetings and the scattered Home Guard units had organized at Springfield in June, sealing their commitment to the Union. I’d dismissed it all as grown men playing soldiers against an imaginary enemy.

We had argued his going repeatedly until, at last, his impassioned pleas for preserving the Union had won my silence.

Now, the enemy was all too real. Some of our own neighbors had slipped across the state border, only twenty miles away, to join Rebel troops building in Arkansas, or had joined Pap Price’s Secessionist State Militia as it fled south to meet the Southern troops.

“Hang on, Nate.” I shifted to grip Nate’s shirttail and slip my other arm around him as the ox began its descent into the stream that lay shallow and still in the July morning. Nate leaned against me, sucking his thumb.

Up the stream, I could see the shed Daniel had built for my canning kitchen and, beyond it, the springhouse we shared with my in-laws. For a moment I could see myself alone there, canning while Daniel was away to war. *Think all that schooling and them fancy ways makes you better?* I shivered, pushing the hateful words from my mind.

The wagon swayed beneath me as the ironbound wheels bumped and creaked over the gravel stream bottom. The scent from wild onions crushed by the wheels lingered in the air as the wagon lumbered back onto the ox path. The narrow trace, lined with yellow-topped mullein, wound through a brushy meadow carpeted with butterfly weed and mustard. On a bare branch at the top of a scrub oak, a young cardinal - bright red against the morning sky - practiced its patchy song.

I glanced at Daniel and he reached to touch my hand. “We’ll be back, Livy.”

We jostled on toward the new house, built by Jeremiah as he had prospered and the family had grown. My home away from home until Daniel returned.

What if he never returns? What if he dies, as Papa did?

Closing my eyes against the unspeakable thoughts, I wondered how, as a girl of seven, back in Ohio, I’d found war romantic. I could still remember standing in a crowd with my mother, on the docks at Cincinnati, when my father and the other soldiers rowed out to the steamboat that took them away to the Mexican War.

The dead fish smell of the Ohio River and the smoke scented steam from the stacks of the large riverboat still lived in my memory. I had felt so grown up in my new green dress and straw bonnet. Old men, women and children cheered the men on, flags and banners waving. The excitement gripped everyone.

My father had survived the war only to die of an infection on the long trip back to Ohio.

The sun glowed above the ridge. My hand began to cramp and I realized I still gripped Nathaniel’s shirttail. I smoothed the shirt and looked around. When we neared the end of the meadow, Jeremiah’s four hounds ran to meet us, their tongues lolling out the sides of their mouths in the growing heat.

Off along the edge of a hill, past the cornfield west of the meadow, I could see the Toliver family cemetery. Two of Daniel’s brothers, stillborn twins, and an older sister, Effie, who had died of a fever the year he was two, were buried there. I slipped an arm around Nathaniel and wondered how my in-laws had survived the loss of three children.

Daniel called, “Halloo,” as the wagon pulled past the brush that separated the path from the backhouse and into the yard.

The big house seemed forbidding. Unlike our small cabin, the hewn log, double-pen house looked like a squat intruder in the large bare yard. Only his

mother's flowers softened its edges. An open, roofed walkway - called a dogtrot - separated the two large rooms everyone around here called pens. One of these pens served as a kitchen and work area; the other, a living and sleeping room. Doors from both rooms led onto the dogtrot. Tall stone chimneys flanked each end of the house. To me, the long, covered porch that ran its front length was its one redeeming feature.

The hounds loped toward the porch and crawled under it into the shade. For one moment, I wished I could join them.

Jeremiah stood under a big oak, reshoeing Daniel's bay mare as we drove in. Heat from the forge shimmered in the early morning air and, under Jeremiah's hat, beads of sweat trickled down the older man's face to wet his brown mustache and his shirt. He looked up, his gray eyes welcoming. At fifty-eight, his furrowed face seemed as old as the land he had tamed thirty years before.

"Daniel, Livy." Jeremiah's gaze ran over the wagon, drifting to my twisting hands as he wiped sweat from his face. "Any news this morning?"

"None good, Pap. That's for sure." Daniel climbed out of the wagon. I waited while he untied the milk cow and led it to the barn with the calf scampering along behind. "Orly Taylor's took his wife to St. Louis," Daniel called back over his shoulder. "At least until things settle down here. And the Tabors is thinking about moving back east."

I looked around the yard until Daniel returned and stopped beside his father. My glance settled on Jeremiah as he studied his son's troubled face. I always felt a little jealous of their closeness and wondered if the jealousy was because Daniel and Nate already shared that same bond.

"They's more?" the older man asked.

"A drummer from Springfield stopped at Ozark to take a order at the general store on his way to Forsyth. Says Colonel Sigel's Union men marched into Springfield a couple of weeks ago. Two days ago, Colonel Sweeny come down with over a thousand men." Daniel stopped and scratched his chin. "Looks like it's starting. The drummer said he's heading back afore he gets caught in the crossfire."

Jeremiah shook his head, drops of sweat flying off his drooping mustache like water off a dog. "I knowed them Secessionists wouldn't be happy 'til they took us all to war." He nailed the last shoe on the horse. "When you be leaving, Son?"

"Two days. Will and Ezra and me want to be in Springfield before week's end. Got to have time to find Colonel Phelps and report in."

In the wagon, Nathaniel squirmed to get down. "Just a minute, Nate," I said.

Jeremiah turned and looked at Nathaniel, his face softening at the sight of his grandson. With his arms outstretched, he limped toward us in his awkward, dipping gait. "Yore Granny and me'll take care of ye," he crooned, taking him from me.

"Gampa?" Nathaniel leaned back in Jeremiah's arms and laughed as he pulled at his grandfather's mustache. I had to smile. Nate, like Daniel, had Jeremiah's even temperament.

“Yeah, yore old gampa will take care of ye.” Jeremiah turned back to Daniel.

“Your leg giving you trouble again?” Daniel nodded toward his father’s left leg. During the Mexican War, a bullet had broken the bone between Jeremiah’s hip and knee. The bullet had glanced off and gone on through the flesh, its trajectory barely saving the leg from amputation.

“Yeah.” The older man rubbed the leg, then said, “You’ve told the men that your brothers and me’ll look out for their wives and young’uns?”

Daniel nodded. “Reckon I better go talk to Mam.” He straightened his shoulders against the chore and I realized neither he nor his father had told her yet that I was staying and Daniel was leaving.

“You help the wife and boy get settled in. I’ll square things with your mam.” Jeremiah set Nate down and reached up to help me from the wagon before picking up his grandson again.

“Thank you.” I gave him a brief, unsure smile.

“And what would you need to square with me, Mr. Toliver?” Daniel’s mother came toward us from the milking shed, carrying a bucket of milk. Daniel hurried to take it; I noticed he avoided the question.

Martha, nearly as tall as I, was an ample woman. Her blonde hair was streaked with white. Her voice, as soft and scratchy as uncarded wool, sometimes left me with the same sort of itch, for Martha Toliver rarely held back what she believed to be truth.

Martha stopped in front of me and looked over the loaded wagon. I tensed, wondering if my mother-in-law could see my fears as I stood there, tongue-tied. Martha grasped my hands. “I see the men has forgot to tell me something. Hit’s good you’uns brought your cow. Our calf has weaned and the cow’s going dry. Mr. Toliver’s going to take her for breeding in a few days.” She turned and looked toward Daniel, then on to Jeremiah, still holding my hands.

She tilted her head, squinting the eye that was covered by a cataract, and nodded. “It’s started then, has it?” She let go of my hands and turned toward Daniel. “You’re going off to fight the Secesh.” Martha took Nathaniel from his grandpa and slipped an arm around me, walking me toward the house. “When you leaving?” she asked, over her shoulder.

“Couple of days,” Daniel said.

Daniel’s casualness about going terrified me. I glanced toward him as he followed us into the house with the milk bucket.

“I’m getting ready to fire the oven and make some breakfast,” Martha told me. Turning back toward Daniel, she said, “Your brothers are out in the field. Might be, you’d fetch them for breakfast?”

Jeremiah entered the kitchen behind us. “Mayhap, whilst she’s here, Livy can show you how to fire up that stove I bought you,” he said.

I couldn’t help smiling. Jeremiah had bought a small cast iron box stove in Springfield two years ago and built a side room for it at the back of the house, but Martha preferred to cook in her old Dutch oven in the stone fireplace. Jeremiah had finally moved the box stove down to my canning shed where I used it to can vegetables and heat water for laundry.

“Maybe you can,” Martha said to me when Daniel and his father went back outside. “Give us something to worry about besides Daniel.” She patted my shoulder. Her open admission that she worried about him, too, eased my anxiety, for she rarely admitted to strong emotions.

After breakfast, Daniel, his father and the two brothers - ten-year-old Micah and fourteen-year-old Amos - emptied the wagon and began moving the few belongings into the kitchen. While I put things away, I listened to their chatter with the same unease and envy I'd earlier felt with Jeremiah and Daniel.

“Are you scared, Daniel?” Micah, short and thin, his dark blond hair matted with sweat, struggled to help his older brother carry the quilt chest through the kitchen door.

“Some, I reckon,” Daniel said. “Let’s set it here.” They put the chest at the end of the bed Martha had appropriated for me from the two boys. I wondered if Micah was worried about his older brother going to war, and whether I should suggest Daniel spend some extra time with him over the next two days.

“You going to kill some Secesh?” the boy asked.

Daniel straightened. “Which ones you want me to kill, Micah?” His sudden anger surprised me. “Tim’s pap, down the creek? How about Mr. Peterson up by Bull Mills, huh?” He stopped and I saw him check his anger. “Them folks is our neighbors. You’ve played with their young’uns.”

Micah ducked his head. “Sorry Daniel.”

Daniel reached out and ruffled the boy’s hair. “We ain’t tried to start no war. But we’ve got to stop the Secessionists from destroying the Union.”

“What’s the difference,” Micah asked. “If people are going to get killed, who cares which side wins?”

I turned away at his innocent perceptiveness. I could not have found better words myself.

“War ain’t no game, boy.” Jeremiah entered with Amos, carrying the large trunk filled with dishes and clothing. “If’n the Secessionists was to split the Union, it’d tear the country apart. Cain’t let them do that.”

Daniel looked over at his father and nodded in agreement. I should have been proud of his concern for the Union, but right then, I only wished he’d been as concerned about the union of his family. I knew he accepted my fear of being alone with danger so near, but I was nearly as afraid of being alone with Martha. I didn’t know why. She’d been pleasant to me the many times we’d visited together at the cabin. But she had a strength and, sometimes, an aloofness about her that made me think she believed Daniel should have married someone more like her.

I couldn’t help wondering how we two women would get along under the same roof and whether I could stand up against her bluntness.

Jeremiah set his end of the trunk down and nudged me, jerking me away from my musings.

“We set the chickens over by the shed,” he said. “Until they get comfortable with the yard. Cain’t have them high-faulting birds of yours uncomfortable.”

I laughed, my worrying over his wife disarmed by Jeremiah's wink.

"Well," Amos said, as he lowered his end of the trunk to the floor, "I wouldn't mind killing a few of them Secesh."

Jeremiah reached out, grabbed his ear and gave it a little twist. "Killing a man ain't near as easy as you make it out to be. You two go finish up. You know the wife don't countenance you talking like that. You scare poor Livy and your mam will cuff your ears for sure."

"Sorry, Pap." Amos turned red. "I didn't mean it."

Daniel's smile made me realize he'd probably had his own ear pulled by the old man through the years. The gesture was not malicious, merely disciplinary. I'd been an only child, and a rather spoiled one according to my stepfather. The interactions of this rough but affectionate family still bewildered me at times.

Amos seemed unperturbed by the dressing down from his father. The boy was maturing. Over the last year, he had grown nearly half a foot and was almost as tall as Daniel and his father. I'd heard that Amos, with his father's dark hair and his mother's blue eyes, had already attracted the attention of several young ladies among the scattered hill families.

Jeremiah gave Amos a light punch on the arm. "You best learn to talk gentle around the ladies if you plan on getting yourself a wife one of these days."

I smiled when Amos blushed and grinned. Micah snickered and Jeremiah turned to glare at him.

Amos looked at his brother and, motioning with his head toward the door, said, "We best get out of here while we can."

When the boys had left, Daniel turned to his father. "I've seen Amos eyeing the Linn girl over to Forsyth."

Jeremiah shook his head. "In a awful hurry to grow up, ain't he?"

Daniel lowered his eyes for a moment. "Weren't we all, Pap?" The two men went outside to see what was left to unload while I pondered the wistfulness of my husband's remark.

They returned from the wagon, bringing a couple of crates into the kitchen. Martha followed them in.

Daniel looked over at me and said, "Where you want these?"

"Oh, the canned goods," I said. "We could keep a few out in the side room, I guess." I glanced over at Martha. "Maybe put the rest of them out in the cellar where it's cool?"

She shrugged, and then nodded. For some reason, Martha didn't approve of the new canning methods I'd brought with my marriage to her son.

Daniel and Jeremiah took the crates into the back room. Martha turned to me and said, "I suppose I could have Mr. Toliver put up some extra shelves."

The edge in her voice made me wish Daniel and his father would come back in. Still, I knew that if I were ever to fit in, I would have to face Martha on my own.

"What's wrong with old fashioned crocks and parchment?" Martha said.

Miserable girl. I jerked at the voice in my head and felt myself blush. *Now, you'll pay for your highfalutin' ways.* I struggled to compose myself, but was unable. "Well, nothing ... it's just that ..." I heard my voice tremble. "Well, these are quicker and safer."

“I ain’t never poisoned anyone yet.” Martha turned and busied herself with putting away the dishes. I’d insulted the older woman and tried to smooth it over. “It’s just, well ... that’s how my mother taught me.”

Martha turned and stared at me for a moment. “Believe I’ve got some mending to do in the other room.”

Unable to meet my mother-in-law’s eyes, I nodded and said, “I’ll take the jars to the cellar later.”

After Martha left, I stared around the room, waiting for my nerves to settle. Her indignation claimed the room like a shrewish neighbor searching for an opening.

I’d known Martha thought canning jars were foolishness. My mother had been the talk of the area, with her “fancy Ohio ways”. I wondered briefly if that had somehow shamed my stepfather, incited his drunken rages against my mother and me.

An old sinking in my stomach made me wonder if I would ever learn to be quiet and get along with Martha. Unable to find anything to do to take my mind off the situation, I decided to go out and see if the boys were through with the unloading.

Out on the porch, I watched while the boys checked the wagon, fighting to keep my mind off the encounter with Martha.

Amos said, “Miz Livy, I’m going to take the wagon over yonder and water the ox. You need Micah to help you with anything?” He climbed into the seat of the wagon.

I looked up. “I don’t think so, thank you.”

Micah piled into the wagon bed behind his brother.

“Micah, wait!” I grabbed my skirt and started toward the wagon at a run. Too late. I heard the crack of the platter as Micah’s foot came down on it.

Micah looked at my face and bent over to dig the shawl out of the straw. “I’m so sorry, Miz Livy ...”

“It’s all right, Micah. You didn’t know.” I took the shawl and the two pieces of the platter from his hands. My own hands trembled as I turned away.

“Micah Eugene Toliver!” Martha stood in the doorway of the dogtrot. I looked up, horrified as Martha motioned me into the kitchen and waved the boys away with a scowl.

“I’m awful sorry, honey,” Martha said. “Was it your mam’s?”

I nodded, struggling to hide my tears. “The last of my grandmother’s wedding china. I took it with me to remember Mama after she passed.”

“It’s right pretty.” Martha took the broken plate and laid it on my trunk by the kitchen cabinet. “Mayhap Daniel can figure a way to fix it.”

“He’s got enough on his mind right now.” I tried to smile. “Papa always said it was the unluckiest set of china in the country. A piece got broken every time someone in the family d...” I could hold back the tears no longer. “Seems like everything’s broken, now.”

Martha gathered me in her arms and patted my back. “He’ll come back to us, darling. Lord willing, he’ll come back.”

Though surprised and a little embarrassed, I almost felt comforted by her gesture until she said, in that stern, scratchy voice, "And we don't cry when our men goes off to war."

I pulled away in a sudden welling of anger. "No, we do our crying when the Government sends them back in a casket."

Martha stared at me, a little stunned, I supposed, by my display. Once again, I'd shamed myself in her eyes.

"He will come back," Martha said, at last, as if issuing an order.

I said nothing, unwilling to argue it further. But my inability to believe her draped me like a coffin cloth.

By evening, the furnishings had been moved into the house. The family went to bed exhausted soon after supper. Though Daniel fell sound asleep, I lay awake. Martha's words from that morning echoed through my mind.

I wondered if the older woman ever felt doubt or fear, and whether - if she could see into my heart - she'd be disappointed at the panic that fluttered there like a trapped bird. A sudden, guilty wish that I'd never met Daniel Toliver overwhelmed me.

Sometime after midnight, I fell asleep and dreamed of him.

"I came back to you, Livy." Daniel stood in the doorway of the weaning house, a tall, vague shadow. I started toward him, but stopped and cried out as I realized I could see the zigzag fence outside through his ghostly figure.

"I fixed this for you," he whispered, handing me the Wedgwood platter. Then, he turned and disappeared.

Waking with a start, I reached for Daniel.

Before the others woke, I dressed and crept back to the weaning house. I had wrapped the broken Wedgwood platter in an old cotton sack. I opened it and ran my fingers over the delicate patterns. Closing the sack, I laid it by the oak sapling and went to the shed for Daniel's shovel. The snap of a twig somewhere to my left sent a shiver of fear through me. *Ain't no one can hear you now, girl ...*

Clutching the shovel like a weapon, I waited for my heartbeat to stop racing, then peered around the door of the shed. An old raccoon darted out of the cornrows and into the woods, leaving me shaken and embarrassed.

I hurried to bury the broken platter beneath the sapling, my hands still stiff from the digging. Finished, I scurried back to the big house, wondering how I'd survive if, as with my father, I again lost the man I loved most in the world.

TWO

July 9, 1861 Martha had started breakfast when I came back from the weaning house. She said little; she only followed me with those mismatched eyes. The cataract never bothered me before. Now, it makes her seem like some half-blind prophetess. I cannot help but wonder if she divines the fear that drove me here and drives me now ...

Daniel and the boys spent the day repairing the corncrib and the wagon bed in anticipation of harvest at the end of the month. I tried to stay out of Martha's way, fearful of treading on her household routine and annoyed that Daniel had not told her Nate and I were moving in.

Near suppertime, while Nate napped in the kitchen, I sat on the porch, sewing. I half listened to Daniel and his father out by the shed while they checked and rechecked the equipment Daniel would take with him.

"Best try out some of this new shot afore you leave." Jeremiah scooped a handful of the lead balls he'd molded and dropped them into Daniel's ammunition pouch. "Shouldn't have no trouble keeping your powder dry in this weather."

Daniel sighted down the long, smooth bore musket he'd finished cleaning and gave the metal barrel one last swipe with the cotton cloth. "Probably have more trouble keeping myself dry, in this heat."

He set the musket aside and turned to his father. "Pap, my revolver and ammo's in the blanket chest. With the Secesh army moving back and forth, and you needing to be away now and then, I thought you and Mam should know that Livy knows how to load and use it."

"Well, Jeremiah said, "That should make your mam happy. Even with that bad eye, she can still knock a squirrel out'n a tree if she's got a clear line of sight."

Daniel grinned. "Livy's pretty good herself, for no longer than she's been handling it."

I had a sudden image of Martha and me, across the yard from each other, she with her musket and me with the revolver, circling each other warily over whose canning method was best. Stifling a laugh, I hoped it wouldn't come to that.

My amusement faded when Daniel looked down at his hands and said, "I'm worried about Livy though, Pap. She ain't strong-minded, like Mam. And, truth be told, I think Livy's as scared of Mam as she is her step dad."

I knew he didn't realize I was on the porch, but I felt a sudden rush of shame. Even my husband thought I was a coward. No wonder Martha disliked me. Gathering up my sewing, I rose to go back into the house, blinking back tears.

"Oh, now, Son," I heard Jeremiah clap him on the shoulder. "She's been through a lot in her life. She'll get the hang of things. Might take her a while, but she's got fire in her. I've seen it."

Squaring my shoulders, I smiled and went inside to help Martha with supper.

I heard Daniel and his father washing their hands in the shallow pan Martha kept filled outside the back door.

When the men entered the kitchen, Martha and I hurried around to put the food on the table - biscuits from breakfast, corn bread and fried chicken from dinner, stewed fruit, new corn, tomatoes from Martha's garden and Jeremiah's buttermilk.

While Martha went out to call the boys, Daniel wandered over to me and said, "Thought we might go for a walk before bedtime."

My hand rose, as if to stop the words while I checked around the kitchen. Daniel sighed. I suppose he thought I was focused only on making sure I had everything for the table. In truth, I was still hurt over the remark he'd made earlier, even though he was right.

"Livy?"

I turned toward him. "What?"

"A walk, after supper?" He placed his hands on my shoulders and looked into my eyes. I knew he wanted to comfort me, and perhaps be comforted, but I couldn't let go of my anger. He lowered his arms. "We need some time."

"Time." I nodded, and turned away. "All right. After supper." He patted my shoulder, but I shrugged out from under his hand.

The boys followed their mother in and gathered around the table to say grace before passing the food.

Jeremiah poured a cup of buttermilk and crumbled his corn bread into it. Martha touched his arm. "Would ye like me to cut some corn off the cob for ye?"

He smiled at her, then looked across the table at Daniel and up to me. He shook his head and said quietly, "Ain't the pain in my jaw that's bothering me, Mother."

Daniel looked over at me and I felt myself blush.

After Martha and I had eaten and washed the supper dishes, I turned to Martha and said, "Don't wait up for us. Daniel and I are going for a walk."

Martha nodded. "Ye need some time." Her head tilted sideways in acknowledgement.

I stared at her for a moment, feeling disconcerted once again. "Yes, that's what Daniel said." I turned away. There could never be enough time in the world to say good-bye to Daniel.

Outside, the new moon, barely a curved, silver thread, crested the southeastern ridge. The blackened sky swam with stars as Daniel and I left the porch. Daniel slipped an arm around my shoulder and my anger ebbed away. I slid my arm across the small of his back. We walked past the log barn. I could hear the milk cow bump against her stall and, from the shed that leaned haphazardly against the barn, the broody hens clucking as they settled for the night.

At the fence surrounding the corn, Daniel stopped and turned. "Livy --"

I shook my head and reached to touch his lips. "Just hold me for a while."

He took me in his arms, rocking me back and forth. I thought about the night I'd met him. I'd gone to a house party up near Logtown the year after my mother had died. I'd moved in with a nearby family rather than stay at my stepfather's cabin. At seventeen, I went to the dance searching for a new home.

I'd not been looking for love, only for security, but Daniel's long, straw colored hair and laughing eyes – the hazy blue of an Indian summer sky - caught at my heart. Even the small crescent scar across the bridge of his nose – a present from Micah, who'd hit him with a wood toy, I found out later - intrigued me as we danced. He was a good half-foot taller than I was and I felt a certain wiry strength in his leanness. I blushed at his lingering smile, wondering if he smiled at all women that way. I liked the way he held me in a firm but gentle grasp, the way he chatted with ease past my shyness.

By the time he asked if he could see me home, I had known I would marry him.

Now, in his arms for perhaps the last time, I struggled to get past my fears, to savor the moment. I turned my back to him, drawing his arms around me while I leaned against him. Together we stood staring at the stars while the silver-thread moon made its slow journey across the sky.

When I finally gave in to a yawn, Daniel leaned down and kissed the side of my cheek. "We'd best go in. Lots to do tomorrow."

We walked back to the house in silence, our fingers interlocked. Tomorrow. Tomorrow Daniel would leave and our life as we'd known it might be over.

We tiptoed into the quiet house. I hoped the others were asleep. In the narrow bed in the kitchen, Daniel and I gave ourselves to each other with quiet passion. Afterward, he ran his fingers through the moist tangles of my hair. "I'll be back, Livy."

I rolled over against him and kissed his chest. "You can't promise me that, Daniel." I closed my eyes and rested my head below his collarbone. "It's not in your power."

I felt him turn his head away, felt his acknowledgement in a sudden tensing of his body. "I'm sorry, Livy," he whispered.

I reached up and turned his face back toward me, running my finger over the scar across the bridge of his nose. "I know." I laid my head on his chest, my fingers playing with the thatch of blond hair until we both fell asleep.

After breakfast the next morning, I took the bucket and slipped out to the barn to milk our cow. Daniel's youngest brother was spreading fresh straw in the stalls. He stopped and leaned on the pitchfork when I entered. He smiled and said, "I'll get her stall cleaned for you."

"Thank you, Micah." I led the cow into the milking shed. "Where's the calf?"

"I tied it out in the yard so's it wouldn't bother you while you was milking." He followed me to the milking shed.

"You've done a good job," I said.

The ten year old grinned, showing the two new front teeth that still seemed a little large for his face. "I'll come back in a few minutes and carry the milk to the cellar for you."

“I’d appreciate that,” I said. He went back into the barn and I thought how much he would look like Daniel in a few years.

I tied the cow’s lead to a post beside the oat trough and let her feed while I fetched a wet rag to wipe down her udder. I looked forward to milking time, to the animal odor of the cow mixed with the scent of old straw and a faint, pungent tang of manure. I liked the fuzzy heft of her belly against my forehead, the warm stretching of the teats between my fingers. As a child, I’d escaped into the quieting rhythm each morning and evening, dreading the time between weaning and rebreeding when the cow had dried and my hiding place was gone.

By the time I finished milking and turned the cow and her calf loose, Daniel stood by the porch, waiting for his cousins. I watched Daniel’s horse, Lettie, shift back and forth under her burden, flicking her tail; she seemed eager to get started. I almost hated the beast for it.

Martha and I had filled hemp sacks with food. They hung on either side of Daniel’s saddle with a bag full of shot and his leather powder horn. He’d wrapped a change of clothing and his wool jacket in his blanket roll and tied it behind the saddle. I made a quick mental check to see if I could think of anything else he might need. The men of the Greene and Christian County Home Guard, thankfully, were not part of the regular Army. However, that meant they had to furnish their own supplies.

Daniel looked over and smiled as I went by, then reached out and touched my arm.

I went into the kitchen to get Nate. He sat on the bed, watching his grandmother bustle around. I was grateful he didn’t seem to understand what was going on around him.

Martha looked up. “Where’s the milk?”

“I had Micah take it to the cellar,” I said. “It’ll stay cool there until I can skim the cream off this morning.”

“That’s fine.” Martha looked around the kitchen. “Reckon we’re caught up here. You go on; I’ll be along in a minute.”

“I’ll take Nate outside with me.” I picked up a little wood horse Amos had carved for Nate and held out my hand. “Come play outside, until your papa’s ready to go.”

Once out on the porch, Nate pulled away and toddled toward Daniel’s mare. Lettie lowered her head and sniffed him, grunting softly. Looking over at his father, Nate said, “Go horsy.”

Daniel lifted him into the saddle. Nate’s short legs, sticking out from under his shirt, barely cleared the saddle.

“Hang on, now,” Daniel said. Nate buried his hands in the mane. Daniel untied the reins and led Lettie around the yard.

Nate loved it, but I could scarcely bear to watch, concentrating instead on the glinting play of light along the mare’s shoulder muscles as she plodded obediently to the barn and back.

Only when the horse was back at the porch rail and Nate safely on the ground could I breathe again. Lettie snorted, nodding her head up and down, and

looked at me with her walleyed stare. Reproving me, I felt sure, for my lack of faith in her.

I turned at the sound of hoof beats along the trace beyond the woods, followed by the sound of Ezra's long, "Halloo".

"Sounds like the men, now," Daniel said.

A few minutes later, Will Carter rode into the yard. Behind him, jogging along on the shaggy black pony he called Dauber, Ezra Johnston appeared. I almost laughed. He was two inches taller than Daniel and, riding bareback astride the pony, his feet nearly dragged the ground. His thin, homely face peered out from under a battered stovepipe hat in placid contentment, reminding me of a shabbier, happier version of Ichabod Crane.

Jeremiah came out of the house while the men dismounted. Will went over to shake hands and visit a moment. He was the youngest son of Jeremiah's sister Alice who, as far as I knew, still lived somewhere in Kentucky.

Jeremiah turned to visit with Ezra. Their talk looked serious, and when Jeremiah glanced at me and nodded, a little thrill of fear ran through me, though I couldn't say why.

Will sauntered over to me. "Wife says hello." He started to turn away, but stopped and said, "You watch out for my Dolly, will you? I know she'll be lonesome."

"Of course I will." In the year since he and Dolly had married and moved here, Dolly had become my best friend. "We'll be over in a couple of weeks to help her with foddering and harvest."

Will tipped his hat and went to talk to Daniel. I smiled watching them. Will, short and stocky, had to tilt backward to look Daniel in the eye while they talked. I saw Nate push himself up from play and toddle over to grab Will by the pant leg.

"Hey, boy. What're you doing there?" Will reached down and picked him up, rolling him back and forth in his arms while Nate squealed in delight. I thought what a good father Will would be.

At twenty-three, Will was balding in front. Dolly teased him about it from time to time, but it never seemed to bother him. With his mischievous brown eyes and a bushy mustache that seemed to dance below his bulbous nose when he laughed, he was the life of any get-together. Today, leaving Dolly behind, he was unusually somber.

"Miz Livy?"

I turned.

Ezra tipped his hat and said, "Wife's going to be visiting Mrs. Carter, come next Monday, to sew pieces for quilting this winter. Wanted me to ask you to join them."

"Oh. Well, I'm not sure ..." My voice trailed off as Martha came up beside us.

"Morning, Ezra."

"Aunt Martha." His long arms gathered her in an affectionate hug that Martha would never have tolerated from Will. Ezra had been four when his mother, Martha's cousin, died. Martha became a second mother and, growing up, Daniel had always thought of him as his older brother.

Ezra held out a small cotton sack to her. “Wife sent these quilting scraps over for you.”

“Well, bless her; I’ll have to thank her next time she comes over.”

Ezra turned back to me. “I was just telling young Mrs. Toliver that the wife is going over to the Carters’ house Monday to piece quilt scraps and wanted her to come.

“I wasn’t sure if ...” I looked down, unable to meet Martha’s eyes.

“Well, of course she will.” Martha put her hand on my shoulder. “Be good for them to get together, with you men going away. It’ll give Livy some time out of the house and give Nate a chance to play with your young’uns.”

And get me out from under your feet, I thought. “You’re sure you won’t need me?”

“No, don’t think so. I’ve even got a bag of scraps you can pick from to take to the ladies in exchange.”

“All right.” I watched Amos and Micah come toward us from morning chores. Micah looked miserable. The thought that I’d never reminded Daniel to spend more time with him shamed me.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Daniel and Will approaching. Jeremiah joined them. Will set Nate down beside me. Daniel looked at me and said, “Well, we best be going if the men and me are going to make it to Springfield afore sundown. Twenty-five miles is a good day’s ride.”

Jeremiah turned to the two cousins and said, “We’ll be over in the next couple of weeks for harvest. You did let the wives know to send word if they need help afore then?”

Will and Ezra nodded.

Daniel turned toward his mother and me. *Oh Daniel, don’t look at me like that.* I saw him sigh and wondered if, like me, he was wishing for one more walk, one more night in each other’s arms. One more day to laugh and play with Nate.

Martha stepped forward to bid her eldest son good-bye. Her rough hands wandered to his face for a moment, then slipped under his arms. Hugging him close, she whispered, “You come back to us, Son. You hear?”

“I will, Mam.” I saw him blink his eyes against a sudden rise of tears. “You’ll watch out for Livy and Nate?” She nodded and turned him loose. He leaned down and kissed her forehead.

Daniel turned to me, hugged me to his chest, and buried his face in my hair. I drank in the scent of him, wanting to carry it in my memory until he returned. Stepping back, Daniel cupped my chin in one hand and ran the other one along my hair, tucking in a wisp he’d loosened from my braided bun. “I’ll write, often as I can.”

“Me, too.”

“Look out for Mam, will you?” He gave me a long, gentle kiss and said, “You have to be strong, for Nate.”

“I will.” I smiled and touched his cheek as he drew away. He bent down toward Nathaniel. Martha slipped her arm around my shoulder. I felt my face twist with the pain of his going, but I did not cry.

Daniel scooped Nate into his arms. “You mind your Mam until I come home. You hear?”

Nathaniel nodded, pulling his thumb from his mouth. “Where going, Papa?”

“I’ll be back, son.” Daniel pressed his lips to Nate’s forehead. Nate’s large, worried eyes followed his father while Daniel handed him over to me. I thought of my own father’s unkept promise and said a silent prayer for my son.

Daniel led the horse out to the trace, Ezra and Will riding ahead. Jeremiah hobbled along behind the two younger boys while they walked with Daniel. At the edge of the yard, they shook hands all around. Jeremiah clapped Daniel on the shoulder and said, “I know you’ll make us all proud, Son.”

Micah squinted up at his brother, shading his eyes against the rising sun and said, “We’ll take good care of Livy and Nate.”

“I know you will.” He reached out and smoothed his brother’s hair.

Amos stood shuffling his feet until Daniel turned to him. “We’ll get your crops in,” Amos said. “Don’t worry none about that.”

“You take good care of Mam and Pap.”

“I will. We’ll take care of each other.”

Daniel patted his brother’s shoulder.

Behind me, a horsefly droned and buzzed in the heat and from somewhere nearby came the cry of a screech owl. I sucked in my breath, my heart racing, and, as if in slow motion, watched Jeremiah turn toward the cry – his face alive with fear at the dreadful omen. I glanced toward Martha to see if she had heard the sound, too, but her face showed nothing.

Daniel seemed not to have noticed it. He mounted and rode away. At the edge of the woods, he turned for one last glance.

“Wave to your papa.”

Nate lifted his arm, opening and closing his fingers. “Bye, Papa.”

I waved, fighting back a smothering dread. Daniel and Jeremiah waved a final good-bye before Daniel disappeared past the woods. Jeremiah limped slowly toward the house, whatever he felt reflected only in the slight stoop of his shoulders.

Martha sighed, next to me, and her leathery hand slipped into mine. For the first time, I understood that we shared the unyielding pain of Daniel’s leaving.

THREE

July 12, 1861 My mother, Anne, and I sometimes pieced quilts in those stolen moments when my stepfather was away drinking. Her bruised face always took on a look of contentment as we sewed the small pieces into larger patterns. I never asked why. Perhaps she saw it as a way to stitch the ragged remnants of her life into something better ...

We pulled into the yard at the Carter cabin, the dry milk cow tied behind the wagon. Dolly and Lucinda, Ezra's wife, were waiting on the porch. Jeremiah tipped his hat to the women and said, "I'll be back around four o'clock to gather 'em up."

I saw Lucinda look up toward the sun and I knew she was figuring in her head where it would be by the time Jeremiah returned.

"We'll make sure everyone is ready to go by then," Lucinda said.

Amos climbed out of the wagon and held out his hand to help me down.

"Thank you." I lifted Nate down and let him run ahead. Turning to Micah, I said, "Would you take that corn bread and the scrap bag to the house for me?"

"Yes'm." He hurried away, eager, I knew, to spend the day with Thad and Henry, Lucinda's two boys.

Amos looked up at his father. "Pap, you sure you won't need me to help with the cow?"

"Nah, don't reckon I will. I think me and Mr. Sanders and his son can handle that old man cow. Why don't you boys go down to the creek and see if you can scare up some crawdads for the ladies?"

Amos laughed. "I'll see what we can do."

"They's a old bucket in the back," Dolly called out. "Here." She held out a pin. "You can bend this into a hook. I think Will keeps some twine out in the shed and they's a piece of fat back under that cloth on the cabinet by the back door."

"Thanks, Mrs. Carter." Amos and the boys disappeared around the corner of the house.

Jeremiah flicked the reins. The mules leaned forward and stepped out. The wagon lurched and the cow bawled as the rope tightened and pulled her away from a patch of grass at the edge of the yard. Soon they all disappeared past the woods, leaving only a trail of dust dancing in the breeze along the trace.

Dolly hurried to me and gave me a hug. She was so tiny she barely came to my shoulder. "I'm so glad you could come." She stepped back and tucked a strand of her frizzy red hair behind her ear. For the year I'd know her, the hair had been in a perpetual struggle to escape the little bun at the back of her neck. "Where's Aunt Martha?"

"At the house," I said. "I think she enjoys the peace and quiet when everyone's away."

Dolly laughed. "That sounds like her."

I loved Dolly's laughter. At sixteen, she was the younger sister I never had, always exuberant and full of energy. We had shared many of our deepest secrets, something I could not do with Lucinda or my mother-in-law.

As she pulled away from me and led me toward the porch, I saw the same loneliness in her green eyes that I felt. I squeezed her hand. "I miss Daniel, too."

"Oh, I'm all right." She looked out toward the cornfield. "Besides, they'll be home afore harvest is milled. Don't you think? Won't take the Union long to run them Secesh out of Missouri."

"Of course," I said. She relaxed and I turned to look for Lucinda, afraid Dolly would see the doubt in my eyes.

Lucinda whispered something to her sons, before waving them after Amos and Micah. Picking up her eighteen-month-old daughter, Callie, she came toward Dolly and me. She plopped Callie on the ground beside Nate. "Lord, them boys is wore me out," she said, shaking her head. "Every few minutes, it's been, 'When's Amos and Micah going to be here'..."

Dolly reached out and touched a strand of Lucinda's black hair. "My goodness," she teased. "I see they're turning you gray headed already."

"Oh, go on." Lucinda brushed Dolly's hand away, laughing. Lucinda was plump and matronly – as short as her husband Ezra was tall. She had a gap between her front teeth and a slight overbite, giving her, I thought, a sort of horsy look. But her friendly walnut brown eyes more than made up for it.

"Let's sit out on the porch and sew," Lucinda said. "Hit's just too hot in your house, Dolly." She slipped her arms around us and ushered us to the porch.

"Oh, Lucinda," I pointed to the bag Micah had left on the porch. "That sack is from Martha – in exchange for the one you sent her."

"Well, wasn't that nice of her." Lucinda poked through the new bag. "Martha has such interesting scraps. All them years of saving, I reckon."

I saw her glance toward the babies, now struggling over Nate's toy horse. She took a small rag doll out of her scrap bag. "Here Callie. You play with this and don't you fight none with Nate, hear me?" Callie toddled over and retrieved the doll. The child was a pudgy, dark-haired copy of her mother. "Nate, honey," Lucinda called. "You come up here on the porch where it's shady." At thirty, two years older than her husband, Lucinda mothered everyone, the men included, in her blunt, practical way.

Nate looked up at me, as if asking whether he had to obey. I nodded and he came to sit near Callie.

"God love 'em," Lucinda said. "Don't they look sweet?"

"Watch out," Dolly said. "Lucinda will have them young'uns married afore they're out of their hippins."

We laughed. I smiled at Dolly's word for diapers. My mother had never let me speak the dialect of the hill people, thinking it vulgar. One more thing that had estranged us from our neighbors and angered my stepfather.

Dolly went inside and fetched a chair for me. Soon we had our needles threaded and pieces of patterns laid out. We searched our sacks for the perfect scrap to add next. As always, if we didn't find one we liked, we combed through each other's bags with a casualness that never failed to comfort me, reminding me that our lives, like the quilts, were dependent on each other's generosity.

Dolly's stitches slowed and stopped. I saw her glance toward the fields, her face filled with longing. At last, she sighed and turned back to sewing. "Sure glad

you ladies come over. It's so quiet with Will gone." She looked over to Lucinda. "I was telling Livy, I'm sure they'll be back afore time to mill the corn. Don't you think so?"

I saw Lucinda's left eyebrow go up and begged her with my glance not to disillusion Dolly.

"Well, least by Christmas," Lucinda said. "Considering the trash that's going to fight on the Secesh side."

"What do you mean?" Dolly said, without looking up.

"Oh that no count Dayton fellow and some of his friends was skulking around up on the ridge behind our cabin. Looking for a free meal on their way over to the Cowskin Prairie to join Pap Price and his militia, no doubt." Turning to me, she added, "Didn't Dayton live up there near Logtown when you was there?"

Lucinda's voice suddenly sounded far away. I felt a cold chill. The patchwork took on a grainy look. I missed a stitch, felt the needle slide against the thimble and jerked my hand away reflexively.

Dolly said, "Are you talking about John Dayton?" I shut my eyes against the lightheaded feeling ...

"Livy? Livy!" Lucinda shook my arm. "My Lord, child. You look like you seen a ghost."

I blinked and stared at Lucinda.

"Well, I should think she would," Dolly said. "That step dad of hers tried to marry her off to him afore she met --"

"Dolly." I felt the blush start up my neck and spread across my face.

"What?" Lucinda put her sewing down and leaned forward, peering into my eyes. "He didn't."

"We grew up together," I said. "John and his father used to take my stepfather drinking when he was out of money. I don't know why, except to see him make a fool of himself." A wave of shame swept over me. "Of course, he wasn't always so mean – before his mother passed. His father was so violent with him after she died. That changed him. And not for the better." I struggled with a stitch. "Maybe his father and my step dad just assumed John and I would marry all those years."

"My goodness," Lucinda said. "No wonder you run off to that family in Logtown after your mam died."

"I just couldn't stay there." I looked up, wondering what Lucinda must think of me.

"Why of course you couldn't." She reached over and squeezed my hand.

"And then when her step daddy come and tried to drag her home and she told him she was marrying Daniel ..." I glared at Dolly, trying to stop her blathering without making a scene. She kept her eyes on her sewing and went on. "He beat her with a horse whip."

"Oh child." Lucinda grasped my other hand. I tried to blink back the tears. She turned my hands loose and leaned back. "Is that why our men went with Uncle Jeremiah and Daniel to see your step dad right after you was married?"

I nodded.

Lucinda shook her head. “Never could get that man of mine to tell me what happened. ‘Men’s business,’ he said. And that was all I could get out of him.”

“Will said they caught up with him in that saloon in Logtown.” Dolly barely stopped for air. “And Daniel took him outside while the men held off John Dayton, and that bunch he runs with, with their muskets. To hear Will tell it, Daniel near beat the stuffing out of your step daddy.”

“Well, by cracky. If they hadn’t, I would have.” Lucinda’s face was red with anger. “If I’d of knowed about it ...” Her voice trailed away.

The image of Lucinda going after my stepfather struck me as funny. I burst out laughing, but I had no doubt that, with Lucinda swinging her rolling pin, he would have been the loser.

Lucinda blushed, but joined the laughter. We laughed until we had tears in our eyes.

Dolly looked up, wiping her eyes. “Oh, here comes the boys. Guess I’d better go stir the fire and put a pot of water on to boil.”

“Do you have room to set that skillet of corn bread on the coals to warm?” I asked.

“Sure do.” Dolly set her sewing aside and went into the cabin.

Lucinda rose. “Livy and me’ll peel some potatoes to throw in with them crawdads.” She slipped her arm around my shoulders. “Don’t you worry none about John Dayton. Him and that trash is probably halfway to Cowskin Prairie by now.”

“Thank you.” I reached up and squeezed her hand.

Lucinda gave me a quick hug. “With any luck at all, them rats will catch the first batch of Union musket balls.”

I smiled, savoring the thought of it for a moment.

While we peeled potatoes, I thought of Daniel. On our wedding night, I had turned away from him in our bed – afraid the welts on my back would break open and bleed if we consummated our marriage; ashamed that he might see what my stepfather had done. I heard him sigh and turn over in the dark, but he didn’t press me.

I tried to slip out of bed and dress before he woke. While I struggled to pull my nightgown off, he got up and lit the grease lamp. I tried to face him before he could see my back, but he stopped me.

“My God, Livy,” he’d said. “Who did this?”

“My stepfather,” I whispered, terrified Daniel would send me away.

He sat me on the bed and fetched the ointment from the cabinet.

Remembering that morning, I could still feel his gentle touch as he applied the salve. When I flinched, he stopped and pressed his lips against my shoulder. From that moment on, I’d known I was safe with Daniel.

Lucinda touched my arm and I jumped. “Livy, you about finished with that potato?”

I dropped the peeled potato into the hot water and the three of us went outside while they boiled.

The boys came around from the back with the crayfish. “We rinsed them for you, Mrs. Carter,” six-year-old Henry Johnston said.

I smiled as Lucinda spit on her thumb and wiped a smudge of dirt from his face. "He's going to be a birthday boy in a couple of months." Henry grinned from ear to ear. Lucinda reached up to smooth his wild brown hair. He had his father's friendly hazel eyes and would grow up as tall and thin as Ezra, no doubt. He is his father's son, I thought.

"Livy," Dolly said. "Come help me with these crawdads."

I rose and followed her into the house. I held the bucket while she scooped them out alive and tossed them in the boiling water. I turned my head. As much as I loved eating the little creatures, while they simmered in the pot my sympathies lay with the crayfish.

After dinner, we returned to our sewing while Nate and Callie napped in Dolly's bed.

"You're awful quiet, Livy." Lucinda looked over at me.

"Just going over what I need to do when I get back to the house."

"You sure?"

"Yes," I lied. From the moment Lucinda had said John Dayton's name, the fear had scuttled around inside me like the crayfish in their bucket.

Dolly leaned sideways and looked up at the sun. "Mr. Toliver will be back soon." Like Lucinda, Dolly could not read, write or tell time.

We had just put our work away and gathered the various pans we'd brought when we heard the wagon in the distance and Jeremiah's "halloo".

The cow mooed and Lucinda said, "Reckon that old man cow got his work done?"

Dolly giggled and blushed. "Well, let's hope so."

I felt a little shiver at the coy reference and saw John Dayton's leering face as he'd tried to force a kiss, not long after my mother had died. That night, I had fled to the Sanderson farm outside of Logtown.

I hugged myself against the fear. I had always felt safe with Daniel, but Daniel was gone.

A woman struggles to survive the Civil War in Missouri.

An Uncivil War

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