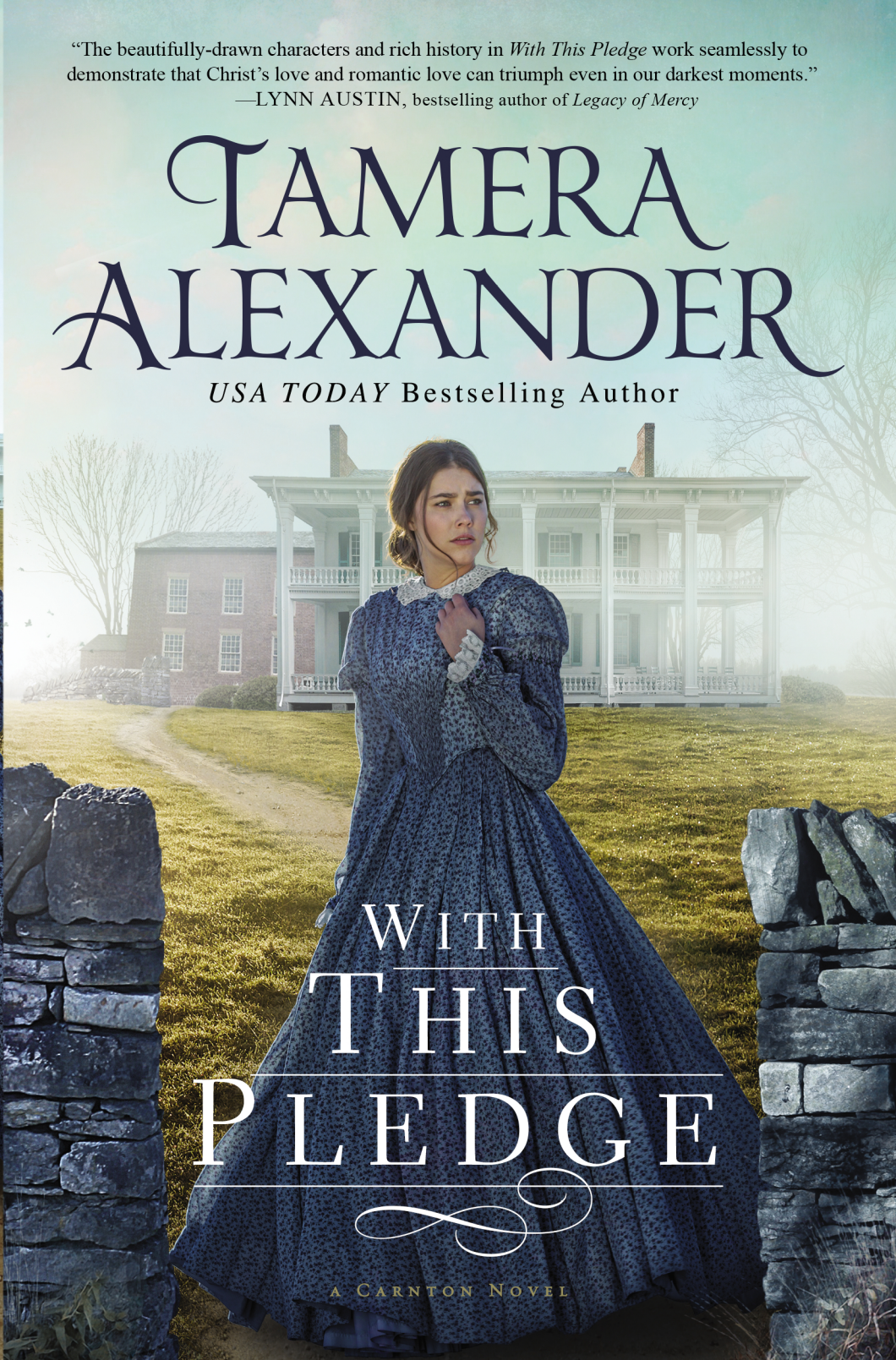


"The beautifully-drawn characters and rich history in *With This Pledge* work seamlessly to demonstrate that Christ's love and romantic love can triumph even in our darkest moments."

—LYNN AUSTIN, bestselling author of *Legacy of Mercy*

# TAMERA ALEXANDER

USA TODAY Bestselling Author



WITH  
THIS  
PLEDGE

A CARNTON NOVEL

WITH  
THIS  
PLEDGE

TAMERA ALEXANDER



THOMAS NELSON  
Since 1798



THOMAS NELSON  
Since 1798

*With This Pledge*

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*In memory of all those who fell at the Battle of  
Franklin, and for the ones who either tended  
their wounds or helped usher them Home.*



THOMAS NELSON  
Since 1798

I lie awake thinking of you,  
meditating on you through the night.  
Because you are my helper,  
I sing for joy in the shadow of your wings.  
I cling to you;  
your strong right hand holds me securely.  
Psalm 63:6–8 NLT

Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God,  
the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness  
to a thousandth generation with those who love Him  
and keep His commandments.  
Deuteronomy 7:9 NASB



Dear Reader,

The journey you're about to embark upon is drawn heavily from the pages of history and from the lives of people who lived through the events portrayed in this novel. I am deeply honored to have been given the privilege to write about both. But along with that honor comes a weighty responsibility to accurately convey the events that took place. This is the story of what happened on the evening of November 30, 1864, at Carnton Plantation in Franklin, Tennessee, following the tragic five-hour Battle of Franklin, in which nearly ten thousand soldiers were either killed, wounded, or captured, and how the people who lived at Carnton dealt with the aftermath.

To that end, I've written this novel with a careful consideration of history—including oftentimes disturbing descriptions of combat—coupled with a deep desire to weave a compelling story of hope. Because hope is what I experienced time and again as I pored over the history of these events. I read literally thousands of pages of historical and personal accounts through which we can witness, with awe-filled admiration, the courage and strength that characterized these men and women.

My thanks go to the staff at Carnton for allowing me access to their extensive historical resources, with special appreciation to Joanna Stephens and Elizabeth Trescott for answering countless questions with never-failing patience. I also extend my gratitude to David Doty, the great-great-great-great-grandson of Captain Roland Ward Jones, the last wounded Confederate soldier to leave Carnton following his convalescence—and one of the main characters in this novel—for sharing his family's personal history, including the love letters between Roland and Lizzie. This novel is all the richer for our phone conversations and email exchanges, David, and for the many pictures you've shared. *Thank you.*

Finally, to you, dear reader, thank you for entrusting your time to me. It's a gift I treasure and never take for granted. Perhaps we'll cross

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

paths at Carnton one day soon. I hope so. And as you walk the hallowed grounds of the battlefield, as you tour the rooms and hallways of Carnton and view floorboards that still—over a century and a half later—bear the bloodstains from that fateful November night, I trust you'll gain, as I have, a deeper appreciation for the sacrifices made by the men and women who were there—most of whom will remain unknown to us.

But some we do know. And this is their story.

With fresh eternal perspective,



# CHAPTER I

NOVEMBER 30, 1864  
CARNTON PLANTATION  
FRANKLIN, TENNESSEE  
21 MILES SOUTH OF NASHVILLE

“And this, children, is a drawing of the Great Pyramids of Giza in Egypt. Which is a very long way from Franklin, Tennessee.” Lizzie read fascination in young Hattie’s eyes, and in those of Sallie, the cousin visiting from Nashville. Yet seven-year-old Winder only stared glumly out the window.

Lizzie lowered her voice. “This pyramid here is where a mighty Egyptian pharaoh, or king, and his queen are buried. And it’s full of secret rooms.”

Winder’s head whipped back around. “Secret rooms?”

She nodded. “Archaeologists recently discovered some new rooms in the upper portion of the pyramid. They’d been hidden for centuries. See this drawing . . .”

As she continued teaching, she glanced at the clock on the side table, expecting Tempy to bring the children’s midmorning refreshment anytime now. A summerlike breeze fluttered the curtains on the open jib window leading to a second-story balcony, and the sunshine and warmth beckoned them outside. Perhaps she would take advantage of the beautiful weather and conduct the afternoon classes under the Osage orange tree out front. After so many weeks of rain and cold, the mild weather was a welcome change. Especially for the end of November.



A few moments later she heard Tempy's footsteps on the staircase. "Thank you for listening so intently, children. And for your excellent questions, girls. And now it's refreshment time!"

Tempy knocked twice on the door, then entered. "Mornin', little ones!"

Winder hopped down from his chair. "What are we havin' today, Tempy?"

Lizzie cleared her throat and gave him a pointed look.

"I mean . . . Thank you, Tempy, for whatever it is you made," he corrected, still trying to peer up and over the side of the tray.

Tossing him a wink, Tempy set the tray on the table. "I made y'all some cinnamon rolls this mornin', Master Winder. You go on now and help yourself. And get a glass of that milk too." She included the girls in her nod, and the children took their snacks and hurried outside to the balcony overlooking the front yard. "Miss Clouston, I brought you one too, ma'am."

Lizzie accepted the roll and took a bite, then sighed and briefly closed her eyes. The bread, still warm from the oven, all but melted in her mouth, the buttery icing slathered on top a concoction of sugary goodness. "Oh, Tempy, these are even better than usual. Thank you."

"My pleasure, ma'am." Tempy eyed the globe on the table and shook her head. "Look at all them places. Hard to believe all that's out there somewhere."

Lizzie heard something akin to yearning in the woman's tone. She'd noticed Tempy gazing at the globe before, but without comment. Mindful of any icing on her fingers, Lizzie turned the globe to show North America, then pointed to Tennessee. "That's where we are right now. And this"—she turned the globe again and pointed to the northeast corner of Africa—"is where these pyramids are located." Lizzie held up the image and gave a condensed version of what she'd taught the children. "It's in a place called Egypt."

Tempy eyed her. “You tellin’ me a fancy king’s buried in that thing?”

Lizzie nodded. “Along with his queen.”

“Mmmph . . . It don’t look so far away on this ball, but I’m guessin’ it’d take us a while to get there.”

“Yes, quite a while. And we’d have to traverse an ocean in the process.” Lizzie drew an invisible line from Tennessee across the Atlantic Ocean to the general region of Giza.

Tempy shook her head. “So much world the good Lord made. Wonder how he ever thought it all up.”

Lizzie moved her finger a little to the right, knowing Tempy would appreciate this. “Do you see this tiny portion of land here?”

Tempy squinted. “Yes, ma’am. But only just.”

“That’s Palestine. The part of the world where the Lord was born and where he dwelt during his life here on earth.”

“Pal-es-tine,” Tempy repeated slowly and said it twice more as though wanting to feel the word on her lips. “I was told he was from a place called Bethlehem.”

Lizzie nodded. “You’re right, he was. Bethlehem is located in this area.”

For the longest time Tempy studied the spot on the globe, then traced an arthritic forefinger over it, her expression holding wonderment. And not for the first time, Lizzie felt a firm tug on her conscience.

By Tempy’s own admission, the older woman had been at Carnton for nigh onto forever, serving as the McGavocks’ cook. Lizzie had often wanted to ask Tempy about her life here. About this war. And about being the only slave left behind when Colonel McGavock sent the other forty-three south three years ago, far from the reach of the Federal Army that would have freed them.

She felt certain that Tempy would have leapt at the chance to learn her letters, but teaching a slave to read and write was against the law. Here in the South, at least. The Emancipation Proclamation, issued by

President Lincoln nearly two years ago, hadn't made much difference in that regard. So Lizzie had never offered. And in the eight years she had lived and worked here at Carnton, she'd never confided in Tempy her opinions on slavery. She'd never had the courage. After all, slavery wasn't a topic a "properly bred" woman deigned to broach. And certainly not with a slave.

And what would stating her differing views have changed? Nothing. Lizzie held back a sigh. She was a governess, not a landowner. She couldn't vote. She wasn't even mistress of her own home—yet, at least. She had no voice. And sharing her opinions would have only driven a wedge between her and the McGavock family, which was a relationship she cherished. Being so forthcoming might well cost her the position here, and that was something she could ill afford, especially now with the war on. Still, even when considering her reasons, she felt a sense of shame.

She wondered sometimes if she shouldn't have gone north all those years ago when she'd first considered it. She could have found a place with a family in Boston or Philadelphia, surely. Yet that would have meant leaving behind her family, her friends, all that was familiar. So she'd stayed, and tried not to dwell on what she couldn't change.

"You teachin' them children 'bout all them places, ma'am?" Tempy glanced at the globe.

"I'm doing my best. Although with so pretty a day, it's difficult to maintain their attention."

"Days like this don't come round too often, 'specially this time of year."

Lizzie dabbed the corners of her mouth, checking for icing. Then she lowered her voice, mindful of the open jib window. "I'm thinking of moving outside for a while so we can enjoy the sunshine."

"If you want, ma'am, I could fix you all a picnic lunch and you could eat out there."

Lizzie nodded. “That’s a wonderful idea! I’ll use that as an enticement for them to remain attentive until then.”

The promise worked like a charm. Following a delightful lunch, the children helped clean up the picnic without complaint. Winder needed a little prompting, rambunctious boy that he was. Still, he pitched right in when asked. Lizzie sat on the blanket beside Sallie watching as Winder and Hattie chased each other beneath the shade of the Osage orange tree. A wave of affection for them swept through her, nearly stealing her breath. She’d known Hattie before the girl had turned two. And Winder she’d known since birth. She loved them as though they were her own.

The warmth within her faded by a degree. Someday, Lord willing, she and Towny would have children of their own. A flicker of guilt accompanied the thought of Towny. But as she always did, Lizzie tried to set it aside. After all, women married for a whole variety of reasons—money, prestige, social standing, security. So was marrying for the hope of having children really so bad?

She studied the bare ring finger on her left hand and thought of what Towny had said in his last letter almost a month ago. The next time he saw her, he’d written, he had something special to give her. She wondered if it was his mother’s ring. Having known his mother, Marlene—God rest her soul—Lizzie found the thought endearing. Then again, having known Towny’s parents and the close relationship they’d shared, she only hoped that *if* Towny planned on giving her that ring, she would prove worthy of it.

It would be wonderful to see him again after all these months. Would he be much changed? Would he consider her so? Had his intent to marry her waned in any way? Did he ever entertain the same questions about their future as she did? A warm breeze rustled the leaves overhead, and Lizzie checked the chatelaine watch pinned to her shirt-waist. It was later than she’d thought. She ushered the children back into the schoolroom upstairs and was closing the door behind her when Tempy caught her attention.

“A letter come for you, ma’am. From your Lieutenant Townsend.” Tempy handed it to her. “I hope he’s all right. He’s such a good man.”

*Your* Lieutenant Townsend. Tempy had taken to calling Towny that in recent months, but the term still struck an odd note within Lizzie. “Thank you for bringing this to me. And yes, he *is* a good man.” She checked the date stamped on the envelope. Only a week ago. Mail delivery had been quick this time. She wondered where he was.

“He’ll make you a good husband too, ma’am.”

“Yes. Yes, he will,” Lizzie answered. She’d told herself the same thing many times.

Tempy tilted her head and studied her in the manner she sometimes did. A manner that always caused Lizzie to ponder whether the woman could read every blessed thought in her head. And, even more, if Tempy questioned whether Lizzie herself was as well acquainted with those thoughts as she should be.

“Well, enjoy your letter.” Tempy dipped her head and took her leave.

Lizzie closed the door and laid the envelope on the table’s edge. It would have to wait for now. The first hour passed swiftly as they reviewed grammar lessons, then transitioned to penmanship. Hattie and Sallie both possessed a beautiful hand. But Winder’s cursive, bless him, looked more like chicken scratch. Lizzie sat with him while he painstakingly practiced each letter, then she whispered, “Well done,” and tousled the hair on his head. She did love a good challenge. Next they moved to arithmetic. Lizzie wrote addition problems on a slate, and each child took a turn solving two or three. Arithmetic was Winder’s favorite subject, and to Lizzie’s joy he excelled in it. Finally she set them to working problems on their own and reached for Towny’s letter.

She opened the envelope. Only one sheet of paper within. Her gaze scanned the page, and her eyes widened. He’d been brief, but not evasive. Quite the contrary. Lizzie felt her face go warm.

WITH THIS PLEDGE

Dearest Lizzie Beth,

I'm counting the days until I see you again and sincerely hope that that number will be a small one. I've taken to dreaming of you in recent days and those dreams are so real I can almost feel you beside me. To say I'm eager to make you my wife would be a dilution of my fierce affections. It would be like saying that Tennessee summers can be a mite warm. Yet as warm as we know those summers to be, they are nothing compared to the fire that burns within me for you, and that seems to grow stronger with each passing day.

Lizzie looked up to see if the children were watching. Then she realized how silly that was. As though in watching her read the letter, they would somehow be made privy to its contents. She fingered the high collar of her shirtwaist and continued.

Tucker's Brigade is being ordered farther south, but I pray we make our way back to Franklin soon. Hopefully by spring. I want us to be married as soon as possible, Lizzie. That is my wish and I hope yours is the same. I apologize for my brevity, but I must see this posted before we move out. Please pass along my kindest regards to the McGavocks and their children. When you see my father, please inform him that his son is well, is fighting for the land he cherishes, but misses home and all the treasures it holds. Namely you, my dearest Lizzie.

Most affectionately yours,  
Towny

Any question about whether he'd changed his mind about their pending nuptials had been erased. And once again Towny had managed to surprise her. She'd last seen him in January, when he'd asked her to marry him. To say she'd been surprised then as well was an understatement. One minute they'd been walking back from town

after a visit with her family—discussing the war and how he'd managed to secure a brief furlough home—and the next thing she knew, he'd turned and grabbed hold of her hands.

"I know this seems sudden, Lizzie, but I've been thinking about it for some time. I think I've loved you since I first laid eyes on you that day at the mercantile. You with your brown hair in pigtails, eating a peppermint stick. You would hardly look at me, until I did a somersault with no hands." His boyish grin held traces of youth. "Once we're husband and wife, I know we can make a good life together. We already know each other at our best and worst, and that gives us a great advantage over most couples. So please, say you'll be my wife? At least consider it?"

She had agreed and then sought her mother's counsel, only to discover that Towny had already asked her father's permission for her hand, which he had heartily given. Her parents were overjoyed. And looking at it practically, she'd realized Towny was right. They did already know each other very well. And they were both twenty-eight years old. It was well past time for her to wed. No one else had sought her hand in marriage, and she had no reason to think that would change, especially with the war claiming the lives of so many men.

But the real reason she'd agreed to marry Towny—the reason she'd not shared with him—made her feel false inside. She wanted children of her own, and the time for that to happen was swiftly passing her by. She smoothed a hand over her midsection. Soon Hattie and Winder would be grown, and she'd have to move on to another house to raise someone else's children. Either that or become a burden to her parents. So . . . she'd said yes.

And she *was* terribly fond of Towny. She could honestly say she loved him. Not, perhaps, in the way she'd always imagined she would love a husband. But love could grow from friendship. Or so she'd been told. And she and Blake Rupert Townsend—or Towny, the nickname

she'd bestowed upon him as a boy—had been the best of friends since childhood. So she'd given him her pledge. And Towny *would* make a fine husband. She'd thought so for many years. She'd simply never imagined he would be hers.

Lizzie folded the letter and put it away, then checked the time. She'd allow the children another five or ten minutes to complete their tasks. In the meantime, she'd fetch the novel she'd left in Winder's bedroom down the hallway. She intended to start reading it to them tonight before bedtime. She'd saved it specially for this time of year.

"Miss Clouston," Sallie said before Lizzie shut the door.

"Yes, dear?"

"Could you help me with this one before you go?" The girl pointed to her slate.

"*Would* you help me," Lizzie gently prompted. "And yes, I'd be happy to help you. But I want you to try to figure it out first on your own. I'll prompt you if you begin to do it incorrectly. And feel free to work the problem aloud, if that helps you."

She smoothed a hand over Sallie's long blond hair and gave her an encouraging nod, then tugged a strand of the equally long golden hair of Clara, the porcelain doll the child took with her everywhere. Sallie grinned and set to work, whispering faintly to herself. Following a recent buildup of Federal troops in Nashville, Sallie's parents had asked the McGavocks if they could bring Sallie to Carnton for a few days to keep her distanced from the war. It was nice to have an additional student to teach, and since Hattie and Sallie were close cousins, they were enjoying every moment together.

Sallie finished working the problem and peered up.

"Well done!" Lizzie whispered, and the girl's eyes sparkled. "By working it aloud, you were able to do it all by yourself. Now see if you can complete the rest, and I'll be back shortly."

Lizzie closed the door, then waited a few seconds to make certain Winder didn't start jabbering at the girls the way he sometimes



did when she left the room. But blessed quiet reigned, and she sighed. Days like these were what governesses lived for.

She headed for Winder's room across the hall, then remembered she'd left the blanket they'd used for the picnic folded on the front porch. Best get that first. She descended the staircase to the main floor and heard the clock in the family parlor chime. Two o'clock. She might dismiss the children early today and they could all take a walk down to the Saw Mill Creek, or maybe even into town to get penny candy at the mercantile. They could stop by her parents' house for a quick visit too, and—

The front door flung open and Lizzie stopped short, her heart skipping a beat. A soldier strode in. A general, she thought, judging by his uniform. Scarcely pausing, he focused on the staircase and strode in that direction.

"May I help you, sir?" She didn't recognize him, yet he did look familiar to her somehow.

Without a word, without even looking at her, he started up the staircase. Lizzie glanced into the side rooms for Colonel or Mrs. McGavock but didn't see them. So she followed the man upstairs, where he hesitated only briefly before heading into the guest room and stepping through the open jib window onto the second-floor gallery porch that spanned the back of the house. He walked as far as the northwest corner of the porch, then stopped and stared out across the fields.

Lizzie stood just inside the guest bedroom, at odds about what to do. Her main concern was for the children's safety—and clearly they were not at risk. But what was the man doing, simply barging into a home like this without asking permission? Without even a greeting? Perhaps he knew Colonel and Mrs. McGavock, but still . . . common decency should prevail.

Seconds ticked past. She finally went as far as the window and peered out, wanting to see what he was looking at. And her heart thudded a heavy beat.

Scarcely a mile away, Federal troops were gathering en masse around the Carters' house. *Thousands* of them. She'd never seen so many soldiers in one place. She stepped out onto the porch for a better view. Earlier that morning, she and Mrs. McGavock had seen several hundred blue coats headed up Columbia Pike. That wasn't unusual, considering that the US Army had occupied the town of Franklin off and on for nearly the past three years. They'd held the city of Nashville too, almost since the war started. So both she and Carrie McGavock had simply assumed the soldiers were on their way there. Either that or to nearby Fort Granger, a Federal outpost some two miles away. But what Lizzie saw now . . .

Why so many soldiers? And what were they doing? Constructing fortifications of some kind, it looked like. In a crescent shape just south of the Carters' home. She hoped Fountain Carter and his family were all right. Something glinted in the sunlight and she took a few steps closer, then stopped. Even without field glasses, she could see numerous cannons being situated along the crest of the hill.

The general suddenly turned, his features fierce, and retraced his steps. Lizzie followed him downstairs, where he strode through the open front door and down the front steps, and mounted a stallion. She paused in the doorway and stared after him as he rode south across the fields.

"Was that a soldier?" she heard behind her. She turned to see Tempy, folded picnic blanket in her arms.

"Yes. But I don't know who it was. He never gave his name. He simply barged in without even knocking!"

Footsteps sounded, and Colonel McGavock emerged from the farm office.

"What was General Forrest doing here?" he asked.

"General Nathan Bedford Forrest?" Lizzie responded.

At his nod, she looked back outside. No wonder the man had looked familiar. She'd seen his likeness many times in the newspaper.

"I have no idea, Colonel. He simply walked in, went upstairs, looked out over the porch, then walked back out again. He never said a word. But I know what he was looking at. Federal troops are gathering around the Carters' house. Far more than what Mrs. McGavock and I saw this morning." She instinctively lowered her voice in case the children were listening from above. "It appears as though they're putting artillery into place."

The colonel's eyes narrowed, and he headed up the stairs. "Please keep the children inside for the remainder of the afternoon, Miss Clouston. And focused on their studies."

"Of course, sir." She and Tempy exchanged a look.

Lizzie left the novel she'd planned on getting from Winder's bedroom for later and returned to the classroom. She instructed the children to open their primers, then turned in her chair to glance out the partially open jib window toward the front of the house. But she saw nothing out of the ordinary.

"Hattie and Sallie, please turn to page seventeen. Winder, please turn to page eight. You may begin reading while I review your arithmetic problems."

Lizzie was halfway through checking Hattie's work when she realized she'd been staring at the same problem for the past five minutes. She couldn't seem to concentrate. What were so many Federal soldiers doing at the Carters' house?

A knock on the door made her jump. The door opened, and Mrs. McGavock stepped inside. Lizzie rose. Visits from her employer during lesson hours were rare.

"Is everything all right, Mrs. McGavock?"

But she could tell from the woman's furrowed brow that it wasn't. Mrs. McGavock quietly greeted the children, then discreetly motioned for Lizzie to join her on the balcony. Lizzie stepped outside and, for the second time that day, a sinking sensation pulled her heart down in her chest. In the distance, no more than two miles away, a massive

sea of butternut and gray moved steadily forward. Like a great crest of an ocean came wave after wave of men, already in their divisions, it appeared, with flags flying. Lizzie's pulse edged up a notch.

She looked in the direction of the Carters' house but couldn't see it from the vantage point the front balcony afforded. "Surely they can see the Federal Army up ahead. Waiting for them."

Mrs. McGavock nodded, her expression grave. "The colonel isn't certain what's happening. But he did hear yesterday that the bridges across the Harpeth are all impassable due to the recent rains."

"So you think the Federals tried to cross but couldn't?"

"I don't know what to think, Lizzie."

Lizzie looked over at her. She considered Carrie McGavock a dear friend, but rarely did her employer use her Christian name. Lizzie checked the watch hanging from her shirtwaist. Half past three.

Mrs. McGavock turned. "I'd like for you to take the children down to the kitchen. Get them settled there with their studies, and perhaps give them something to eat." She offered a faint smile. "A treat will help keep them occupied."

"Yes, ma'am. I'll do that right away."

Wanting to reassure her, Lizzie tried to maintain a smile. Many years ago a matronly aunt had told her mother, *Lizzie's a quiet thing, Sena. Sweet enough, but I declare if that girl can't seem to hold a smile.* Lizzie often wondered if that statement had been a self-fulfilling prophecy. Either way, it was the truth. She returned to the classroom, pressing a forefinger to her lips while Mrs. McGavock made a quiet exit. "Children, I want you to gather your books and slates. We're going to have our afternoon lessons in a special room of the house."

Winder's eyes widened. "Is it a secret room?" he whispered, his chin dropping a smidgen as he peered up at her. "Like in that triangle place you showed us this mornin'?"

"No, it's not a pyramid. Not even a secret room. But it *is* a secret where we're going." She gathered her things and gestured. For effect,

she opened the door slowly and peered out, then motioned for them to follow quietly.

The girls giggled as they moved down the stairs to the entrance hall, then to the dining room. The bi-fold doors separating that room from the farm office were open, and through the window, in the distance, Lizzie spotted the Southern army advancing.

“Hurry along now,” she whispered and encouraged the children to precede her down the short flight of stone steps to the kitchen.

“We’re goin’ to the kitchen?” Winder asked, obviously nonplussed.

Lizzie shook her head. “Follow me!”

Tempy looked up from where she stood at a worktable mixing something in a bowl. She must have caught the look Lizzie sent her because the woman only smiled at the children as they passed, then raised her brows when Lizzie retrieved an oil lamp from the hutch.

“All right, children . . .” Lizzie nodded toward the larder and summoned a conspiratorial tone. “Remember I told you that the rooms in the pyramid have no windows? We’re going to go inside the larder and pretend that we’re in a pyramid!”

Hattie and Sallie looked at each other and grinned. Winder, however, stopped dead in his tracks.

“I got in trouble for goin’ in there last time, Miss Clouston. Mama said I ate too many of Tempy’s tea cakes. And it took forever ’fore I could have ’em again.”

Lizzie’s heart warmed as she remembered that incident. How she loved this boy. “It’s all right, Winder. We have your mother’s permission to go inside, I promise. Come along.”

She opened the door and a bevy of scents reached out to them—fresh ground flours and meals, an array of spices ranging from cinnamon to nutmeg to oregano, and above it all the sweet scent of dried apples, peaches, and pears. Tempy worked tirelessly when it came to storing up summer fruits and vegetables, and was equally skilled at turning those stored goods into culinary treasures.

Lizzie placed the oil lamp on the stone floor. "Have a seat, children." She sat on a barrel of molasses, her mind racing.

Sallie sucked in a breath. "I forgot Clara! May I go back and get her, please?"

Hattie jumped up. "I'll go with her. We'll be like those explorers you told us about!"

Lizzie held up a hand. "I'll go get Clara. Meanwhile, I want you three explorers to discuss what you think it might be like to be inside a pyramid in one of those rooms. Each of you write down three things you might see or feel or smell while in that room. Then when I get back, we'll share our lists with each other."

The children nodded, though Sallie didn't look quite as convinced.

Lizzie reached behind her for a tin. "And of course every explorer needs nourishment." She removed the lid and held out the container.

"Tea cakes!" Winder yelled and grabbed two, then paused and looked up at Lizzie, who gave an approving nod.

After serving the girls and seeing her three charges settled, she slipped from the larder and closed the door behind her. Tempy stood staring out one of the kitchen windows.

"Miss Clouston, you best come see this."

Lizzie joined her and saw two large groups of Confederate soldiers moving their way. Trees lining the serpentine brick walkway out front blocked the rest of the view. "Yes, Mrs. McGavock and I saw them earlier, before I brought the children downstairs. I wanted to say something to you but couldn't. Not in front of them."

"What's goin' on, ma'am? Why's that army marchin' this way?"

"I don't know. But from what I saw earlier, there are just as many Federal soldiers holed up over by the Carters' house."

"Oh great God be with us all," Tempy whispered.

Lizzie said a silent amen. "I need to run upstairs and get Sallie's doll. Would you keep an eye on the children for me until I get back?"

"Yes, ma'am. I surely will."

Lizzie hurried up the steps and through the dining room and started up the staircase.

“Miss Clouston . . .”

She turned to see Mrs. McGavock peering out the front door, which stood slightly ajar. Reading the woman’s expression, Lizzie joined her. “The children are safe, ma’am. They’re in the kitchen with Tempy, and—”

Mrs. McGavock opened the door the rest of the way and Lizzie fell silent. Despite her feelings about this war, the sight spreading out before her was spellbinding. That great sea of butternut and gray they’d seen from a distance earlier advanced toward them in columns that seemed to stretch out forever across the Harpeth Valley, nearly two miles wide. No sound jarred the tranquil afternoon other than that of the soldiers’ rhythmic footfalls and the occasional trill and chatter of a barn swallow. Most of the soldiers looked so young, and they marched with spirits high and rifles at the ready straight across Carnton’s fields and front lawn as the warm Indian summer day drew to a close.

On closer inspection, Lizzie realized that some of them weren’t carrying rifles. While it was common knowledge that the Southern army was less adequately equipped than their Northern counterpart, seeing that fact evidenced so crudely in the weapons some of the soldiers wielded was sobering, to say the least. Pitchforks, knives, pickaxes, even shovels. And it only added to the measure of the almost tangible grit and determination she could feel with each forward step the soldiers took.

“The mighty Army of Tennessee,” Mrs. McGavock said softly, her voice a mixture of pride and dread. “Twenty thousand men, the colonel tells me.”

While Lizzie was stirred by the sight and shared the sense of dread, she couldn’t share the same sense of pride. Because for all the reasons given to support the Confederacy’s cause—states’ rights, economic concerns, protection of home and land, and families’ futures—they all

seemed to lead back to the continuance of slavery. And though she had yet to voice her opinion in this household, she was very much in accord with the North on that count. In the same breath, she only wished it wasn't taking a war to find some semblance of common ground.

Carrie McGavock stepped outside onto the front portico, then descended the steps and followed the brick path to the front gate. Lizzie shadowed her steps.

The neat columns of soldiers briefly broke ranks as they circled around the house, marching in quick time straight toward the mass of entrenched Federal troops waiting for them just south of the Carters' house. Lizzie studied the men's faces as they passed. Fierce determination marked some, weariness and fatigue others. Then she heard it. Music. From somewhere within the throng rose the South's oh-so-beloved "Dixie." She spotted the brass band as they marched past, the fading rays of sunlight reflecting off their instruments. After "Dixie" came "Bonnie Blue Flag," then "The Girl I Left Behind Me." The latter tunes seemed far too rousing and frivolous to accompany an army's charge, yet she heard some of the troops singing along as they—

A stray gunshot sounded from the advancing forces, and she and Mrs. McGavock both turned and hurried back toward the portico. When they reached the steps, they heard someone calling out to them.

"Ladies! Please, I must prevail upon the house!"

Lizzie turned to see a man hurrying up the brick walkway.

Mrs. McGavock took a step forward, squinting. "Reverend Markham? Is that you?"

The man's steps slowed as disbelief clouded his features. "Caroline Elizabeth Winder?" His voice held disbelief. "Could the woman before me be the same young girl I knew back in Louisiana?"

A slow smile curved Mrs. McGavock's mouth. "She would be one and the same, Reverend. Except it's Mrs. John McGavock now. Those closest to me call me Carrie. And it's been several years since I was that young girl. And since our paths have crossed."



“Yes, it has been.” He looked over at the soldiers still pressing forward. “Or several lifetimes, it feels like.”

The tender understanding in Mrs. McGavock’s expression rendered any verbal response unnecessary. Footsteps behind them drew their attention. “Reverend Markham,” Mrs. McGavock continued, “allow me to introduce my husband, Colonel John McGavock.”

Following swift introductions, a pause settled in, and Lizzie detected a subtle change in the reverend’s demeanor.

“Colonel McGavock, Mrs. McGavock, I need to inform you that your home has been designated the division field hospital for the wounded of Loring’s Division. On behalf of General Hood and the great Army of Tennessee, we’re grateful for your devotion to the Confederacy and to your fellow countrymen.” He solemnly extended his hand and Colonel McGavock shook it, and in doing so accepted the selection of his home without hesitation. But what else could he do? Armies never requested. They took. Even when it was *your* army.

“Reverend, our home is yours,” the colonel responded. “We’ll make ready as best we can in the time that we—”

From somewhere behind them, a cannon boomed. Its echo thundered across the valley. A high-pitched whistle set the very air on edge, and just as Lizzie looked west toward the Carters’ house, an explosion rocked the ground beneath her feet. Instinctively, she ducked. Her whole body tensed.

“Ladies—” The colonel took both her and Carrie by the arm. “Back inside the house.”

As though that cannon blast had been a signal, an eruption of artillery fire exploded in the distance behind them. Halfway to the door, Lizzie glanced back at the reverend but found he was already running for the gate. She was nearly inside the house when she heard it . . .

An eerie screech, unearthly and primal, rising like a phantom chorus from the Confederate soldiers. The air trembled with the sound of it. Amid volleys of musketry fire, the squall rose in a fearsome swell

over the valley, and her spine tingled with a prickly chill. The Rebel yell. She'd read about it, had heard men speak of it, but had never heard it herself.

*Hearin' it will strip the courage clean outta your backbone*, a man once told her. And though she'd questioned it then, she believed it now. How could an enemy hear that and not shudder?

Close on Colonel and Mrs. McGavock's heels, she raced to the family parlor to peer out the window to the fields behind the house. Fire and smoke poured from the Federals' entrenchment line as though they'd unleashed hell itself on the Confederate Army advancing across the open field. Men were cut down by the dozens midstride, rifles not yet raised to shoot. Still the Rebels surged forward. But it was too far an expanse to cross. The field was too deep.

Lizzie pressed a hand to the windowpane, unable to breathe. *It's too far. Turn back!* she screamed on the inside. But by some depth of courage and strength of conviction she'd never known, the men pressed forward, stepping over fallen brothers, pitching forward only to struggle to their feet again. Pushing, pushing to make the Federal breastworks. Smoke and fire soon engulfed the valley.

"Carrie! Miss Clouston!"

Lizzie turned to see the colonel pushing furniture up against the wall. His wife ran to help him.

"Where are the children?" he asked.

"In the kitchen with Tempy," Lizzie answered.

He nodded. "We need to make room for as many men as possible. Carrie, you and Miss Clouston work together down here. I'll go upstairs and do what I can there."

Lizzie grabbed hold of one end of an upholstered settee, Mrs. McGavock the other, and they hefted it up against the wall. They moved a marble-top table and wingback chairs to the side of the room, then did the same with the furniture in the best parlor. And all the while, war raged on the other side of the wall.

They hurried to the dining room next, then emptied the table of dishes Tempy had already set for that night's meal and shoved them into the sideboard.

Breath coming hard, they crossed into the farm office. Mrs. McGavock went immediately to the Grecian rocking chair, and Lizzie read her mind. The chair was a gift from the late President Andrew Jackson to the colonel many years earlier and held great sentimental value.

Lizzie grabbed hold of one side. "Why don't we take it down to the kitchen? Then the colonel can decide what to do with it later."

"Very good."

They managed to get the chair down the steps, but maneuvering the last turn into the kitchen presented a problem. Tempy rushed to help, and between the three of them they managed it. Lizzie looked over to see the children standing in the doorway of the larder. Wide-eyed uncertainty etched the girls' expressions, while curiosity painted Winder's.

"Winder says there's fighting outside," Hattie said, looking between her mother and Lizzie.

"I only told her 'cuz it's true!" Winder responded, making a bee-line for a window.

Lizzie caught hold of him. "Children, I need you to stay in the larder awhile longer." She looked to Mrs. McGavock, wondering if she wanted her to stay here or go back upstairs with her.

Mrs. McGavock's gaze shifted to Tempy. "Tempy, I want you to stay with the children until Miss Clouston returns. She and I have a few more things to do upstairs. But I'll send her back soon," she added, her tone growing more maternal, as though she'd intended the last comment for the children's sake as well.

Lizzie gave each of her charges a quick kiss on the head and guided them back inside the larder. Just before closing the door, she pointed to the tin of tea cakes and winked.

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Back upstairs, she worked furiously alongside Mrs. McGavock to move things out of the way, making room for what was to come. And somewhere between the cannon blasts and rifle fire she caught the faintest strains of the Confederate brass band still playing in the distance.

Hands on hips, Carrie McGavock paused in the entrance hall. “I wish we were better equipped to help them—had more to offer in the way of medicinal supplies.”

But when the front doors burst open a moment later and stretcher bearers began carrying in the wounded, Lizzie realized that nothing could have prepared them for what crossed that threshold.



## CHAPTER 2

For all the death she'd seen in her life, Lizzie had never seen anyone die. She cradled the bloodied cheek of the smooth-faced soldier before her. He was only a boy, no more than thirteen years old—scarcely half her age. And as he took his last ragged breath, she would've sworn she felt the tug of heaven's tide drawing him home. But it was his final words, whispered with such urgency, that wedged her heart in her throat. The scream of artillery shells and thundering cannon blasts shook the very air around her, and it sounded—and felt—as though the world were coming to an end.

She looked again into the young boy's countenance and found it growing steadily paler in death. Even as her heart broke further, she wrestled with what to do with his final words. Perhaps if she could learn where he—

Sharp commands issued from the entrance hall, and she turned to see more stretcher bearers pouring through the front doors with more injured men. The wounded already crowded the best parlor and spilled over into the farm office across the hallway. Their wails and moans tore at her.

How could these men still be drawing breath with bodies so broken, shattered by artillery and rifle fire? They'd been shot, bludgeoned, gouged, and bayoneted. Most clutched their sides and abdomens, others their heads. One man sat leaning forward in a wingback chair groaning and holding his arm tight against his chest. Only, upon closer inspection, Lizzie realized that the appendage he held so tenaciously was completely severed. She steeled herself. Not one to swoon, much

less faint, she gripped the edge of a small table, needing to feel something solid.

The pungent haze of spent gunpowder, campfire smoke, and blood was inescapable, as were the odors of sweat and unwashed bodies. Soldiers called out for their mothers, for their sweethearts, for a drink of water. Others cursed the Yankees with language so foul Lizzie felt each word like a pinprick. Still others prayed in piteous voices to be relieved from their awful suffering. And during it all, surgeons moved among them, dressing wounds and shouting orders.

“Bandages! We need more bandages!”

“Move this soldier upstairs!”

“Morphine! We need morphine!”

“Miss Clouston, you think Lieutenant Townsend is somewhere in this army of men?”

Lizzie glanced behind her to see Tempy standing with wads of fresh bandages in her arms. She took a steadying breath. “No, Tempy. Thank goodness, he’s not. In his letter today, he wrote that Tucker’s Brigade was being sent south of here. Away from Franklin.”

Towny hadn’t told her precisely where his brigade was being ordered, of course. The soldiers were always mindful that mail could be intercepted by Federals. When she first read of his being sent farther south, she’d felt a touch of disappointment. Now she was grateful beyond imagining.

“Well, thank you, Jesus, for that,” Tempy said softly, then deposited the fresh bandages on a side table. “I best get more of these, Miss Clouston. Looks like we’ll be needin’ them.”

Lizzie knelt to help the next soldier, a young man lying on the floor clutching what remained of his right arm.

“I think I’m done for, ma’am.” He groaned, his eyes glistening with emotion. “Them Yankees done managed to kill me.”

“Not yet they haven’t,” Lizzie said softly and attempted a smile. “And we must work to keep it that way.” She pushed back strands of

hair from her face and checked the makeshift tourniquet corded tightly around the corporal's upper arm. Deciding she could do no better, she focused on the deep gash on his lower leg instead.

"Federal got me with his bowie knife, ma'am. He was swingin' it wild."

Lizzie winced. "I can see that."

"You think one of them docs can save it?" He took a sharp breath. "My leg, I mean?"

"Why you wantin' to keep that leg of yours, Bowman?" The soldier lying next to him grinned even as he clutched his own abdomen, his shirt soaked through with blood. "You know you never could dance worth a lick!"

Both soldiers laughed even as their eyes told the truth of their pain, and Lizzie recalled how Towny and other boys she'd known used to jest at the most inopportune times.

She retrieved a nearby basin of water and rinsed out a bloody cloth. "I'll clean the wound as best I can, Corporal, then bandage it. One of the surgeons will need to look at it later, as well as see to your arm."

She worked hurriedly, mindful of other soldiers who needed tending. The continuing barrage of rifle and cannon fire, plus what she'd witnessed earlier when peering through the family parlor window, painted an all-too-vivid image of how these men had sustained their injuries. She'd counted nearly a dozen surgeons working either inside the home or out in the yard. They'd offered the household little instruction on how to help, so Lizzie simply did what she knew.

Through the years she'd watched her father in his pharmacy in downtown Franklin, so she had some knowledge of the primaries in doctoring. Whenever the town's physician was otherwise engaged, people turned to druggist Edward G. Clouston for help. Lizzie had actually entertained the idea of following in her father's footsteps when she was a girl. Either that or becoming a doctor. Until she'd realized that such opportunities were rarely open to a woman.

So while she didn't possess any truly *special* gifts—not like singing or playing the piano or being especially adroit at knitting or sewing—her ability to memorize was exceptional. So she'd become a teacher instead.

"There you go, Corporal." She gently but firmly tugged the knot to secure the bandage. "Now try to rest. A surgeon will be by soon, I'm sure."

"Thank you, ma'am." He clenched his jaw tight, his eyes glazing. Perhaps due to the loss of blood, or shock. Or both.

Lizzie moved to help his friend and applied pressure to the abdominal wound until a corpsman finally arrived. She rose carefully, her legs aching from kneeling so long. She counted thirty men in the best parlor alone. With scarcely any space to walk, she stepped over the soldier she'd finished tending to help another whose arms were badly injured.

Most of the men, beards all wild and wooly, were ill-clad for winter and barefoot, the soles of their feet cut up and bruised. Some had fashioned shoes from threadbare gunny sacks and odd bits of cloth. But the dried blood caked on the bottoms of their feet revealed what little protection their ingenuity provided. Over the last three years she'd read accounts of battles in the newspapers—some overly graphic, or so she'd considered them at the time. But now she saw that the journalist's pen—and her own imagination—had grossly failed to depict the awful truth. This war was exacting far too high a price. From both sides. And slavery stood at the center of the debate.

Yet she knew it wasn't that simple. Towny and his family had never owned slaves, yet he'd been one of the first to sign up to fight. *What is a man supposed to do, Lizzie, when an army shows up to occupy his land? His home? His possessions? He fights, that's what he does!* Towny's eyes had blazed with conviction that night.

Even though she hadn't agreed with his decision to join the war, she could better understand fighting in defense of home than she



could fighting for ideals and values she considered wrongheaded and vile. For years they'd read in the newspapers about a divided Congress striving to reach a compromise, but by 1860 any whiff of a settlement seemed all but dead. Eleven seceded states later and this war was born.

When the McGavocks entertained, Lizzie was sometimes invited to join them for dinner, depending on who their guests were. She'd heard every argument in support of states' rights along with the need to rein in President Lincoln's overreach in government. But even the argument about states' rights boiled down to a state's right to maintain the institution of slavery. Her own father, who owned slaves, had sided with the Confederacy. She'd attempted once, at the outset of the war, to share her differing opinion with him, but he swiftly and firmly put an end to that conversation. So she held her tongue.

She looked around the parlor. Most of the men appeared to be in their late teens to midtwenties. She doubted whether any of them had ever owned slaves, much less extensive property. After all, if a man owned more than twenty slaves, like Colonel McGavock, he was released from the obligation to fight, because the Confederacy needed food for the army and relied on those plantations and estates to contribute it. No, the men in this room looked more like farmers, laborers, railroad workers, perhaps accountants or mercantile owners. She guessed that most of them simply woke up one day to find a war on their doorstep.

She finished wrapping the wounded lieutenant's arms, tied off the bandages, and moved to help the next man.

Colonel McGavock's connection to the War Department kept him well informed, and based on what he'd shared with her and Mrs. McGavock earlier that week, the Army of Tennessee, under the command of General Hood, was the last standing army for the Confederacy. General Lee and his men were still besieged by General Grant in Virginia. So that meant the men in this house and those

wounded yet still alive on the battlefield a short distance away were the Confederacy's last hope.

But with the Confederate government all but bankrupt and the Federal Army outnumbering the Southern forces by almost three to one, it seemed a dim, if not already dying, hope at best. A hope that Lizzie could not support, much less champion, no matter her love for family and—

“Miss Clouston! Your assistance is required!”

She looked up, a blood-soaked cloth in her hand, to see one of the surgeons making his way toward her across the crowded parlor, his focus intent.

“We need assistance in surgery, ma'am. Colonel McGavock suggested you might be of aid.”

She hesitated. “I'm . . . most willing to be of any help I can, Doctor. But I've not been trained in the specifics of—”

“Have you ever administered chloroform? Or ether?”

“No, sir. Though I have read accounts of such.”

“That will be sufficient, under the circumstances. I'll guide you through the rest. The most important thing—” He looked her square on. “According to the colonel, you possess a stalwart constitution and are a compassionate woman whose sensibilities will not be easily offended by the aftermath of war.”

Despite her unsteadiness a moment earlier, Lizzie nodded, finding “the aftermath of war” a rather sanitized description for the carnage all around them. “Colonel McGavock is gracious in his assessment, Doctor. But in this regard, I do possess a sturdy constitution.”

“Then tonight you're a surgical assistant, Miss Clouston. There are at least forty men upstairs on the second floor, with at least that many waiting outside, and more to come. They need surgery now or many of them are going to die. Keeping the men sedated during the procedures is crucial to saving as many as we can.” He leaned closer, his voice lowering. “For as long as the chloroform holds out.”

Sobered yet further, Lizzie nodded. “Of course. I’ll come upstairs straightaway.”

The surgeon left the parlor and she shadowed his path, mindful of where she stepped. She spotted attendants loading the deceased onto stretchers before carrying them outside, and she hesitated, recalling again what the young boy who’d died in her arms had whispered.

With no time to spare, she crossed the room, wiping the blood from her hands on her apron. She hastily searched the boy’s clothing, his desperate tone so clear in her memory. *I done grieved over h-how I left things ’tween us, Mama.* His thinning voice had faltered. *But I didn’t take it with me like I said. I-I left it. Buried. Way back on our land. ’Neath that ol’ willow. And now . . . somehow it makes dyin’ easier knowin’ you’ll have it.*

What did that mean? *Knowin’ you’ll have it.* Have what? Oh, that she’d had time to ask him, but he’d slipped too swiftly beyond the veil.

His shirt pocket proved empty, but his pants pockets yielded a thin stack of envelopes bound with string both horizontally and vertically, as one would tie a package meant for posting. Only the string was tied in a knot, not a bow. Next she withdrew a pocketknife absent its inlaid ivory, an oblong stone with a well-worn surface, and a page torn from a Bible and folded with care. *The Book of Psalms*—she glimpsed the heading at the top, along with a name scrawled in poor penmanship—*Thaddeus*.

With a last look at his youthful face she said a prayer for his mother, wherever she was, then stuffed the items into her skirt pocket. She traced the surgeon’s steps into the front entrance hall, where the ache inside her deepened.

Every spare space in the front hall and farm office was filled with bleeding, dying men. Every niche and corner was occupied, the thick floorcloth and fine upholstered furniture soaking up their blood. Even in the shadows beneath the stairs, soldiers sat slumped against the wall like wounded animals gone off by themselves to die. Stretcher

bearers continued to carry more men up the stairs, struggling beneath the weight of their task. Feeling as though she'd walked into some horrible nightmare, Lizzie briefly squeezed her eyes tight and opened them again, half expecting to see the home as it had always appeared, pristine and in order. But the scene remained unchanged. Then rising above the cacophony of chaos and death she heard familiar words.

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to—”

The ragged voice broke, and Lizzie turned in the direction of the shuddering sigh that followed.

Not too far from her, a soldier sat slumped against the wall, his head bowed, the front of his shirt soaked through with blood. “. . . to lie down . . . in green pastures. He leadeth me . . . beside still waters.”

The man grimaced and clutched his belly, yet continued to recite, his voice halting. Lizzie hurt for him and was grateful when she saw an attendant bend down to help him. Whispering a prayer for him, for all of them, she managed to pick her way to the staircase.

Hand on the stair rail, she'd started up when she felt a tug on her skirt and looked down.

“Please . . .” A soldier, his voice raspy, rose up on one elbow, a jagged gash on the side of his head and his tattered trousers of homespun butternut stained a deep crimson. Hand trembling, he held out an envelope. “Would you see that . . . this gets to my daughter?”

With a grimace he fell back, and a fresh flow of blood seeped from the hastily applied field dressing on his leg. Lizzie tucked the envelope into her skirt pocket and carefully edged back his trousers to inspect the wound.

She clenched her jaw. Needing something, anything, to use as a tourniquet, she spied a decorative silk cord looped around a vase on a nearby table and grabbed it. She wrapped the cord around the man's upper thigh and pulled taut. He let out a groan. His face went ashen.

Lizzie knelt over him, willing him to stay conscious. “What's your name, soldier?”

“Pleasant—” He gasped. “Captain Pleasant Hope, 46th Tennessee Infantry.”

She gripped his hand. “That’s a fine name, Captain Hope. I’ll keep your letter in my care. And *if* the time comes, I’ll do exactly as you’ve asked. But until then, I need you to—”

An explosion shook the floor of the house, sounding closer than any of those previous, and for an instant everyone held a collective breath. Lizzie instinctively looked into the family parlor at the clock mounted on the wall to the right of the fireplace. A quarter past five. Only an hour had passed since the first exchange of gunfire? It felt like forever. How long would the battle last? Surely with night falling the fighting would end. It would have to. How could they fight when they couldn’t even see each other?

She looked back down. “As I was saying, Captain Hope, I need . . .” Her words trailed off. The captain’s eyes were still open, but his gaze was dull and fixed, his hand slack in hers. Lizzie pressed her fingers to the side of his throat, then slowly released her breath. “I’ll do as you’ve asked, Captain Hope,” she whispered and gently closed his unseeing eyes.

“Quickly, gentlemen! Bring them inside!”

Hearing Mrs. McGavock’s voice, Lizzie looked back to see her employer directing yet another wave of stretcher bearers through the front double doors. Beyond them, darkness had indeed fallen and taken with it the unseasonably warm temperatures. Replacing the warmth, a chilling wind swept into the entrance hall as though to remind them that December was mere hours away.

“The farm office is already full,” Mrs. McGavock continued, “as are the best parlor and family parlor. But we still have space. Put them in the dining room. And in the family bedrooms upstairs.”

Mrs. McGavock’s steady tone carried authority worthy of a general’s rank, and the men obeyed without question. Lizzie’s gaze briefly met hers and so much was said in their wordless exchange.

Bracing herself for what awaited upstairs, she continued up the steps toward—

“Mama?”

Lizzie turned back and spotted Winder standing in the doorway of the farm office. Her spine went rigid. What was he doing out of the kitchen! And Hattie and Sallie stood huddled close beside him.

Lizzie cut a hasty path back down the stairs and across the entrance hall, eager to usher the children back to where they belonged. She scanned the foyer for Colonel or Mrs. McGavock. And where was Tempy? She’d promised to keep the children with her. Yet the children weren’t Tempy’s responsibility, Lizzie knew. They were hers. She was their governess, after all.

She grasped little Winder by the hand. “What are you all doing up here? I instructed you three to keep to the—”

“They’re bleeding so bad,” Hattie whispered, tears pooling. “*All* of them.”

Winder looked beside him. “Course they’re bleedin’. They been shot by them dang Yankees. I told you that’s what we were hearin’ from the kitchen.”

Lizzie squeezed his hand. “Winder, don’t speak in such a—”

“Miss Clouston—” Sallie tugged on Lizzie’s sleeve. “I’d like to go home now, please.” The girl’s chin trembled and her already stricken expression grew more so.

Lizzie placed a hand on her slender shoulder, thinking about how Sallie’s parents had brought her here to keep her safe from the war. But how could anyone have predicted this?

“I’m afraid going home isn’t possible right now, Sallie. But I will see you all safely back to the kitchen. Where you were supposed to stay until I returned to—”

“Miss Clouston!”

Recognizing the deep voice, Lizzie straightened and looked behind her, cringing. Severity darkened John McGavock’s expression, and she

rushed to explain. “Colonel McGavock, sir, I’m so sorry. It was my intent that the children remain in the kitchen, away from all this. But I should have taken better care to—”

“Miss Clouston,” he began again, his tone hinting that excuses would not be brooked.

Lizzie briefly bowed her head and prepared herself for the uncustomary reprimand, hating that she’d disappointed him.

“My dear woman, this is not your fault. I, too, wish there were a way for these children not to see this. But this has been brought to our door—with the Lord’s knowledge, I must believe. And there is no escaping it.”

She realized she’d been mistaken. It was anguish, not anger, that shadowed his gaze.

“So let us help them navigate this terrible journey.” He peered down at Hattie, then at Winder, and lastly at Sallie, his wiry gray beard brushing the edge of his vest. “Would you not agree, Miss Clouston?”

Her throat tightened with both regret and relief, and she nodded. She trailed her employer’s focus to the children and, even now, saw in their expressions that this “terrible journey” was already burning through their innocence, an innocence she would have fought fiercely to protect for a great many years longer. But Colonel McGavock was right. This was their world, for better or worse. The world in which they would grow up. However much she might wish it were not.

“Thank you, Colonel McGavock,” she whispered. “For understanding.”

Impressed with the need to be upstairs, she also knew she couldn’t leave the children alone. But what to do with them in such a situation? Then a thought came. “Colonel, the soldiers are thirsty. If you’ll permit me, I’ll fetch pails and ladles, and the children can help distribute water and tea to the men.”

The colonel nodded. “Excellent idea, Miss Clouston. But I’ll see to the children for now. Dr. Phillips is waiting for you. Your talents

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will be better utilized alongside him and his colleagues. I've already assured him you're more than up to the task."

Hoping that would prove true, Lizzie climbed the staircase, mindful of the wounded leaned up against the wall and of the soldier below still struggling to recite the psalm. But when she reached the second-floor landing, she spotted a surgeon in one of the bedrooms, bone saw in hand, feverishly cutting on a soldier's arm, and her confidence ran screaming.



THOMAS NELSON  
Since 1798