

Bonnets and Bugles Series · 1

**DRUMMER
BOY AT
BULL RUN**

GILBERT MORRIS

MOODY PUBLISHERS
CHICAGO

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1

Will You Hate Me If There's a War?

Pineville, Kentucky, was so close to the state line that the Virginia mountains were clearly visible. The quiet little town had few celebrations. Usually the Fourth of July was the most important. However, on one cool day in March 1861, the streets were filled with people, music, and the sound of laughter. Fifty years earlier the village had been incorporated, and this celebration had been ordained to call attention to that time.

The day was raw and windy, but no one seemed to mind—least of all the pretty girl who was tugging urgently at the sleeve of a boy close to the square dance platform.

“Come on, Jeff—we’re old enough!”

Leah Carter was barely thirteen, but she’d been yearning to square dance with the grown-ups for a long time. Her honey-colored hair gleamed as the pale sun touched it, and the green dress she wore matched the color of her eyes. It was her best dress. She’d been hoping that Jeff Majors would tell her how pretty it was—but he had not.

“Aw, I don’t know how.” Jeff was tall for fourteen years and had the blackest hair Leah had ever seen. He had black eyes too—and brows to match. He was wearing a pair of stiff new jeans, a red-and-brown checked shirt, and a pair of new brown

boots. Digging the toe of the right one into the dirt, he said stubbornly, "Anyway, your pa would paddle you if he caught you dancing."

"He would not!" Leah tossed her long hair. "He's never paddled me!"

Jeff suddenly grinned at her, his eyes crinkling until they were mere slits—they crinkled like his father's and brother's. "I can think of a time or two when he should have tanned you. Like the time you and Walter Beddows—"

"I don't want to hear about Walter Beddows!" Leah interrupted, her face turning pink. She hated Jeff's teasing. They'd grown up together, their families were the closest of friends, but for the last year she'd suddenly become aware of how handsome a boy Jeff was—though she'd never admit it. "Come on, I'll teach you."

Jeff tried to draw back, but she caught his arm and pulled him toward the low platform. The square dancers were moving to the music of a five-piece band, including two guitars, a banjo, a fiddle, and a dulcimer.

"I feel like a fool, Leah!" he protested. But somehow he found himself on the platform. He kept his eyes on his feet, trying to follow Leah's instructions. He knew he'd take a great deal of ribbing by his friends.

Right now he heard one of them calling, "Hey, Jeff! Where'd you get that pretty gal?"

"Don't pay any attention to that old Jay Walters!" Leah whispered. "You're doing fine!"

Two men arrived at the long refreshment table just then, and one squinted at the square dancers. He was six feet tall, and a fine black suit set off his trim figure. Nelson Majors had the same dark hair

and eyes as his son Jeff. "Will you look at that, Daniel!" he exclaimed.

Daniel Carter was a smaller man than his friend, no more than five feet ten inches. His light brown hair was growing thin on the crown, and his eyes were a faded blue. His mouth was firm under a scraggly mustache, but there was a fragile quality in his features. A look of surprise swept over his face. "Why—that's Leah and Jeff!"

Nelson Majors laughed at the expression on his friend's face. "They're growing up fast."

"Not fast enough to start square dancing with the grown-ups, I don't reckon." Carter scowled. Then, in spite of himself, a grin touched his lips. "That girl! She's stubborn as a blue-nosed mule!

I'll give her a thrashing when I get her home!"

"Be the first one, I reckon. Say, look at that." He grinned as his older son, Tom, approached the young couple. "He's going to tease the life out of Jeff for this stunt!"

Jeff, concentrating on his feet, jumped when a hand tapped his shoulder. He whirled around to find his brother standing there, a smile dancing in his dark eyes. "Cutting in on you, little brother," Tom announced cheerfully. He turned to Leah, adding, "I make it a habit to dance with every pretty girl."

Leah almost giggled, but decided that was not ladylike. Instead she let Tom Majors direct her around the floor. She caught a glimpse of Jeff stomping away—and then she did giggle. "He's mad at you."

"Do him good to be jealous." Tom smiled down at her. "I didn't think anybody on earth could make Jeff get up and dance in public. What'd you do, Leah—put a spell on him?"

“Oh, you just have to know how to handle Jeff.” Leah nodded wisely. “He’s shy, Mister Tom, but I know how to get him to do things.”

“I’ll bet you do!” A merry light gleamed in Tom Majors’s eyes. “You’ve been bossing him around since you were six years old. What I want to know is, how—”

He broke off suddenly, as a shout caught their ears. “It’s a fight!” he exclaimed. Releasing her, he dashed off the platform. Shouldering his way past a circle of men, Tom stared at the two young men who were pounding each other furiously.

The crowd was urging them on, but Tom instantly stepped between the two.

“Royal—Dave—!” He caught a wild blow on the cheek that drove his head back, but he yelled, “Stop this foolishness!”

Royal Carter’s face was contorted with anger. “Get out of the way, Tom! I’m going to stomp him!” Royal was not tall, but he was muscular and strong. Blond-haired and blue-eyed, he tried to look older by wearing a large mustache and heavy sideburns. He was Tom’s best friend.

“You ain’t stompin’ nobody, Carter!” Dave Mellon was much larger than his opponent but had taken several blows in the face. His lip was cut, and a large bruise was darkening on his cheek. His face was crimson with rage, and he tried to push Tom aside. “You taking up for him, Tom? You ought to know better!”

“What’s all this?” Now Mr. Carter had arrived at the inner circle, followed by Nelson Majors. He took his son’s arm. “Royal, you know better than to brawl in public!”

Ordinarily Royal Carter was a gentle young man—the last person one would expect to see in a fight. He was nineteen and had the nickname of “Professor” among his friends. Now he was pale with anger, and he glared at Mellon. “He cussed the president and the Union,” Royal said. “I won’t stand for that!”

“You and the rest of your Yankee friends will stand for more than that, Carter!” Dave Mellon was an outspoken abolitionist—which meant he was for freeing the slaves even if it meant war. President Lincoln would fight only to preserve the Union. “This country can’t put up with slavery!”

An angry mutter ran around the crowd.

Mr. Carter glanced around. Mellon’s words had divided the men into two groups. All were his neighbors, but they differed strongly on the matter of states’ rights—and slavery.

It’s the same all over this country, he thought sadly. Men who’ve gotten along all their lives are ready to start shooting at each other!

“Come along, Royal,” he said quietly. He turned, and his son—giving one hard glance at Dave Mellon—obeyed. They pushed their way through the crowd.

A man said loudly, “Why don’t you just go South, Carter?”

But Daniel Carter ignored him.

When the men reached the refreshment table, they found their wives waiting. “Are you all right, son?” Mary Carter was younger than her husband. She was a strong woman—which was very good, because Mr. Carter was not always well. “I thought you and Dave were good friends.”

“Not anymore,” Royal said sharply. “You should have heard what he said about us!”

“You’re going to hear worse, Royal.” Nelson Majors was very fond of young Carter. The young man had spent much time in his home over the years. Now worry disturbed Mr. Majors’s dark eyes. “This business about slavery and states’ rights isn’t going to get any better.”

“Do you think there’ll be a war, Nelson?” The question was asked by his wife, Irene, a frail woman who wore a worried expression. In her youth, she had been a great beauty, but sickness had drained her, and now she looked frightened.

“I hope not,” Mr. Majors said quickly. But his eyes met those of Daniel Carter—and he knew they were thinking the same thing.

“There’ll have to be a war,” Tom insisted. “The Yankees will force it on us.”

“Why, you don’t own any slaves, Tom,” Royal said.

“No, and I never will. But a state has the right to decide for itself what to do!”

That was the real issue that faced the country — whether or not a state could leave the Union if it so decided. And though the two families said no more, the celebration was spoiled for them.

They all seemed to realize that the lifelong friendship between the Carters and the Majors family was in peril. Indeed, the United States of America was on the verge of disaster.

* * *

“Oh, Jeff, it’s the robin’s egg—the one we’ve looked for for so long!” Leah held the tiny blue egg

in her hand. Her face was alive with pleasure.

Leah and Jeff were high in a towering sycamore tree. They'd become expert tree climbers in their joint determination to collect a specimen of every bird's egg in the county. Leah was wearing her old overalls, and the two sat as easily on the limb as if it had been a solid bench.

"I was about to give up." Jeff stared down at the blue egg with satisfaction. "Well, now we can add this one—but we still don't have one from a woodpecker."

Leah began to count off the eggs they still needed to find. She had not gotten through the list, however, when the sound of horses approaching made her break off.

"Let's get down," she said hurriedly. "We'll look silly up in this old tree!"

"Too late," Jeff said. "They'll pass by us."

But the tree where they'd found the robin's nest was beside the road, and the road crossed a large brook at the same spot. Most riders paused there to water their horses, and this was exactly what happened.

"It's your brother!" Leah whispered in alarm.

"And that's your sister with him!" Jeff wanted to get away, but the buggy his brother drove came to a stop beneath their tree.

"We'll water the team," Tom said. "It's been a thirsty drive."

"Well, all right, but then you'll have to take me home, Tom."

Leah stared down through the foliage but could see only the top of the buggy. She could hear them, however, and she whispered, "We can't eavesdrop on them!"

“Cover your ears, then!” Jeff whispered back. “We can’t let them see us up here!” He wished he were up any other tree in the world.

“Sarah, you know I love you,” Tom said. “And I thought you cared for me.”

“Oh, Tom!” Sarah Carter was a beautiful girl. She had blonde hair, dark blue eyes, and a creamy complexion. Her simple blue dress set off her trim figure, and she was highly sought after by several young men. But her eyes were troubled as she said, “We can’t even talk about things like that.”

“Why not?” Tom demanded.

“Because things are so—so confused.” Sarah bit her lip. “There may be war next week. You know that, Tom.”

“Why, there’s always something for people to worry about. If people waited until there were no problems, nobody would ever get married!”

“This is different, Tom, and you know it.” Sarah went on, speaking softly but pointing out the difficulties. She ended by saying, “If war comes, you’d fight for the South, wouldn’t you, Tom?”

“I—I guess I’d have to, Sarah.”

“And my brother Royal would fight for the Union.” Worry crossed her smooth face, and she asked suddenly, “What would it be like if I married you—and you killed my brother—or if he killed you? Don’t you see how terrible that would be?”

Tom could only ask her to change her mind. Finally he said heavily, “I guess all we can do is hope there’s no war.”

Then he spoke to the horses, and the buggy pulled away.

Leah waited until she could not hear the sound

of the horses and wheels, then climbed down the tree.

Jeff slid to the ground too, keeping his eyes fixed on the buggy, which was turning past a distant grove of trees. "I wish we hadn't been up in that tree," he muttered.

"You knew he was courting her. Everybody knows that."

"Yeah, but I feel guilty about listening to them. That wasn't right!"

"I know. I feel the same way—but we couldn't help it." She put the tiny egg into a small box lined with cotton and closed the lid. The pleasure of the hunt was gone now, and she said, "I've got to get home."

"Me too."

They plodded along silently, each thinking of what they had heard. But when they came to the fork that led to the Carter place, Leah stopped abruptly and looked into his eyes. "Jeff—will you hate me if there's a war?"

"Why . . . that's a crazy thing to say!" Jeff blurted out. "Of course not!"

Leah studied his face for a moment, then whispered, "I'd never hate you, Jeff, no matter what!" There was a catch in her voice, and she whirled and dashed down the road.

Jeff watched her go. He almost ran after her. Then he thought of what Tom and Sarah had said. He whispered, "I'll never hate you, Leah—not ever!"

Then he resumed his slow walk toward his house. His shoulders were slumped, and his dark eyes were filled with doubt. A woodpecker drummed on a dead pine over his head, but young Jeff Majors was so troubled with thoughts of a war that he did not even glance up.

Bonnets and Bugles Series · 2

YANKEE BELLES IN DIXIE

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1

Leah's Plan

Leah—don't move!"

Leah Carter had stepped halfway over a rotten log in the woods, but at the sound of Jeff Majors's voice she froze where she was. At the same instant she heard a buzzing that made her blood seem to run cold. With her foot half over the log, she lowered her eyes to a diamond rattler thick as a man's wrist and poised to strike. Its needle-sharp fangs were white, and its rattles blurred as they sounded their dire warning.

"Don't move!" Jeff whispered again.

Leah longed to turn and run, but she knew that the striking snake would catch her in the leg if she tried that. She heard Jeff to her left and wanted to cry out to him to be careful.

She felt the sun beating down on her head as she stood rigid in position.

Suddenly Jeff sprang into her line of vision. He struck at the snake with a large stick, shouting, "Get back, Leah!"

Leah leaped backward and in her anxiety sprawled full length on her back. She scrambled to her feet and saw Jeff still thrashing at the snake with all his might. "Be careful, Jeff! Don't let him get you!"

Jeff straightened up and turned to her, his face pale, and said in a voice not quite steady, "I guess that'll take care of him!"

Now that the danger was over, Leah suddenly felt sick. Her knees were weak and trembling. When Jeff dangled the snake over the stick, she cried out, "No, I don't want to see him!" She walked unsteadily away and leaned against a tall hickory. Her shoulders began to shake, and she put her head against the rough bark trying to hold back the tears.

Jeff dropped the snake at once and came to stand beside her. "Aw, Leah," he said uncomfortably, "don't cry. It's all over now." When she did not move, he tentatively put a hand on her shoulder and turned her around. Looking down at her, he muttered, "That was pretty close, but we made it all right."

Jeff Majors had the blackest hair possible and eyes so dark he was called the Black Majors by some of the family. Tall for his age and looking older than his fourteen years, he had large hands and feet. There was a look of durability about him. He wore a pair of worn tan trousers and a faded checked shirt, both somewhat small for him.

Leah pulled herself together, swallowed hard, and looked up. "You saved my life, Jeff. He—he would have gotten me for sure!"

"Well, I'm glad you didn't step on him. They're bad business."

Leah was sobered by the experience. "I could have died," she whispered. "You never think about such things until something like this happens."

"Sure. I reckon it pays to be careful in the woods—but when you're stepping over a log you can't always see what's on the other side."

* * *

Jeff looked down at Leah, thinking how pretty she had gotten in the last year. Today she wore a pair of faded blue overalls that had once belonged to her brother, Royal, but somehow she looked nice in them. One thing they had in common was their birthday—June fifteenth—but she was one year younger than he was. He admired her green eyes and blonde hair, now falling down her back, but to cover his embarrassment he said, “Well, you would’ve done the same for me.”

“I don’t know if I could have.” Leah turned, and the two walked slowly along the forest path.

When they reached an opening in the trees, they paused and looked down into the wide valley. “I sure got lonesome to see that house of yours when I was gone to the army,” Jeff murmured. He studied the Carter home, then lifted his eyes further. “Can’t see our place from here. I missed it too— thought of it every day.”

“Someday you’ll all come back,” Leah said softly. “The war will be over, and we’ll all be together again just like we used to be.”

The Civil War had shattered the little town of Pineville, just as it had other towns all over the country. Dan and Mary Carter, Leah’s parents, had stood for the Union, but Jeff’s father, Nelson Majors, had been Southern born. He had taken his wife and two sons South, settling in Richmond. Jeff’s mother died soon after their arrival, bringing a new child, named Esther, into the world.

Looking down, Jeff thought of how it had been when they were growing up together.

Leah asked suddenly, “Do you have to go back and be a drummer boy, Jeff? Can’t you just stay here until the war is over?”

“Why, I can’t do that! I’ve got to be with my pa and Tom.”

“But—but your father’s in prison in Washington. He’s not in Richmond.”

Jeff’s lips made a thin line, and he nodded curtly. “He won’t be there for always. He’ll get exchanged or . . . or . . .” The thoughts that ran through his mind disturbed him. His father had been taken as a prisoner of war at the Battle of Bull Run, and since that time Jeff had thought of little else except how to free him. Leah seemed to see that he was troubled. “Well, in any case, we’ve got Esther here. We’ll take good care of her.”

The Carters had volunteered to take the baby since Nelson Majors was in the army and had no way to care for a child.

Abruptly she looked at him and said, “Jeff, you know what I heard one time?”

He looked down at her curiously. “You hear a lot. What is it this time?”

Leah pursed her lips and looked thoughtful. “I read somewhere that if someone saves your life, you belong to that person somehow.”

Jeff grinned. “Well, I guess you belong to me then. That means I get first helpings at the table tonight—and you have to wash all my clothes while I’m here.”

Leah was more serious. “You always get first helpings—but I’ll never forget how you jumped in there and killed that old rattler!”

“Oh, shucks, Leah, that was nothing.” Jeff shrugged. But he was pleased with the way she looked at him. “I’m glad that I was there. I wouldn’t want anything to happen to you. You’re my best friend, aren’t you?”

She smiled instantly, her teeth looking very white against her tanned face. "Yes, we'll always be best friends."

Jeff was shy in many ways. Although he and Leah had been best friends for a long time, he somehow felt embarrassed to talk about it. "Come on, let's go see old Napoleon."

They walked quickly down the path, emerging finally at a bridge that spanned a sparkling stream. Leaning on the rail they watched the small minnows sparkle in the sunlight. Occasionally a fish would break the water, and Jeff said wistfully, "I wish I had a line here. I'd catch some of those bass."

"I don't see old Napoleon though."

"He's a pretty smart fish, and I caught him once. So I don't think he's going to be dumb enough to get caught again."

Jeff remembered. They had been at this very bridge when word came that the North and the South were at war. That had been the beginning of hard times for them both.

"That was really something when you caught old Napoleon," Leah said quietly.

Old Napoleon was a huge bass, legendary almost, that had been able to avoid being caught for years. But Jeff had snagged the huge fish on his last visit and managed to get him to shore.

"You let him go, Jeff. I never did really know why you did that."

Jeff traced his initials on the wooden rail with his forefinger and was silent for a moment. Finally he said, "I guess I just like things to stay where they are. Everything's changing so quick. When I was in the battle at Bull Run, for some crazy reason I thought about Napoleon. We don't have a home

here anymore, but I thought, *Well, as long as old Napoleon's there, not everything will change.*"

He thought again to the time he had pulled the thumping fish in, how he'd stared at him, then bent over and loosed the hook and let him go free. "Some of these days," he whispered, "when the war is over, I'll come back, and we'll catch him again, Leah."

"I don't know—I don't think I could eat old Napoleon. That would just be like eating Delilah." Delilah was the hammer-headed tomcat that dominated the Carter household.

Both of them laughed at the idea of eating Delilah, then they turned toward the house. On the way they stopped to look at several bird nests. For years they had collected wild bird eggs until together they had the best collection in the county. Leah had taken it when Jeff moved with his family.

"Look, Jeff, there's that tree where we got the wren's egg. Do you remember that day?"

Jeff stared up at the branches and thought for a moment. "And that's the day my brother Tom and your sister Sarah parked under it in the buggy." He smiled. "I sure felt bad about eavesdropping on them."

Tom Majors had been courting Sarah Carter before the war began. They were very much in love. Jeff only too well remembered perching in the tree with Leah when their buggy pulled up. Tom demanded to know why Sarah would not marry him. She had said it was because Tom may soon be fighting for the South but her brother Royal would fight for the North. "What would it be like if I married you—and you killed my brother—or he killed you?"

Thinking of this, Jeff shook his head. "Things sure have gotten mixed up, haven't they?"

Tentatively, Leah touched his arm, drawing his eyes around to her. "One day it will be all right. The war will be over, and Tom and Sarah will get married. And Esther will grow up, and you and your father will come back and live in Kentucky again."

"You really believe that, Leah?"

"Yes!"

Jeff examined her face carefully. "I'm glad you do. Sometimes I doubt it—but I hope you always believe it, Leah."

When they got within a hundred yards of the house, Jeff suddenly halted and took her arm. "I'll be leaving here soon."

"Oh, *don't* go back to the war—you could get killed!" Leah pleaded, looking up at him with alarm in her eyes.

"Well, I'm not going back to the army right now."

"Where are you going then?"

Jeff pulled off his straw hat and ran his hand through his black hair. He bit his lip. "I'm going to Washington—to see my father."

"Why—you can't do that!" Leah exclaimed. "You're in the Confederate Army. You're a drummer boy—not carrying a gun—but I don't think that matters!" She shook her head so that her blonde hair swung over her back. "You can't do it, Jeff! You'll get caught, and they shoot spies!"

"I don't care—I've got to do it!"

She stood there arguing with him.

Finally, when he said, "I'm going, and that's all there is to it," and she said, "You are the most stubborn boy on the face of the earth!" Leah seemed to have a sudden thought.

“Well, you can’t go alone,” she announced. “You can go with me and Pa.” Jeff stared at her. “What do you mean?”

“Why, now that Pa’s a sutler, you know we follow the Union Army everywhere, selling them things. The army’s just outside Washington, and Pa said last night we’re leaving soon to take care of the soldiers.”

Dan Carter had decided that it was God’s will for him—even though he was not in good health—to follow the Northern army and sell supplies to the soldiers. In addition to the usual tobacco and paper and thread, he carried Bibles and tracts, which he distributed to the lonesome soldiers of the Army of the Potomac.

Jeff shook his head stubbornly. “No, that wouldn’t be right. You both might get caught. Then we’d all three get shot.”

“We won’t get caught.”

Jeff knew she was almost as stubborn as he was.

For a time she seemed to be thinking hard. Finally her eyes began to sparkle. “You can be our helper,” she cried. “You don’t look like a Southern spy. Just wear those old clothes you’ve got on, keep your mouth shut, and nobody will ever know but what you’re just a helper.”

They talked excitedly, and by the time they got back to the house and went to find her father, Leah had already thought of a plan. She explained it carefully to her father.

Daniel Carter was a thin man with a rather sickly look and faded blue eyes. He listened, his eyes on the two of them, his mouth firm under a scraggly mustache. He had been badly wounded in the Mexican War and could not join the army now, but

he wanted to serve his country. When Leah was finished, he nodded slowly. "Well, I think that may be the thing to do." He cut off Jeff's protest by saying, "You don't know this young lady like I do, Jeff. When she gets her mind set on something, she's as stubborn as a blue-nosed mule!"

"Pa, don't say that!" Leah exclaimed. "I'm not a bit like a mule!"

"Well, you're a lot prettier than one." Her father smiled. "But I still say you're just about as stubborn." Then he turned back to Jeff. "We'd better do it that way, Jeff. I know you're worried about your pa. You can go with us, and we'll see if the Lord will help us get to see him."

Jeff swallowed hard. The kindness of this family was more than he ever bargained for. When they had agreed to take his newborn sister, Esther, for as long as necessary, he'd thought they were the finest people in the world. Now he knew so!

"Thanks, Mr. Carter. Me and Pa and Tom, we won't ever forget you for this!"

Bonnets and Bugles Series · 3

THE SECRET OF RICHMOND MANOR

GILBERT MORRIS

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1

Who'd Eat an Old Frog?

Leah Carter bent over the wood cookstove and opened the oven door. A delicious aroma wafted out. She inhaled it with enjoyment, then pulled out the large pan and placed it on the table. Looking around, she found the broom in the corner and quickly removed one of the straws. Coming back to the table, she leaned over the cake that bulged over the pan and plunged the straw into the top.

“Just right!” she said with satisfaction. She placed the cake aside and then stepped back to the stove, where a saucepan of chocolate was bubbling. She stood watching it for awhile, and when it looked right she picked up the pan and went to the cake. Carefully she added the icing and then, putting the saucepan down, examined her creation. “You look like a fine cake,” she said.

“You talking to yourself, Leah?”

She jumped, startled, and turned to the man who had come in. “Uncle Silas,” she scolded, “I wish you wouldn’t sneak up on me like that!”

“I wasn’t sneaking.” Silas Carter grinned at her with an air of innocence. He was a small man with a full white beard and a pair of merry blue eyes. “I came clomping in like a herd of elephants.” A sly smirk touched his lips, and he said, “I think you must be thinking about some young man.”

“I was not!” Leah protested.

“Well, have it your own way.” Uncle Silas walked over to the table and looked down at the cake. “How ’bout I have a piece of that?”

“No, that’s for supper.”

“Well, let me just taste the icing.”

When her uncle reached out to draw his finger across the frosting, Leah squealed, “Don’t you dare!” Turning, she picked up the saucepan. “Here, you can scrape the pan.” She watched him greedily lick the spoon, then begin scraping at the thick icing on the inside. “You’re just like a child,” she exclaimed, shaking her head.

Silas did not stop eating the icing. “Well, I did without good cooking so long,” he said between bites, “I don’t miss many chances.”

“I hope you’ve got something to do today,” Leah said. “I can’t cook with you underfoot all the time.”

“I’ll just sit right over here.” Silas drew a cane-bottomed chair from under the table and moved it against the wall. Carefully he sat down and tilted it back, placing his heels on the rung. “Now this is what I like. Lots of good food and a fine-looking young woman to do the housework! I should have thought of this a long time ago.”

“You’re spoiled,” Leah accused the old man.

Silas nodded cheerfully. “About time, I say.” He gave the spoon another healthy swipe with his tongue. “If I had known I could’ve had a life like this, I would’ve gotten sick a long time ago.”

Silas’s two nieces, Leah and Sarah Carter, had come all the way to Virginia from Kentucky to care for him after he had gotten ill. They had, he insisted, saved his life from the awful woman he’d hired to take care of him. He had grown very fond of the girls and had been saddened when Sarah had to

return home. She had had a slight misunderstanding with the Confederate authorities. In fact, she'd been falsely accused of being a spy and had been forced to leave Richmond.

Looking over at Leah, Silas said, "I'm sure glad you could stay and take care of me. I miss Sarah, though. She sure is a fine girl!"

Leah was busy rattling pans, getting ready to cook the evening meal. "I miss her too. And Pa and Ma—and Esther."

"Too bad Sarah had to go home. I was sad to see it happen—but not as sorry as Tom."

He gave the spoon one more lick, then gruffly said, "I guess he's all she writes about in her letters." He handed the pan to Leah and said, "What time are the Majors boys coming?"

She began cleaning the saucepan. "They said they'd be here late this afternoon."

"I was surprised that they could get off, what with this battle shaping up," Uncle Silas said.

The mention of the battle caused Leah to frown. "I guess it's only because Lt. Majors is still weak from being in that ole Yankee prison camp. I still don't like the way he looks. He ought to take a month off."

"I don't think he's going to get it, though, the way the Yankees are headed this way. We'll need every man we can get to hold off them blue-bellies." Silas tilted his chair forward and stood to his feet. "What all we having for supper? I'm hungry already."

"You get out of here, Uncle Silas," Leah scolded. "I can't get a thing done with you around, and you're not going to spoil your supper by getting into that cake!"

Silas shook his head sadly. “That was exactly my intention,” he said. “But you’re the boss in the kitchen, so I’ll go out and hoe the beans a little bit.”

Leah, looking out the window, smiled as her uncle picked up a hoe and headed for the garden. As he began hoeing slowly and methodically, she thought again how strange it was that she was here in Richmond. She’d grown up in Kentucky, but when the war came that state had split in two—half for the Union and half for the South. The Carter family had been for the Union—her own brother, Royal, was serving in the Union army. The thought of Royal made her sad for a moment. She was afraid he was in the Army of the Potomac that everyone said was headed for Richmond.

She thought of the job of getting the chicken ready for supper. She didn’t like that part of cooking—killing the chicken. But it was something that had to be done.

She went out into the chicken yard where the white birds flocked to her, expecting to be fed. *I wish there was some way to eat chickens without killing them*, she thought. She loved animals, and it was hard to choose one, but she did. She quickly went through the ritual of killing the bird and picking the feathers off. When she came back into the house, she complained, “I should’ve waited and made Jeff do that.”

As she cut the chicken into parts and put them in a bowl, she thought about Jeff Majors. He and Tom were the two sons of Lt. Nelson Majors, and Leah had known them all her life. They had been neighbors back in Kentucky. Lt. Majors was from Virginia though, and after Fort Sumter was fired on

he'd taken his family South. Here he'd joined the Confederate army, as had his sons, Tom and Jeff.

As Leah thought of Jeff, her eyes brightened. "I wish he didn't have to go to that war. He's not really old enough—only fifteen." Jeff was a drummer boy in his father's company. She and Jeff had grown up together, were more like brother and sister, and he'd said he was glad she'd come to Richmond, for he had been lonesome for her.

Finally all the dinner preparations were completed. Just as she finished, Leah heard her uncle call out, "Here they come, Leah."

She whipped off her apron and ran out the door. She stopped on the porch as three men in a wagon waved and called to her.

Leah looked for Jeff, who sprang out of the wagon first. He was a tall boy with the blackest hair she'd ever seen. His eyes also were black. He was wearing a gray Confederate uniform with buttons down the front and looked very handsome, she thought. She wouldn't say so, however.

As he came up to her, she pouted. "I should have known you'd come in time for supper. You never miss a meal, do you?"

Jeff Majors grinned. "I'd be a fool if I did, with as good a cook as you are."

His dark eyes gleamed with humor, and he looked her over. She was wearing a light blue dress today with white trim around the neck and sleeves and had tied her long blonde hair with a single bow.

"Why, you look right pretty, Leah. It's always good when you have a pretty cook instead of an ugly one."

Leah flushed with pleasure, for Jeff didn't pay her many compliments. "You wouldn't care if an

ape cooked your food, Jeff Majors!" She turned then to greet his father and brother and thought, *I reckon Nelson Majors is one of the handsomest men in the world.*

Lt. Majors was indeed fine looking, over six feet tall, dark-skinned, having the same black hair that Jeff had. He had hazel eyes, however, that were very unusual. He bowed formally to Leah and said, "Miss Leah, I'm sorry for you—a troop of hungry soldiers here to be fed."

Leah took the hand he held out and, when he kissed it, blushed. "All you officers talk fancy," she said.

"So do we corporals." Tom Majors, tall and dark like his father, came to shake Leah's hand himself. He grinned at her. "I feel like I could eat a bear."

"Well, we don't have any bears," she said. "But you sit out here on the porch and talk. Supper'll be ready as soon as I call you."

She went back inside and quickly put the chicken on to fry. As it did, she set the table, putting on Uncle Silas's best white tablecloth. She placed a bowl of fresh flowers, including violets and daisies, in the middle of the table. By the time she'd done all that and mashed the potatoes, the chicken was almost done. She went to the door and called, "Come and get it while it's hot."

The four men came in, and Lt. Majors's eyes opened wide as he looked at the table. "Why, this is like eating at a fancy hotel in Richmond, only better."

Tom said almost reverently as he sniffed the air, "That doesn't smell like anything we get to eat in camp. Come on, let's lay our ears back and pitch into it!"

Jeff laughed. "You've got the manners of a wild hog, Tom."

Tom hit his younger brother on the shoulder. "My manners are as good as yours, I reckon, Brother."

The men sat down and spoke of how pretty the table was set.

When Leah had brought the heaping platter of fried chicken and set it down, she seated herself. "There! We can get started."

Silas bowed his head, and the others followed his example. "Father," he prayed, "we thank You for this food. We thank You for these guests, and we pray for our folks at home. We acknowledge that every good gift comes from You. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen."

"Amen!" Lt. Majors said and looked around the loaded table. "Well, we're not going to be hungry if we get on the outside of this food." He looked at the golden fried chicken, the pork chops, the heaping bowl of mashed potatoes, a bowl of poke sallet, and other vegetables. Then he picked up a piece of fresh-baked bread and took a bite. "Oh, my!" He sighed. "I feel like I'm going to commit gluttony."

They all fell to, and Leah was pleased at the way everyone ate. She kept their glasses filled with sweet milk, except for Jeff, who liked buttermilk better. A constant stream of compliments came her way, and she was happy that she'd been able to satisfy them.

When they had slowed down and began shoving their plates back, Leah rose, saying, "You're not through yet."

"Not dessert! I didn't save any room," Jeff protested.

Leah smiled at him sweetly. "That's all right, Jeff. Your father and brother can eat your share."

She left and came back with the cake she had made earlier. When Jeff saw it, he cried out, "Not chocolate-iced cake!"

Leah put down the cake and said innocently, "Too bad you're so full you can't eat any."

"Oh, yeah? Well, you just watch!" He waited as patiently as he could while Leah sliced a piece for each of them.

Jeff started shoveling the dessert into his mouth, and his father said, "Son, you sound like a pig snorting and grunting. I'm ashamed of you."

"I'm sorry, Pa," Jeff said with his mouth stuffed full. "You know how I can resist anything except temptation and dessert."

While the men ate, Leah filled their cups with coffee. "This is about the last of the real coffee," she said. "You'd better enjoy it."

The room became relatively quiet as they ate their dessert. But finally Uncle Silas groaned and said, "Girl, you've done us all in!"

Leah laughed at him, and a dimple popped into her cheek. "It's not my fault you all eat like pigs. You didn't have to."

"Yes, we did, Leah," Tom disagreed. "Any man who wouldn't fill himself up on food like this, why, he's no man at all."

They sat around the table then, enjoying one another's company. Soon they began to talk about the war.

Silas asked, "Nelson, what's the talk around headquarters about this army McClelland's got?"

The lieutenant grew serious. He tapped on the white tablecloth with one forefinger and shook his

head. "We've got word that he's got over one hundred thousand men."

"How many do we have, Pa?" Jeff asked.

"Well, not that many—maybe seventy thousand in all."

"Well, one rebel could whip five Yankees," Tom said at once.

His father shook his head. "I've heard that said before. But from what I've seen, it's just not so. Those Union soldiers at Bull Run—they fought just about as hard as men could fight."

"But they ran away—we whipped them," Jeff said, chewing on another piece of cake.

Lt. Majors looked at his younger son. "You know, Jeff, in one way I'm sorry we won that battle."

"Sorry we *won*!" Jeff exclaimed. "How can you say that?"

"It's made us overconfident, I'm afraid. All you hear is how we put the run on the Yankees, but one battle's not the war."

Silas nodded. "I think you're right, Nelson. From what I hear, the Yankees went back, put their heads down, and started building a big army and lots of war factories. About all we've done around here is brag about how we whipped them in one battle."

Jeff seemed astounded. "Why, I don't see how you can talk like that! We've been training and drilling every day. We'll be ready for them."

"I don't doubt we'll do the best we can," his father said, "and after all, we're fighting for our homes, and they're intruders."

They talked for a while longer about the war, then changed the subject. With a battle coming up, they were all a little apprehensive and somewhat depressed. They talked about Esther, Nelson

Major's baby daughter. His wife had died giving birth to Esther, and it had been the Carters, back in Kentucky, who volunteered to take the girl until the Majors could do better.

"I got a letter from your mother," Lt. Majors said to Leah. He took it out of his pocket. "You might want to read it." He smiled saying, "She claims that Esther's even prettier than you were when you were a baby."

Leah smiled too and took the letter. "Well, she is. She's the prettiest baby I ever saw." As she read, she thought of what a tie Esther had made between the two families. They were divided by the war, but they were together in the task of raising Esther Majors. Handing the letter on to Uncle Silas to read, she said, "I wish I could see her. I miss her so much."

"So do I," the lieutenant said, a frown darkening his face. "A man wants to see his children, and this war won't permit that."

Leah rose and said, "I'll do the dishes."

"Well, I'll help," Tom said. "And you too, Jeff."

"I'm too full," Jeff protested.

But Tom reached down, grabbed him by the hair, and jerked him squealing to his feet.

"You'll help, or I'll strap you." But he laughed.

The young people cleaned up the supper dishes while Silas and Nelson Majors sat on the front porch. The three made a game out of it, laughing and having a good time. Finally they finished and walked out onto the porch too, where they sat until it grew dark.

"Guess we need to go inside. The skeeters are gonna be getting bad," Silas said.

But Jeff said suddenly, "Have you been listening to that big old frog croaking down at the creek?"

"Sounds like a bull, don't he?" Silas nodded. "He's a big one!"

"I'd like to go get me a mess of frogs," Jeff said.

Silas said, "Well, there's a frog gig in the shed over there. It's kind of rusty, but I reckon it'll do. If you want to go, take you a lantern and have at it."

Jeff brightened.

Leah knew he liked any kind of hunting and fishing.

"Come on, Tom," he said. "Let's go."

"Not me. I'm going to go inside and sit down and not do a thing. I've got a feeling we're going to be pretty busy after we go back."

Jeff looked at Leah. "Leah, you come. You can hold the lantern while I do the gigging."

Leah made a face, wrinkling up her nose. "Who'd eat an old frog?"

"I would," Jeff said. He cocked his head to one side and begged, "Come on, Leah. It'll be fun."

"Don't do it, Leah," Tom advised. "He'll have you doing all the work. That's the way Jeff is."

Leah let Jeff coax for a little while, then said, "All right, but I'm going to put on my old clothes." She went to her room and put on a pair of frayed overalls and old shoes.

When she went outside, Jeff was waiting, holding a lantern and a long pole and a sack. "Look! This ought to get 'em." He showed her the gig, which looked like a small pitchfork with four prongs, each having a barb.

Then they walked down to the road, turned, and went on to the creek. The moon had begun to rise—a full moon, like a huge silver dish. By the light of it, Leah could see a small, flat-bottomed wooden boat.

"You get in front," Jeff said. "I'll do the paddling."

Leah scrambled into the boat, holding the lantern carefully.

Jeff got in after her, picked up the paddle, and began to row slowly downstream.

"It's sure quiet," Leah said.

At that moment a huge bull frog said, "*Harumph!*" and she nearly jumped out of the boat.

"Hold it! Hold that lantern up!" Jeff cried.

Leah held the light high, and Jeff brought the boat to a stop. "Let's sit still," he said quietly. He picked up the frog gig and laid down the paddle. "There," he said, "see there—there he is—look at the size of that frog!"

Leah peered into the night, but the lantern light almost blinded her. Finally she did manage to see two gleaming eyes and made out the shape of a large frog perched on the bank.

"Careful now—don't move," Jeff whispered. He picked up the paddle again, maneuvered the boat close to the bank, and grasped the frog gig. Then with a sudden lunge he speared the frog. "Got him!" he exclaimed. He pulled the frog in and removed him from the barbed prongs. As he dropped him into the sack, he said with satisfaction, "Kick all you want to, frog, but you'll be breakfast tomorrow!"

The frog thumped in the sack on the bottom of the boat, and Leah said again, "I don't want to eat any old frog!"

"Did you ever eat frog legs?"

"No, I never did. There's lots of things I haven't eaten."

“Why, you’d like them. They’re better than chicken.” Jeff nodded. “Come on, let’s move on down.”

For the next two hours, they paddled slowly down the small stream. Although Leah did not like gigging frogs, she did enjoy being out in the quiet of the night. The mosquitoes, for some reason, were not as bad as usual. They just sang a high, whining song around her ears occasionally. She took a few bites from them, but she was used to that.

Finally Jeff said, “Well, we’ve got enough for all of us.” He turned the boat around, and they made their way back upstream.

“Be careful. Don’t fall in the creek,” he warned, when Leah got out. He followed her, tied up the boat, and picked up his sack of frogs. “Never got so many big frogs in my whole life.” He picked up the gig too. “Let’s get back.”

They walked up the road by lantern light and moonlight, and when they got back to the house, he said, “Let’s go in the backyard—I’ll clean these tonight.”

Leah went with him, and when they got there she held the lantern for him.

“This won’t take long.” Jeff pulled a knife from his pocket and opened it.

Leah watched as he cleaned the frogs and admired how efficiently he did it. “I wish I could clean chickens as easy as you do frogs,” she said finally.

“Well, frogs don’t have feathers.” The amber light of the lantern picked up his bright eyes, and he laughed. “That’d be something, wouldn’t it—a frog with feathers!”

Soon the frogs were cleaned, and Jeff washed off their catch under the pump. "Pretty good night's work!" he said.

They went inside to find that Tom had gone to bed, but Jeff's father and Uncle Silas were still talking.

Looking up, Silas asked, "Did you get any?"

"Did I get any?" Jeff said. "You never saw such frogs!

"And look how dirty I am!" said Leah. "I'm going to wash up and go to bed. Good night, Jeff."

"Good night, Leah. We'll go again."

As soon as she was gone, the lieutenant grinned at his son. "She's not only pretty, she's a good helper, isn't she? Not every young woman would go frogging with a fellow. You'd better hang onto her."

Jeff said, "Pa, I wish this war was over and we were back in Kentucky."

Nelson Majors's face grew sober. "I wish it too. But you can never go back and be what you were." He looked over at his son, rose, and slapped him on the shoulder. "We just have to take what we are, where we are, and trust God," he said quietly. "Let's go to bed, Jeff."

Bonnets and Bugles Series · 4

THE SOLDIER BOY'S DISCOVERY

GILBERT MORRIS

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1

A Slight Case of Jealousy

Jeff left the thick woods and paused to look down on the house lying in the Kentucky valley below. Warm memories of days gone by flashed through his mind.

“I sure do hate to leave this and go back to the war!” he muttered. Then he shrugged his shoulders, hefted his flour sack full of slain rabbits, and made his way along the winding path, down the side of the mountain into the valley still misty in the early dawn.

The War Between the States had forced him and his family to leave Kentucky, which refused to leave the Union, and relocate in Confederate Virginia. This had been his first trip back since before the war began more than a year ago. It seemed sometimes that the fighting would go on forever. Often nightmares of Bull Run and other battles he had endured came back with sharp intensity, and Jeff would wake up in a cold sweat, thrashing around.

War hadn't seemed so terrible when, at fifteen, he had persuaded his father, now Captain Nelson Majors, to allow him to join the Confederate army as a drummer boy. Now, as he thought of how the war might last for years, he grew despondent.

His time with his friends the Carters was at an end. The bright August sunshine had brought a rich tan to his face, and he had enjoyed every day of his visit. Leah Carter and Ezra, the young, wounded

ex-prisoner, were home safe; he could assure his father that little Esther was doing well with her foster family; and his father's troops needed the supplies he had collected. He couldn't stay any longer.

As he reached the foot of the mountain and made his way across a small creek that bent like an elbow, he cast a quick glance at the water, wondering if he had time to go fishing. He brightened. I'll get Leah. We can have one more fishing trip before I have to leave.

That thought cheered him, and he lifted his head and walked quickly to the Carters' small farmhouse. Going around to the back, he dropped his sack of game on the ground and pulled out his sharp knife to begin skinning the rabbits.

"Well, looks like you got enough to feed all of us."

Jeff looked up to see Mrs. Carter emerge from the house. She was strongly built, with pretty green eyes and blonde hair that was caught at the back of her head in a neat bun. She had been a second mother to Jeff Majors, and her daughter Leah had been his best friend since both learned to walk.

"Got five rabbits," he said proudly, holding up one of them. "Fat and thumping too. Nothing like a good mess of fried rabbit and poke salad, I always say."

Mary Carter looked amused. "I hope you'll let the rest of us have a bite or two, Jeff. You brought an appetite like a panther back from the war."

He knew she was as fond of him as if he were one of her own children.

"I'll go get breakfast started. I'm fixing you one of your special treats for supper tonight—apple pie!"

Jeff's teeth flashed in a broad smile. "Apple pie! Make one just for me, will you? I haven't had good apple pie since I first left Kentucky."

Jeff turned back to the job of skinning rabbits. Leah's mother watched him for a few minutes as she cooled off from the hot kitchen.

He was tall for his age—fifteen—with the blackest hair possible, as dark as a crow's. He had large hands and feet that he still hadn't grown into, and a pair of eyes so black that one had to look close to see the pupils. He had been stringy when he left Kentucky with his family a year ago, but now had begun to fill out.

When Jeff had the rabbits skinned, he brought them to the back porch, laid them in a row on the table, and then washed his hands thoroughly in the basin. After he threw the dirty water into the flower patch below the railing, he reached for the towel hanging from a nail by the back door. He stepped inside and smiled at Sarah Carter, working with her mother at the kitchen sink.

"Well, I've done my part," he announced. "Now, Sarah, we'll see if you can cook them." A sly look came over his face, and he grinned, "Tom told me to be sure and sample your cooking. Said he wouldn't marry a woman that couldn't cook."

Sarah, at eighteen, was one of the prettiest girls in the Pineville area. She had dark brown hair and very dark blue eyes, which she focused on Jeff now. "My cooking's good enough for him. I never saw him turn anything down of mine."

Her face flushed slightly.

Jeff knew she didn't like to be teased about his older brother. They had been very much in love before the war but now were separated for who

knew how long; nothing was certain anymore. Tensions weren't helped by the fact that Tom was a sergeant in the Confederate army while Sarah's brother, Royal, was a Union soldier.

At once Jeff realized he was on dangerous ground. He said quickly, "Better get a letter written if you want me to take it to Tom. I guess I'll be leaving pretty early in the morning."

He walked into the living room where he found Mr. Carter playing with Esther, Jeff's baby sister.

Dan Carter looked up, and a grin split his craggy face. "This baby's a lot smarter than you ever were, Jeff. Why, when you were your sister's age, I don't think you had any sense at all!"

Jeff picked the child up. The baby stared at him with wide blue eyes, and he tossed her in the air, making her scream with joy. "I guess she is pretty smart, Mr. Carter," he said. "Maybe girls are just smarter than boys." He winked at Leah's father as he tossed Esther once more.

Dan Carter returned his wink and then, gathering his long, thin legs beneath him, rose slowly from the rocking chair, moving carefully as people do who have known much sickness. His once lustrous brown hair, Jeff saw, had faded to a dull, gray-streaked, muddy brown, although his light blue eyes still shone with determined pride. His mouth was firm under a scraggly mustache. He'd been wounded terribly in the Mexican War and would never regain his former strength and vitality.

"Not feeling too well today, Mr. Carter?"

"Oh, I don't complain, Jeff," he protested. "As long as a man's able to get up and walk and get some good vittles—and be with his family—he shouldn't complain."

“Guess that’s right.” Jeff carried Esther on his shoulders across the room to where an older Carter child, Morena, sat on the floor making shadow figures against the floorboards in the bright morning sunlight that streamed through the open door.

Morena’s hair was fully as blonde and her eyes were as blue as baby Esther’s. She smiled up at Jeff but didn’t move.

Jeff reached out and smoothed down her hair, saying fondly, “I’ll miss you when I go, Morena.”

It always saddened him when he looked at this child. She was as old as she would ever be, mentally. Physically, she looked like any other nine-year-old girl, but she had never learned to speak and could perform only the simplest chores, such as feeding and dressing herself. She was happy, it seemed, and for a while Jeff sat on the floor talking to her and allowing the baby to pull his hair with her chubby fingers.

“I don’t know what we would’ve done if you folks hadn’t taken Esther, Mr. Carter,” Jeff said abruptly.

“Why, it was little enough to do, Jeff.”

“Take a tiny baby—for only the Lord knows how long? And with your daughter Morena to care for already?” Jeff shook his head stubbornly. “No, sir, it was a real big thing!”

“If things had been the other way around, your family would have done the same for us,” Dan Carter insisted, sitting back down.

“No way we can ever know that.”

“Yes, there is.”

“Why, you can’t go back and do things over!”

“No, Jeff, that’s right.” Dan ran his hand over his head, thinking for a moment. “But you can know how people are. I’ve known your folks for a long

time. I'm telling you, you and your family would have done the same. Your mother—there never was a better woman!”

“I . . . I miss her every day.”

“Only right you should, boy. And what would she have done if we couldn't have cared for Morena somehow?”

Jeff cocked his head to one side, then smiled. “She took in *everything*, Ma did—even sick birds and animals. Why, she took in a pesky baby fox once and nursed it back to health.” He grinned at the memory. “The fool thing bit me! But she loved it.”

“Yes, she was a loving woman. And what would she have done with a baby like Morena—or your Esther?”

“Loved her to death, I reckon.”

“Well, there you are, Jeff.” Dan smiled. “You don't have to keep on thanking us for taking care of your sister.”

“It's a lot to take on, though.”

“Not to Mrs. Carter, Sarah, and Leah! They dote on that little sister of yours—and so does Morena.”

Jeff looked over to where Morena was looking down at the baby, cooing and stroking the fine blonde hair. He asked suddenly, “Mr. Carter, will Morena ever be any more growed up?”

“Only the good Lord knows that, Jeff.”

“I wish she would get better. She's so pretty!”

Dan Carter's face showed a trace of sadness, but he said firmly, “We can't know God's ways, Jeff. But we can know that God is good and that somehow in the end Morena will be as bright and active as any other child.”

“In heaven?”

“Yes, that’s right. I kind of like to think of that time, don’t you, Jeff?”

“You mean . . . heaven? When we get there?”

“Yes.” Dan smiled and added, “No wars, no droughts, no need for doctors—no politicians, either. Not like this place.”

Jeff’s face clouded as he thought through Mr. Carter’s comments. Finally he replied, “I guess I’m not a good enough Christian.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Well, I guess I’m not ready to go to heaven—not today, I mean.”

Mr. Carter laughed, and his eyes twinkled. “Enjoy the day, for the Lord has given it to us. ‘This is the day that the Lord hath made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.’ We can’t know when we’ll go, so we live for the Lord here until we go there.”

Jeff didn’t reply, his face darkening as thoughts of heaven led to thoughts of death—and how the war had brought death close to so many over the last year. He finally said, “Well, Ezra’s out of the war, anyway. He won’t have to fight anymore. Nobody wants a convalescing ex-prisoner of war on his front lines.”

“Yes, and I’m glad of it. I wish you were out too.”

“Me too, and Pa and Tom—and Royal, of course.”

“You know, Jeff, I think God put Ezra in that prison camp.”

“What for?” Jeff asked with surprise.

“Well, look at it,” Dan said slowly. “I can’t go off with Leah and leave this farm all the time with Mrs. Carter and Sarah and the children all alone, can I?”

“No, sir, I don’t think you can.”

“Well, it’s hard to find good help for a small farm. I tried pretty hard, and all I could come up with was hiring Ray Studdard from across the way. I couldn’t see doing anything else, as expensive as that would be. But here Ezra escapes from that Confederate prison camp, and he hides out in a farmhouse. How many farmhouses are there in that part of the country, Jeff?”

“Must be a thousand, Mr. Carter.”

“Yep, I’d say so. Ezra could have gone to any one of them. But he didn’t. He went to the *only* one where he’d have a chance to meet Leah. Now, that just *couldn’t* have been an accident!”

Jeff stared. “You think God does stuff like that? I mean . . . that He works things out for us?”

“He knows of the sparrow’s fall, Jeff, and we’re worth more than sparrows.”

Jeff shifted restlessly, then shook his head. “Too much for me to figure out,” he said finally. “Do you reckon Ezra will stay on for a long time?”

“The boy’s got no place else to go.” Mr. Carter shrugged. “Why are you asking, Jeff?”

“Oh, no reason. Just wondering.”

Jeff’s thoughts moved from Ezra—and Ezra’s budding friendship with Leah—to what a fine man Dan Carter was.

Even though he was too old for the army, and too sickly, he’d determined to do his best for the soldiers in the Union army. He’d persuaded his family that he should serve God by becoming a sutler, stocking his old wagon with supplies—including Bibles and tracts—and following the Yankee army throughout the first year of the war. He’d taken Leah with him because, even though she was just a young girl, she was strong, healthy, and smart.

Especially when he had his bad spells, she took much of the work off his shoulders.

Jeff looked about as he started to get up from the floor by Morena and Esther. "Where's Leah?"

"Oh, she's gone with Ezra. I think they went hunting birds' eggs, Jeff." He stopped abruptly, looking at Jeff's face.

The boy scooped up Esther. He swung her under his arm as he strode across the room and dumped her into Dan's arms. He muttered, "Should of known she'd rather hunt eggs than fish with me." He left the room without another word.

Almost as soon as Jeff had passed through the door, Mrs. Carter entered, her hands white with flour. Looking around, she asked with surprise, "Where's Jeff off to?"

"He just lit out after Leah and Ezra," Dan said. He gave his wife a look and shook his head. "I think he's a little bit upset."

"Upset about what?"

"Oh, I told him Ezra and Leah had gone egg hunting, and he clammed up and left with hardly a word."

She went over and looked out the window. She saw Jeff stalking off, his back straight and his steps almost military. Shaking her head, she turned back and said quietly, "Jeff hasn't taken much to Ezra. You'd think they would've become friends after Jeff helped Leah hide him the way he did."

Ezra Payne had served in the Union army and was taken captive at the Battle of Bull Run. He had escaped from prison, and Leah and Jeff helped him get away to Kentucky.

"Well, you know how strong Jeff is about Confederate rights, Mary. Might be he can't get over

Ezra being a Union soldier.” Mr. Carter paused. “It’s not like our Royal—or even my sutler work. Jeff’s been like part of our family his whole life, but he don’t have any history with Ezra.”

“You’re at least right on that account, Dan,” she agreed. “Remember Leah told us about the set-to she and Jeff had when she first asked him to help her with Ezra.”

“I don’t know what’s going to come of this.” He shook his head. “Jeff’s a good boy, but he’s got hard feelings against the North.”

“That’s not the main cause of it, though,” his wife murmured. She dusted the flour off her hands as she crossed the room, and then she lifted Esther out of Dan’s lap. She pinched the baby’s fat, rosy cheek, then turned to give her husband a direct look. “He’s jealous of Ezra. I guess you see that, Dan. They’ve been awfully close, Leah and Jeff, all their lives.”

“Why, they’re only children!”

“I guess you don’t have to be fifty years old to get possessive of somebody. Leah would be just as possessive of Jeff. I’m sorry for it, though Ezra is a fine young man. He hasn’t had much of a chance in this world.”

“No, he hasn’t.” Mr. Carter shook his head as he remembered what Ezra had told them. “Nobody should have to spend his childhood an orphan, working like a slave on some stranger’s farm.”

“I’m grateful we can give him some of the love he’s never had.” Mrs. Carter’s voice came with conviction.

“But Mary, neither one of us wants Jeff hurt over Leah,” he protested. “Maybe we ought not to ask Ezra to stay.”

“Oh, we’ve got to! We promised. We can’t abandon him. Besides, you said yourself God brought him to give us the help we need now that Royal’s off to the war. Ezra’s such a good worker.” She put the baby down and sighed heavily. “Well, I have every confidence our prayers and Jeff’s basic good sense will make the difference. Jeff’s a good boy—he’ll just have to get over this.”

“Look! What’s this one, Leah?”

Leah Carter looked up into the thick foliage of the oak tree. She squinted at the egg Ezra was holding and said, “I can’t tell. Bring it on down.”

“Do you want all of them?”

“No, just one. Leave the rest to hatch.”

Ezra Payne came down the tree, swinging from branch to branch, using only one hand.

When he jumped to the ground, Leah laughed at him. “You’re just like a monkey, Ezra! I’ve never seen anyone who could climb a tree like you.”

Ezra smiled at the girl. He was not tall, but when he regained the weight he’d lost, he would present a formidable set of muscles to any opponent. His curly brown hair and sparkling teeth were in sharp contrast to his pale prison complexion. “Always liked to climb trees!” he said. “When I was with the army, they’d send me to the top of the tallest tree so’s I could scout out the enemy. Why, one time General McClellan himself was down at the foot with his officers.” He grinned more broadly, “There I was, telling the general of the whole Union army how it was!”

Leah laughed again as she took the egg. “That’s just another story you’re making up. Let me see that egg.” She ignored his protests of innocence, studied

the egg, and announced, "That's a catbird egg. We've got plenty of those."

"Have I got to take it back up to the nest?"

"Of course. You're not going to eat it raw!"

"I've seen the day I would, like when you found me stealing your groceries back in Virginia."

"That's different." Leah shrugged. She smiled at him suddenly, adding, "You weren't a very good burglar, Ezra. You made more noise than a wild pig."

"Didn't have much experience."

"I hope you never get any more."

Ezra climbed the tree and replaced the egg. When he was back on the ground, he affectionately slapped Leah on the shoulder and declared, "You must know every bird's egg there is, Leah."

"I ought to—been hunting them most of my life. Come on, let's go down by the river. Maybe we'll find a kingfisher nest. They're sure hard to find."

The two of them picked their way down a path overgrown with summer ferns, vines, and saplings until they came to the creek. Leah chattered happily all the time, telling Ezra about birds of all kinds. Finally she turned to him and exclaimed, "I'm so glad you've come to stay with our family, Ezra. With my brother, Royal, gone to the army, the farm's about to fall to pieces. My folks say you're an answer to prayer."

Ezra glanced at her quickly. His face grew serious. "Well, it's about the best thing that's ever happened to me, Leah. You can't know how different it is to work because you belong instead of just to get out of a beating."

He looked at the trees surrounding them and cocked his head, seeming to listen to the creek bubbling at their feet, before he said, "I've never had a

home, not a real one anyhow—just living with people, and then the army—and then prison camp.”

“My folks think a lot of you.”

“I never met anyone kinder.”

“They’re special, all right.”

“You’re sure lucky, Leah, to have good parents like them.”

Leah glanced quickly into his face and saw the honesty there. Honest pain and honest yearning. She was glad she’d helped Ezra escape from Virginia. He had been so sick that she thought he wouldn’t live. Now she said quickly, “Well, it’s good for everybody.”

Ezra fell in beside her as they walked along the creek, saying nothing for a while. Finally Ezra said, “I’m afraid Jeff doesn’t like it too much.”

Leah shot a glance at him. “He’ll be all right. Jeff just doesn’t warm up to people right away sometimes.”

“I like him fine, but he just doesn’t take to me.”

“Jeff’s too fast to make up his mind, I think. He does everything quick. He gets mad sometimes, then he’s over it in a flash and feels bad about it. Don’t worry about it, Ezra.”

They followed the creek for a while as it cut through the valley, then took a game trail across the meadow back toward the lane leading to the farmhouse. As they rounded the last bend, Ezra peered ahead, exclaiming, “Look! There’s Jeff now.”

Leah watched Jeff stride toward them down the lane. She could tell at a glance that he was angry. His long legs ate up the distance, and his fists were balled at his sides.

Leah’s voice betrayed her worry. “We’ve been gone longer than I thought, but he shouldn’t be

mad. He's the one who wanted to go hunting by himself while it was still dark." Jeff pointedly ignored Ezra and focused on Leah's face. "I've been looking for you."

"I'm glad you got back, Jeff. Did you get any rabbits?"

"A few," he said shortly. "I thought we were going fishing?"

"Oh, Jeff, I didn't think you would be back in time."

"I was back in plenty of time."

"Well, it's still not too late." She rested her hand on his arm. "Let's go later this afternoon when the sun's not so hot. We can catch a few before supper." Still grasping Jeff's arm, she turned to Ezra. "You can come too, Ezra."

"No, it's too late now." Jeff pulled his arm away, turned without another word, and loped down the road.

Leah whispered urgently, "Ezra, he's upset. Let me go talk to him." She ran quickly and caught up with Jeff, half skipping to keep up with his long strides. "Don't walk so fast," she pleaded, pulling on his arm to slow his pace.

Jeff paused, his face flushed. His lips were drawn tightly together, and he wouldn't look at her.

Leah bit her lip. She was annoyed. After all, he had been the one to leave and go hunting alone. Now she said sharply, "Jeff, don't be like that. We still have time to go fishing—and we can go run a trotline down by the rocks tonight."

"No, I guess not."

"You're just being stubborn." She pulled him to a stop, and he turned to face her.

What Jeff saw was a young woman of fourteen with green eyes and blonde hair. She was tall for a girl and had sometimes complained that she was as tall as a crane. Jeff noticed that she had filled out a great deal since he had left and had become far more like a young woman than the scrawny girl he had left behind.

He said shortly, "I don't know why you have to spend all your time with him!"

"Jeff, you're just being silly."

"I don't think it's silly. He's the enemy, Leah. He's fighting for the North."

"Well, so is Royal, if you'll remember. We've been over all this before. Besides, Ezra's not fighting for anybody now."

Hot words began to fall from their lips. Both had tempers, and, while they were growing up, more than one fiery argument had separated them for a time. They usually got over it pretty quickly, but this time Jeff refused to be pacified. Finally, he made a big mistake. He blurted out, "You're nothing but a Yankee, Leah Carter!"

This raised Leah's temper another notch, and she shot back, tears in her eyes, "Well, if I'm a Yankee, then you're nothing but a ragtag Rebel!" She turned and ran down the road toward the house.

He stood watching her go, feeling about as miserable as he ever had in his life, but he was too stubborn to admit it. "Well, if that's the way she wants to be, she can just have Ezra Payne and the whole Union army!"

Bonnets and Bugles Series · 5

BLOCKADE RUNNER

GILBERT MORRIS

MOODY PUBLISHERS
CHICAGO

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1

A Grown-up Party

Oh, no, Leah, I think your dress is much prettier than mine!" Lucy Driscoll turned her head to one side, touched her dimple with a forefinger, and nodded with a smile. "That green matches your eyes exactly."

Leah Carter flushed with pleasure and examined herself in the mirror. She was wearing a muslin dress printed in a paisley pattern of coral and white with green trim on the collar and sleeves. Her skirt was in three tiers and very full.

She touched her honey-colored hair, which was done up in the newest fashion, and her eyes glowed with excitement. Nevertheless, she quickly said, "Well, I don't think it's as pretty as yours, Lucy."

She was accustomed to being second in any competition regarding clothing, for Lucy Driscoll was the daughter of John and Edith Driscoll, one of the wealthiest planter families in the Richmond area. Lucy *was* a beautiful girl—small, well-shaped, and her blonde hair and blue eyes exactly what they should be. The dress she wore was more ornate than most grown women wore and was made of green silk with pink lace flounces.

Leah had come to pay Lucy a weeklong visit. As the two girls giggled and dressed and arranged each other's hair, Leah thought how strange it was that they had become friends, for they had not always been on such good terms.

Lucy Driscoll was a Rebel to the core, believing in the Southern Confederacy with all her heart. Leah, on the other hand, came from Kentucky, a border state. Her brother was in the Union army, and her father was a sutler, serving the Union troops. The two girls had not been at all friendly at first, but Lucy had changed greatly, Leah thought, smiling.

“It’s so nice that you invited me to stay with you, Lucy.” Leah smiled. “Do you think we dare wear some of that rice powder you found?”

Lucy giggled. “I don’t see why not. After all, we’re practically grown up. I mean, after all, we’re fourteen years old, going on fifteen.”

The two girls delved into the cosmetics that had belonged to Lucy’s sister, and finally Lucy exclaimed, “We’d better go down! I think I hear the music already.”

“I wouldn’t want to be late,” Leah said.

Lucy’s eyes gleamed. “I would!” she exclaimed. “If you go to a party early, nobody notices you—but when you go in late like this, everybody stops to stare.” She laughed and took Leah by the arm. “I’m just joking, but I’m so excited—our first grown-up ball! And some of the young officers will ask us to dance.”

“I’m more excited about meeting Belle Boyd than any officers,” Leah said. “I mean, she’s the most famous Confederate spy in the whole South. She’s a real celebrity.”

“Oh, it’ll be fun meeting her all right.”

Lucy was rather spoiled with meeting celebrities. She had met Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and Jeb Stuart. They had all been at her parents’ home at one time or another.

"I'm more excited about this dance card," she said. Lucy held up her card, and her eyes sparkled. "How many dances are you going to give Cecil?"

Leah flushed slightly. "Oh, I don't know," she muttered. She was much shyer than Lucy, having grown up on a farm. She'd had no experience in ballroom dancing at all until she came to take care of her Uncle Silas here in Virginia. Trying now to look casual about the whole thing, she said, "He probably won't even ask me—not with you around in that dress."

"Oh, yes, he will. He's crazy about you, Leah." Lucy nodded. She was a Southern belle to the bone, having grown up with beaux and parties and balls. Her older sister had been the most beautiful eligible belle in Richmond, so Lucy was fully aware of all the ways of flirting with young men.

They went down the beautiful curving staircase where they encountered a couple who had just entered.

"I don't believe you've met Mr. and Mrs. Pollard, have you, Leah?" Lucy said. "Mr. Pollard is the editor of the *Richmond Examiner*." She reached over and patted the big man's hand. "He's not only the best-looking editor in the South but the most important."

John Pollard was a tall, portly man with longish gray hair and brown, friendly eyes. "Now, don't you start flirting with me," he teased Lucy. "My wife will be jealous."

Mrs. Pollard was a small woman with carefully dressed reddish hair and very light blue eyes. She smiled. "If he were a few years younger, I'd take him away right now." She turned to Leah and said, "I've

heard so much about you from your Uncle Silas. How is your family in Kentucky?"

"Oh, they're fine. I miss them a great deal, of course."

"I'm sure you do. Well—"

Mrs. Pollard was interrupted when a tall young man with the blackest possible hair, black as a crow's wing, joined them. He had well-set black eyes and was tanned in a very attractive fashion so that his teeth shone when he smiled.

"Why, hello, Jeff!" Lucy said quickly. "Have you met Mr. and Mrs. Pollard?"

The introductions were made, and Mr. Pollard examined Jeff's uniform. It was ash gray with brass buttons and looked very good on him. "What's your unit, soldier?"

"I'm in the Stonewall Brigade," Jeff Majors said proudly.

"You look so young!" Mrs. Pollard said.

"I'm almost sixteen," Jeff said quickly. "I'm a drummer boy right now, but it won't be long before I'll be in the regular army."

He turned to the two girls. "I've come to get my name on your programs before those other fellows get all the dances." He grinned. "Put me down for half of them."

Lucy laughed. "Why, you bold thing! I won't do any such thing as that—but you can have two."

Jeff winked at her, then turned to Leah. The two had grown up together, and their families were closely intertwined. As a matter of fact, Leah's family was keeping Jeff's baby sister, Esther. Since Jeff's mother had died and there had been no one else to care for the baby, the Carter family had generously volunteered.

“Well, I’ll have all of yours then, Leah.”

“No, you won’t.”

Another young man, dressed in a beautifully tailored brown suit, shoved his way in front of Jeff. “I’m having the dances with Leah. You may be in the army, but you can’t hog all the good-looking girls.”

Cecil Taylor was the same age as Jeff. He was rather thin with chestnut hair and bright blue eyes. His parents were almost as wealthy as Lucy’s, and of course the two sets of parents had often whispered about how nice it would be if Cecil and Lucy fell in love and got married. Then, together they would have the biggest plantation in the South.

Mr. and Mrs. Pollard drifted away, and the two boys began to argue over dances. But they were soon swamped by soldiers. The two girls were young, but girls in the South matured early, and the young lieutenants themselves were mostly not over seventeen or eighteen.

Lucy had her arm seized by Jeff, who led her off to the dance floor. She looked back over her shoulder and smiled at Cecil, whereupon Jeff said sharply, “You watch out for that Cecil. He’s not always a gentleman such as a young man should be.”

“Don’t you worry,” Cecil retorted. “Jeff’s the one to look out for.” Turning to Leah, he said, “There’s the music. I’ve got me the prettiest girl in Richmond, and I propose to have her all to myself as much as possible.”

It was a beautiful experience for Leah. As she whirled around the floor, her hoop skirt swinging, she remembered that the first time she had come to this place it had not been so. She had come wearing

rather plain clothes, and Lucy had cruelly interrogated her about her Northern sympathies.

Now, however, she was having a wonderful time. The oak floor was polished, and lights glistened from the chandeliers. At the sides of the room, silver trays and crystal glasses were lined up on a snow-white tablecloth along with all sorts of refreshment.

“You’d never know a war was going on, would you?” Cecil murmured.

Leah thought of the wounded soldiers she had visited in the hospital at Chimborazo. They had been so pathetic that sometimes she had to leave so that they could not see the tears that came to her eyes.

Looking around the ballroom, she thought about how, even on the streets of Richmond, clothes were wearing thin, groceries were nonexistent in some cases, and the Confederacy was slowly being squeezed to death by the blockade that the Union had thrown along the coastline. Only a few swift-sailing blockade runners dared brave the Yankee gunboats to carry cotton for sale in England, returning with the precious commodities that kept the South alive.

“No, you wouldn’t know there’s a war. This is very nice.” She looked over to where Jeff was dancing with Lucy. He was very tall, and Lucy was so small that she had to look up at him. “I wish I were tiny like Lucy,” Leah said suddenly. “I feel like a big old cow!”

Cecil stared at her in surprise, “What makes you think such a thing?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I just feel that way.”

“Well,” Cecil said, “stop thinking that way.” He glanced over and said, “They do make a nice-looking couple, don’t they? Wouldn’t be surprised but what Jeff didn’t fall in love with her. Most fellows do. I did!”

“Oh, you two were just childhood playmates.”

“Well, that’s true enough, and I guess people don’t often fall in love with people they grew up next door to.”

“Sometimes they do.”

Leah’s answer was so short that Cecil stared at her. Then he seemed to suddenly remember that Leah and Jeff had grown up together just as he and Lucy had. “You know, I think you’re stuck on Jeff.”

Leah blushed and bit her lip. “Don’t be silly,” she said.

Just at that moment the band reached the end of the piece, and Leah was claimed by a short, fat young lieutenant with a moon face and a thick Southern accent. He could not dance very well, but he was amusing. Leah found herself laughing at some of his outlandish remarks.

The dance had been going on for thirty minutes when a woman came into the room in the company of Mr. and Mrs. Pollard. Lucy and Leah were at the table with Cecil and Jeff, sampling the punch.

“Look! There’s Belle Boyd,” Lucy said. “Come on, let’s go meet her.” They crossed the room, and when they reached the threesome, Lucy smiled and said, “Miss Boyd, I’ve just *got* to meet you. My name is Lucy Driscoll.” She introduced her friends quickly and added, “Oh, Miss Belle, we’ve heard so much about you!”

Belle Boyd, a young woman of about twenty, was not really beautiful. Her nose was a little too

prominent, and she had a very determined chin. But she had a trim figure, and her dark hair was worn in curls. Her best feature was her fine, dark blue eyes, which she now put on the young people in front of her. "I'm happy to meet all of you," she said.

"Oh, tell us about some of your adventures saving the Stonewall Brigade," Lucy said quickly.

She turned to Jeff. "Jeff is in the Stonewall Brigade, and so are his father and his brother."

"Now here!" Mr. Pollard exclaimed. "We don't have time for Miss Boyd to tell stories."

He was right, for the young officers in their ash gray uniforms began crowding around, all clamoring for a dance with Miss Belle Boyd. She was sometimes called the Siren of the Shenandoah, sometimes the Rebel Spy. Already she had been arrested four times by Union authorities but each time had managed to obtain her freedom. She again turned her wonderful eyes on Leah, Lucy, and Jeff, saying quickly, "I'll be staying for a visit with your parents, Lucy. We'll have plenty of time to talk."

As Belle Boyd whirled off in the arms of a tall captain, Lucy said, "Isn't that exciting! She's so pretty!"

"She's not as pretty as you," Jeff observed. "Come on, this is my dance, Lucy." They moved away, Lucy's dress sweeping in wide circles to the waltz tune that the band played.

"Well, that's exciting—to get to meet Belle Boyd and actually talk to her. She's really something!" Jeff said.

"Yes, she is. I read stories about her in some of the magazines, but I never thought I'd get to meet her."

Leah's head was swimming from all the dances she'd had. She could not remember the names of all the young men she'd met.

Finally Cecil whispered, "Let's go get some more refreshments."

He got some cake and punch, handed a plate and cup to Leah, and said, "Come on, let's get out of this noise. I haven't had a chance to talk to you for all these blasted soldiers!"

"Don't call them that!" Leah protested.

She followed him out into a small garden area paved with flagstone. When he closed the French doors, the music became soft and muted. "Hey, this is nice, isn't it? Here, let's sit on this bench!"

Leah sat down and took a bite of cake. "This is good," she said. She looked around and noted the huge trees surrounding the Driscoll mansion. "I love magnolias," she said. "Their blossoms smell sweeter than anything."

Cecil took a swallow of punch and turned to her. "No better than you. They don't smell any better than you. You've been using perfume."

Leah flushed, for she had used some of the scent that Lucy had appropriated from her sister. "That's not nice to talk about what a girl smells like."

Cecil grinned. He was a happy-go-lucky boy. "Well, it is if they smell good," he argued.

Leah liked Cecil a great deal. He was an alert young man, full of fun and oftentimes practical jokes, and she enjoyed his teasing. He began talking about how in another two years he would be able to join the army.

Leah said quickly, "Oh, I hope the war's over by that time."

“Well, if the Yankees give up, it will be,” Cecil said confidently.

“I don’t know—the South is losing so many men.”

“So are the blue bellies.”

“I know, but they have so many more. Their armies just keep filling up.”

“Sometimes numbers don’t count so much.”

“What does that mean?”

“Well, in the story about Gideon in the Bible, the Israelites only had about three hundred men—and they defeated their enemies.”

“That’s not the same thing!”

“Why not?”

“Because that happened a long time ago!”

“Well then, look at the American Revolution. The British had more soldiers than the colonists—but they didn’t win.” Cecil suddenly asked, “Which side are you really for, Leah? I’ve never really understood that. I mean, your brother’s in the Union army, and Jeff’s in the Confederate army. You’ve got an uncle here that’s for the South. But your family—I guess they have to be for the North. What about you?”

It was a question that Leah had never been able to answer. She hated the idea of slavery with all of her heart. She also hated the war. But it had been obvious for some time that the North and the South would never be reconciled by peaceful means.

“I don’t know,” she finally said and dropped her head. “I just wish it were over.”

Cecil was a sensitive young man. He obviously saw that he had disturbed her with his talk of the war and was sorry for it. Then his eyes gleamed with humor, and he said, “Leah!” He put down his

cup. "I made my mother a promise one time. Do you think you ought to keep your promises? Especially to your mother?"

"Why, of course I do." Leah grew curious. "What did you promise her?"

"I promised her I would never kiss a girl until I was seventeen."

"Well, I think that's good." Leah nodded firmly.

Cecil reached over and took her arms. He was laughing as he said, "But I've decided to make an exception in your case." Then, before she could move, he kissed her on the lips.

Just as he did, the door opened behind them.

Leah pulled away from Cecil and leaped to her feet.

There stood Jeff with Lucy, staring at them. Lucy hid a smile behind her hand, but Jeff's dark eyes were angry. He said, "I think it's about time for you two to come inside."

"Oh, don't be such an old stick, Jeff." Lucy said.

But Jeff turned and walked away, and she followed him.

"I sure made old Jeff mad that time, didn't I?" Cecil whistled softly. He stared at Leah, saying, "I'm sorry. I was just teasing."

"Oh, he'll be all right. Jeff's just got kind of a hot temper."

Later on, Leah found it was not all right. She had one more dance with Jeff, and he did not say a word to her. He kept his head high and his eyes fixed over her head at the other dancers.

"Don't be mad, Jeff. Cecil was just teasing."

"None of my business what you do!" he said shortly. "If you want to go around kissing everybody that comes along—well, that's fine with me! 'Course,

I expect your family would be pretty disappointed in you if they found out.”

Instantly Leah grew angry. “I suppose you’re going to run and write a letter telling them—or perhaps tell Uncle Silas!”

“Well, somebody needs to tell them.”

“You’re just an old tattletale! Besides, I bet you kissed Lucy, didn’t you?”

Jeff’s face suddenly flushed. “That’s none of your business,” he said. “I’m older than you are.”

“One year older! That makes you grown up, does it?”

“It means I’m older than you are!”

“That doesn’t mean anything!”

Jeff grew more angry. “You have a stubborn streak in you. Everybody knows that.”

“I have a stubborn streak?” Leah glared at him, her eyes flashing. “You’re the one who’s stubborn—and unreasonable too!”

“You think it’s reasonable to kiss a boy out in the garden?”

Actually Leah was not proud of her scene with Cecil, but as many people do when they’re feeling guilty, she tried to cover up her feelings by attacking others. “You’re a fine one to talk! You made a fool of yourself over Lucy the first time you ever saw her.”

“I never kissed her in the garden!”

“You would if you got the chance!”

“I would not!”

The argument flared up further, and finally Jeff turned and walked off.

That night, in the room the two girls shared, Lucy said cautiously, “Don’t worry about Jeff. He’ll be all right.”

“I don’t care if he is or not!” Leah said. She turned over and said no more. She was so angry and upset that tears came to her eyes, but she kept very still, not allowing Lucy to dream that she was crying.

For a long time she lay there, going over the terrible argument with Jeff, and finally admitted to herself that she’d been in the wrong—at least partially.

But we’ll make it—we always do.

Yet somehow she felt worse than she had over the arguments she’d had with Jeff in the past. Finally she drifted off to sleep—and had bad dreams all night.

Bonnets and Bugles Series · 6

THE GALLANT BOYS OF GETTYSBURG

GILBERT MORRIS

MOODY PUBLISHERS
CHICAGO

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1

An Urgent Plea

Be still, Daisy! I'm sick and tired of fooling with you!"

Leah Carter, seated on a three-legged stool, slapped the glossy hide of the surprised Daisy, who turned to look at her and utter a long, low moo.

Leah endured the gaze of the enormous brown eyes of her favorite cow, then sighed heavily. Patting Daisy's heaving side, she said, "I'm sorry, Daisy—it's not your fault. I'm just not fit to live with today."

A rebellious expression on her face, she leaned her head against Daisy's flank and began milking again. Streams of white liquid drummed into the tin bucket, and soon frothy milk half filled the pail.

"That's enough for now. You'll need the rest of your milk for Suky." Daisy nodded her head as if in agreement, and Leah stroked the animal fondly between the horns.

"I'll bet if it were *your* birthday," Leah muttered, "Suky wouldn't forget it." Again Daisy mooed sympathetically—or so Leah took it. Her lips pursed, and she touched the curving horns for a moment, then whispered, "It's pretty bad, Daisy, to have your fifteenth birthday and not a single soul even notices it!"

She opened the gate, and Daisy ambled out of the stall, where she was greeted enthusiastically by her calf. Suky at once began having his evening

meal. Leah watched for a moment, then picked up the bucket and started for the house.

Leah was a tall girl—too tall, she thought, calling herself “tall and gawky.” Actually she was not gawky, though she was taller than most girls her age. She wore a pair of faded blue overalls that had once belonged to her brother, Royal, and noted that she was beginning to fill them out more than she had the previous year.

Her eyes were an odd color, sometimes seeming to be light green but at other times light blue. A relative who had been to sea once remarked, “Your eyes are just the blue-green color of the ocean at certain times of the year, Leah.” Her braids, a rich blonde, came down almost to her waist. Leah was an attractive young woman—and on her fifteenth birthday she had hoped someone might even tell her so.

Reaching the fence that surrounded the barn, she slipped through the gate muttering, “At least somebody could say, ‘Happy birthday,’ you’d think!” Leah kicked at Max, the black-and-white shepherd dog that came loping up to greet her with his red tongue lolling. Her foot merely grazed him, but he let out a yelp and backed away, eyeing her cautiously.

“Get away from me, Max!” she said and then at once felt terrible. The two were very close, and she at once bent over saying, “I’m sorry, Max. Here. You can kick me if you want to—or bite me.”

Max clearly had no desire to do either of those things. Being reassured by the note in her voice, he came forward again, tail wagging furiously. He licked her face, and, in an effort to get away, Leah stepped into a slight hole in the ground.

“Noooo!” she cried, finding herself falling. She tried to balance the milk, but as she went down full length, it sloshed down the front of her overalls. “That does it!” she muttered and threw the bucket blindly as far as she could.

“Whoa! What’s going on, Leah?”

Leah looked up to see Ezra Payne, who had approached without her noticing and now came running. He put a hand out, saying, “Here, let me help you up.”

“I can get up by myself!”

Leah scrambled to her feet and felt her face flush with embarrassment. She stared at the boy defiantly. “Well, go on and laugh. I can see you want to.”

Ezra Payne was seventeen with warm brown eyes and mahogany colored hair. Since he had come to live with the Carters, the two had grown to be very good friends. Ezra could never forget that she had practically saved his life.

Ezra had escaped from a Confederate prison camp close to Richmond, and it was Leah who found him almost dead with fever. She hid him on her uncle’s farm and, along with Jeff Majors, arranged his escape. Ezra was an orphan with no family at all and had been glad to stay on and work for Leah’s parents as a hired hand.

Leah was usually good-tempered, but now her brows were pulled down in a frown, her lips in a thin white line. She seemed to be daring him to laugh.

Ezra hesitated, then protested, “Why, I wasn’t laughing.” He brought back the bucket, saying mildly, “Everybody falls down once in a while.”

Leah wanted to snap at him. She had already lashed out at Daisy and at Max—but that had not been very satisfactory. She had carefully hinted to Ezra more than two weeks earlier that her birthday was on June 15. Yet he had not said one word. But then, neither had anyone else! She said almost bitterly, “The older I get, the clumsier I get.”

She started toward the house.

Ezra walked along by her side. He acted almost afraid to speak. He was a mild-mannered young Northerner, and living in Kentucky had been a trial for him. Leah knew that. He had learned that Southerners had a great deal of pride, and now Leah, angry and with the front of her overalls soaked with milk, must have looked rather formidable.

“Well,” he said cheerfully at last, “your pa’ll be back pretty soon, and maybe you and me can go with him on another trip to take stuff to the soldiers.”

Leah’s father was a sutler. He sold supplies and Bibles to the soldiers of the Union army. Leah had gone with him on earlier trips and so had Ezra. Ordinarily the thought of such a trip would have pleased her, but she said stiffly, “I don’t want to go out on any old wagon.”

Actually she would love to do that very thing, for following the army had been adventurous and a great deal of excitement. Her father believed that God had called him to distribute Bibles and tracts to the troops, and Leah had thrown herself into this work with a great deal of pleasure. Now, however, she was upset and simply shook the braids that hung down her back in an angry gesture and walked up the front steps.

Ezra followed close behind her. “I think we’re gonna have fresh pork chops for supper.”

“I don’t want any old pork chops!”

She marched into the house and started for her room, but her mother called, “Leah, come into the dining room, please.”

Rebelliously Leah shot a glance at Ezra, who was standing watching her. Then she flounced down the hall and into the large dining room, expecting to see her mother.

“Happy birthday! Surprise! Surprise!”

Leah stopped as abruptly as if she had run into a wall. The dining room was packed with people. With a startled gaze, she saw a huge cake sitting in the middle of the table, while on each side were piled colorfully wrapped gifts. Her mother stood behind the table along with her nineteen-year-old sister, Sarah. Sarah’s arm was around ten-year-old Morena. Several neighbors were there, including the sons and daughters of the families that lived close, and Leah felt absolutely awful.

Ezra came in to stand beside her. He grinned broadly, catching her eye. “Well, you’re all dressed up for your birthday party, Leah.”

Leah looked down at her faded, ragged blue overalls soaked with milk, and she blushed. “This is awful!” she said.

She turned to go, but Ezra caught her by the arm and held on. “What’s wrong?” he asked. “You look all right to me.”

Mary Carter, Leah’s mother, stepped out from behind the table. “This was mean,” she said, but there was a smile on her lips. “But we wanted to surprise you.”

“Well, you surprised me all right,” Leah said ruefully. She felt ashamed of the way she had been acting and managed a smile. “Let me go change clothes, and I’ll be right back.”

She ran back to her room, but when she opened the door and stepped inside she stopped abruptly. There on the bed was the most beautiful dress she had ever seen. It was light green with small white flowers, and it was made of silk. Leah knew her mother had made it, laboring over it secretly, and she squealed with delight. Stripping off her old overalls, she quickly washed her face at the washstand, then slipped into the dress.

Now she saw at the bedside a pair of brand-new shoes, the ones she had longed for for a long time, high-topped, light tan shoes with high heels. She pulled on stockings, then put on the shoes and quickly arranged her hair in front of the mirror. She was shocked at how mature she looked in the new dress. And it fit perfectly!

The party was a complete success. Besides the new dress from her mother and the shoes from Sarah, there were smaller gifts from the others. One that took her breath away was handed to her by Ezra. It felt heavy, and with excitement she pulled the paper off. When it was peeled away, she took a deep breath and said, “Ezra, it’s beautiful!”

It was a wooden box made of walnut, exquisitely carved and finished with a high sheen. She lifted the lid and saw that the inside was lined with green felt. When she looked up, Leah’s eyes were glowing. “It’s beautiful!” she repeated.

“You can keep all your jewelry in there,” Ezra said, rather embarrassed.

One of the boys from the next farm grinned. "Or all those love letters you get from Jeff."

A laugh went around the room, and Leah flushed. She stroked the lid of the box and said, "We always had our birthdays together—Jeff and me—before the Majorses left for Virginia."

Sarah came over and put her arm around her younger sister. Sarah was a beautiful girl. She had dark hair, dark blue eyes, and a creamy complexion. She said, "You'll have your birthdays together again when this war's over."

The mention of the war threatened to dampen everyone's spirits, and Mrs. Carter quickly said, "Now, let's have some more ice cream. Ezra, you can turn the crank."

When the party was over and everyone was gone, Leah sat on the front porch with Ezra. The two had been quiet for some time, and finally Ezra said, "Have you heard from Jeff lately?"

"I got a letter two weeks ago."

"What did he say?"

"He said he thought there'd be more fighting soon." She turned to face him and shook her head. "I worry so much about him—and about Royal."

Ezra had given his parole not to return to the Union army, but Leah knew he remembered some of the terrors and hardships of the war.

He said, "Well, I guess all we can do is pray for them."

Leah reached over and patted his hand. "Yes," she whispered, "I guess that's all we can do."

Sarah was standing at the window when a tall, rangy man on a tall, rangy mule pulled up in front of the gate. A smile touched her lips. She had

always thought that Pete Mangus and his mule resembled each other a great deal. Pete carried the mail in the mountains close to Pineville, Kentucky.

Sarah hurried out to meet him. The sun was high in the sky, and this spring of 1863 had been the mildest that people in Pineville could remember. "Hello, Pete," she said. "You have some mail for us?"

"Shore do." Pete fumbled in the leather bag slung over the mule's shoulders and came up with a small packet of letters. He shuffled through them and nodded. "Got two. One's from your pa, looks like. And the other is the one you been looking for, I reckon." Pete grinned down at her and handed her the letters. "That young Rebel you're so sweet on shore keeps the mail hot, don't he? But you was sweet on him before him and his family left to go South."

Sarah sometimes got upset with Pete, who felt that his status as mailman enabled him to know all the private business that went on between those who exchanged letters. However, everyone in the valley knew that she and Tom Majors had been, as Pete put it, "sweet on each other" before the war. Now, however, Tom was in the Confederate army, and her own brother was in the Union army. A great problem, but that's the way it was.

She longed to open the letter from Tom at once but knew that Pete would demand to know exactly what it said, so she said, "Stop on your way back, and I'll give you some of the gingerbread I'm making."

"Shore will!"

Sarah hurried into the house and opened Tom's letter, which was brief. Sitting at the kitchen table,

she read it slowly, savoring every word. As she read, she could see Tom's face. He was tall and dark and handsome like his father, Nelson Majors, a Confederate captain, and like his brother, Jeff, who was a drummer boy in the same army.

Sarah's lips grew tight, for Tom wrote of the hardships that the people of the South were enduring. She knew he did not do this to arouse pity but simply to relate the facts. He did not mention the fighting that was to come, but her heart contracted as she realized that a young man in the Confederate army—or the Union army for that matter—had little chance of escaping without at least being wounded.

The last paragraph said,

I love you more than I ever did, Sarah. I'd give anything if we could get married and raise a family. I know that can't be, the way things are, but I can keep hoping anyway. Don't forget me.

Love, Tom

Sarah put the letter down and sat for a long time staring at it. There was a sadness in her that she could not contain. Finally, with a sigh, she folded the letter and picked up the other one. It was not from her father.

She did not recognize the handwriting at first, and when she opened the letter she looked at once at the signature at the bottom of the page. "Abigail!" she whispered and smiled. But when she began to read, the smile left her face almost instantly.

Abigail Smith had been her best friend since early childhood. She had married a young man

from the North named Albert Munson. It had been one of the saddest moments of Sarah's life when her friend moved away to Pennsylvania. Now as she read Abigail's letter, lines appeared around her eyes as she frowned at the fine script:

Dear Sarah,

You'll be glad to hear that I am going to have a baby. You remember how much we always talked about how nice it would be to have a baby to take care of—well, Al and I are very happy to announce that we're going to be a mother and a father.

But I must also tell you something else, Sarah. I've tried not complain since I've been here, but I've been so lonely. I was spoiled when I was home, and here I've had rather a hard time. Albert has been gone with his regiment, and he has almost no family. I have met several people and have tried to make friends, but the Northern people here are suspicious because I come from the South.

What I'm trying to say, Sarah, is that I'm going to have this baby—and I'm terribly afraid because I don't have a single close friend to be with me. I know it is awful to ask this, but is there *any* way that you could come and stay with me at least until the baby comes? I have the money to send you for your fare, and it would mean so much to have my best friend here during this hard time. Please try to come. I'm depending on you.

Sarah put down the letter and frowned. She had been apprehensive about her friend's marriage,

for Abigail had indeed been spoiled. Sarah had liked Albert at once, but he was very young and apparently had very little money.

She got up and walked through the house aimlessly. She sat for a while beside Morena, smoothing her sister's blonde hair and helping with the game she was playing. Morena was ten physically, but would never be more than two or three years old mentally. She was a sweet, very beautiful girl and won the hearts of all who saw her.

As Sarah guided the youngster's hands in a simple game that involved a stick and a ball, she tried to imagine what it would be like to be in a strange place with none of your own family and be expecting a first baby. And even as she sat there, she made up her mind.

I'll have to go to be with Abigail. Somehow I just have to!

Sarah said nothing to anyone until late that night. Just when her mother was getting ready to go to bed, Sarah stopped her. "I want to talk to you, Ma."

"What is it, Sarah?"

Sarah took Abigail's letter from her pocket and handed it to her mother.

Mrs. Carter read it quickly and looked up. "You want to go to her, don't you?"

"I have to, Ma. She's the best friend I've ever had—and she's so alone and so frightened. Will it be all right?"

"It will be all right with me." Then a thought seemed to come to her, and she said, "One thing troubles me. They say that the Confederate army might be planning to invade the North again. Do

you suppose they would get as far as Pennsylvania?”

“Oh, I don’t think so,” Sarah answered quickly. “But in any case, I’ll have to go.”

Mrs. Carter had the same blonde hair and green eyes as Leah. She was a warm-hearted, strong woman, and now she made an instant decision. “Your father may worry about you, as I will—but I think it’s the right thing for you to do.”

Two weeks after that conversation, Sarah settled into her seat and looked out the open window of the wood-burning train. Her father was on the platform, and her mother, and Leah, who was holding Morena’s hand. They all waved furiously, and as the train picked up speed, she called out, “Don’t worry about me! I’ll be all right!”

She could not hear their answer as the train left the small town station, but she waved until they disappeared from sight. Then she listened for a while to the clicking of the steel wheels over the tracks and felt a touch of fear. It was a long way to Pennsylvania, and she had never gone anywhere by herself—not this far at least. But then she thought, *I’m nineteen years old, and God will take care of me!*

These two facts reassured her, and Sarah Carter leaned back and watched the trees rush by as the train moved steadily north.

Bonnets and Bugles Series · 7

THE BATTLE OF LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN

GILBERT MORRIS

MOODY PUBLISHERS
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1

Home Again

As soon as Leah Carter dumped the bucket of field corn into the trough, all seven suckling pigs came running across the lot. She smiled at their squeals, and as their pink snouts pushed into the corn she laughed at their eagerness.

“You have the worst manners of any pigs I ever saw! Look at you, Jacob—shoving your brother out of the way! Now you stop that!”

Leah had named all of the pigs after characters in the Bible, and now she saw that she had named them well. The one named Cain was snapping at the one she had named Abel. She caught Cain’s tail and dragged him backward.

“You give your brother a fair share of that corn!” she scolded.

But Cain was true to his name. He snorted and bit at her wickedly, and when she released him he plunged back into the mass of squirming piggish bodies.

Leah gave up on the pigs and leaned on the fence to watch as they chewed and grunted. “You look like some of the Franklin family at the church picnic. I never saw such greed!” she said aloud.

But there was a smile on her face for she loved animals and took pleasure in raising them. Somewhere down the line she knew they would all either be sold or end up on her plate as pork chops.

However, she had learned to forget this—or at least put it out of her mind.

A slight July breeze blew Leah's hair and cooled her face. She was a tall girl of fifteen and saw herself as gawky. Her mother had said, "You're going to be *stately*, Leah, not a giantess!" and another time Ma had said sharply, "Stop stooping over! God gave you a tall, good figure—now don't be ashamed of being tall."

Leah, like many young girls her age, was too conscious of her appearance. Actually she had nothing to be ashamed of. She had light blonde hair, very fine, that hung to her waist when it was not braided and coiled around the back of her head as it was now. Her eyes were a light green that sometimes seemed almost blue. One of her uncles, who had been to the ocean, said, "Leah, your eyes are just the color as the sea at certain times of the morning—not quite blue, not quite green, just a little bit of each."

She had an oval face with a shapely wide mouth, and her complexion was fair. She had a few freckles across her nose—which she hated.

Leah drifted off in thought, wondering how Jeff Majors would think of the way she was growing up. Jeff was one year older. They had birthdays on the same date, June 15, and until the time that the Majorses left Kentucky, they had spent every birthday party together.

The thought of Jeff's leaving saddened Leah. "I hate this old war," she muttered. Her brother, Royal, had gone to fight for the Union, while Jeff's family had gone to Virginia to side with the South. Now Jeff was a drummer boy in the Confederate army—his father was a major—and, strangely

enough, Jeff's older brother, Tom, was back here with the Carters after having had his leg shattered at Gettysburg.

For a while Leah thought of the days when she and Jeff had roamed the hills hunting birds' eggs and chasing possums and raccoons, or fishing. "I wish the war was all over," she said, "and everything could be like it was again. I wish—"

Suddenly strong arms wrapped around Leah, pinning her arms to her side and squeezing her so that she could not get her breath. She was lifted clear off the ground, and she squealed in sudden fear. The arms merely tightened, and she felt a face press against the back of her head—and then she got a resounding kiss on her right cheek!

"Is that you all got to do—stay out here and watch pigs, Leah?"

Leah felt herself released, and she whirled to see Royal standing before her, grinning.

"Royal!" She threw her arms around him and pressed her face against his chest, and his arms closed around her again. Fear that he would be hurt or even killed in battle had been with Leah every day her brother had been gone. And now he was back!

Trying to put an angry expression on her face, she said, "Royal, I could shoot you! Why didn't you tell us you were coming home?"

"Didn't know it," he said airily.

Her brother was not tall—not over five eight or nine—but he was strongly built. He had a cheerful face, hair only a little darker than Leah's, and amazingly light blue eyes. They looked like cornflowers, Leah once told him. He was called "the Professor"

by the soldiers in his unit, for he had spent one year in college and usually had his nose in a book.

He reached out and pinched Leah's chin. "Anyway, I wanted to surprise you," he said.

"Have you been to the house to see Ma and Pa?"

"No, just got here. Come on—you can take me in."

Leah grabbed Royal's hand as they walked toward the house. She fired questions at him, which he answered as best he could. They climbed the steps to the white two-story farm home, entered through the front door, and went down the wide hall that led to the kitchen.

"Ma—Pa—look who's here."

Dan and Mary Carter rushed to Royal and embraced him.

"Why, Son, what a great surprise!" Mr. Carter said. "How long can you stay?"

His father was thin, with the sickly look of the chronically ill. He had brown hair, faded blue eyes, and a firm mouth under a scraggly mustache. He had been shot up badly in the Mexican War and now was a sutler. He followed the Union army in his wagon, carrying supplies such as paper, pins, needles and thread, and special foods that the soldiers liked. Leah sometimes went with him.

"How long can I stay?" Royal repeated. "Long enough to eat you out of house and home, Pa." He hugged his mother with one arm and shook his father's hand at the same time. "Ma, I'm expecting to be fed like the Thanksgiving turkey before he becomes the dinner!"

Mrs. Carter was an attractive woman. She had the same blonde hair and blue-green eyes as his sis-

ter Leah, and there was a strength in her that everyone recognized. "I might know you'd come home hungry," she said. "You sit right down there. I'll start making one of those cherry pies."

"Make one just for me, Ma."

"You start the pie, Ma," Leah said. "Come, Royal—I've got a surprise for you."

Their parents looked at her as if they knew what was on her mind. "You bring him back soon," Mrs. Carter said.

"Where are we going?" Royal asked as Leah hauled him by the hand out of the kitchen and through the back door.

"You'll see." She pulled him down the steps and then turned him to face the huge walnut tree that shaded the backyard. Underneath it a small group sat on a quilt spread on the ground—Royal's other sisters, Sarah and Morena, and a man playing with a year-old blonde baby.

At the sight of the man, Royal dropped Leah's hand and yelled, "Tom—Tom Majors!" and ran across the yard.

Tom Majors looked up. Tom had been Royal's best friend since boyhood. He was wearing a checked red-and-white shirt and gray trousers.

Royal crossed the yard in bounds, dropped down beside his friend, and beat him on the shoulders. "Tom, you old son of a gun, what are you doing here?"

The last he had heard, Tom was a sergeant in the Confederate army, and Royal couldn't imagine how he had gotten back to neutral ground in Kentucky—right here at his own home.

Suddenly a cry rose from Tom's lips, and Royal stopped abruptly and drew back. Tom Majors was

dark complexioned, but now his face was pale, and there was pain in his eyes.

“What’s wrong, Tom? I didn’t hurt you, did I?” But even as Royal spoke, he saw that Tom’s left leg was missing below the knee. He stood up quickly. “Well—say—I’m sorry—I didn’t know, Tom.”

Tom Majors pulled himself to his feet. Reaching out, he took the pair of crutches that was leaning against the tree trunk and settled them under his arms. “That’s all right, Royal,” he said quietly.

Silence fell over the group then. The girl beside him—Royal’s sister Sarah—was the first to recover. “I’m so glad to see you, Royal,” and as he put his arms around her, she kissed him on the cheek. “How long can you stay?”

“Maybe a couple of weeks,” Royal said. He was still stunned by Tom’s injury, and his mind swirled as he tried to think of what to say. Finally, being an honest young man, he turned to his friend and asked, “Where did you get hit, Tom? Gettysburg?”

“That’s right.”

Royal waited for him to say more, but Tom Majors simply pressed his lips tightly together.

“Well, I’m glad it wasn’t worse,” Royal said quickly. “How did you get here?”

“Jeff and Sarah brought me. I was hurt too bad to travel back to Virginia. She’ll tell you about it. I’ll be seeing you around, Royal.” Tom put out the crutches and swung his body along, his face hidden. He disappeared around the house, and Royal stared after him.

Then Royal felt a hand and looked down to see his eleven-year-old sister Morena tugging at him. She too had blonde hair, but there was a blankness in her blue eyes. She had developed into a beautiful

child physically, but mentally she never had matured.

Royal swept her up in his arms. “Morena,” he said, “you are getting prettier all the time.”

She laughed and patted his cheek.

Sarah and Leah stood quietly waiting as he played with the child.

And then he looked up. “Tell me about it.”

Sarah said quietly, “It was a miracle really, Royal. I’d gone to Gettysburg to be with Abigail Munson. She was having her first child and was pretty much alone. I was there when the battle took place. Tom and Jeff were there with the army. When Tom lost his leg and couldn’t travel, we had to do something. It was impossible to get back to Virginia. Both he and Jeff would have been captured.” Her blue eyes were thoughtful as she remembered that time. “I bought a wagon and team—we traveled at night, dodging Union patrols until we got back here.”

“Tom’s changed, Royal,” Leah said. “His leg is healing, but he seems to have given up. He just won’t take an interest in anything—he’s not the Tom we knew.”

Royal glanced in the direction where Tom had disappeared. “Maybe I can help him,” he said. “We were always real close.”

Sarah hesitated. “I hope you can.”

The thought came to Royal that Sarah was closer to Tom than anyone else—they had been almost engaged before the war started. He studied her face and knew that, if Sarah could not help Tom, it would be difficult for anyone to help.

“Well, I’ll do the best I can—we all will,” he said. Then he knelt beside the baby on the quilt. “Look at

Esther—she’s growing like a tadpole turning into a frog.”

“That’s awful, Royal!” Sarah protested. “To call a child a frog! She’s the prettiest baby that ever was!”

Esther was the only sister of Tom and Jeff. Her mother had died giving birth to her, and since all the Majors men were in the Confederate army, the Carters, their old neighbors, had taken the child to raise.

Royal picked her up, and she squealed. He said, “She *is* good-looking, the best-looking female on the place.” He winked at his sisters. “But don’t tell Ma I said so.”

At supper that night there was great rejoicing. Mrs. Carter loaded the table, with help from her two daughters: pork chops, fresh ham, fried chicken, mashed potatoes, candied yams, green beans—and two luscious cherry pies in crumbly crusts.

Royal finally leaned back after his third piece of pie. “It would be a sin to eat any more of this,” he declared.

“It was a sin about a half hour ago, I think, Son.” His father grinned at him. “I believe we have all committed gluttony tonight.”

“Tell us some more about the army, Royal,” Leah said eagerly.

“Well, Tom here could tell you more than I could. For us it’s been either bored to death or scared to death.”

Sarah was sitting next to Tom. “What do you mean?” she asked.

Royal had noticed that Tom had scarcely touched his food. He’d been mostly just pushing it around with his fork. He had not said ten words

either. But at mention of the war, his hand closed tightly on his fork, the knuckles growing white.

“I mean it’s either weeks or even months of drilling—the same old thing every day. Then you go into a battle, and for about one day or two you’re scared to death. Is that the way it was with you fellas, Tom?”

“Just about.” Tom’s face was pale, and his voice was low. He did not contribute anything else to the conversation although he had been through every major battle.

Since Tom had been on the opposite side, from time to time Royal had had nightmares that one day on the battlefield he would face a young fellow in a gray uniform and that fellow would be his best friend, Tom Majors.

Leah obviously saw that Tom was not going to participate in the conversation. “Come on into the parlor, Royal,” she said. “I want to show you some pictures. A traveling photographer came, and we all had our pictures made.”

“But I haven’t had my coffee yet.”

“I’ll bring it to you,” his mother said. “You go on in. You girls too. I’ll do the dishes.”

The girls protested, but not very much. Sarah finally said, “You come too, Ma. We can all wash the dishes later.”

The parlor was a pleasant room with whale oil lamps on the heavy walnut tables. Royal and his sisters seated themselves on the horsehide sofa, Royal in the middle with Leah and Sarah on each side. Morena came to sit on his lap, and across the room Tom sat, holding the baby, Esther. He stroked her hair gently and, as the others exclaimed and laughed over the pictures, he seemed to be far away.

Perhaps he was thinking about his father, now a major in the Confederate army, and his brother, Jeff, a private—wondering if they were about to go into another battle. He glanced down at his pinned-up left trouser leg, and a spasm of pain crossed his face.

From across the room Royal saw it, and his heart constricted. He said nothing, but it hurt him to see Tom Majors, who had always been the most cheerful young man at any party, just sitting there, cut off from all the rest of them.

Finally the women went back to the kitchen to do the dishes, and Mr. Carter yawned and said, "I've had a long day—I'm going to bed. It's good to have you home, Royal," he said, and then he left.

Royal sat on the sofa with Morena beside him. She was content to hold his hand and stroke it lovingly. He smiled down at her. The only language she really understood was the expression on someone's face or the tone of voice.

"You're mighty pretty, Morena," he murmured. Then he looked across at Tom and Esther. "She sure is a beauty, Esther is."

"Yes, she is. She looks like Ma," Tom said. He smoothed the blonde hair and touched the silky cheek with his finger. Esther grabbed it and pulled at it vigorously. This brought a smile to Tom's face, the first of the evening.

For a while the two men talked, but it was an effort. No matter how much Royal spoke, Tom answered only in monosyllables. At last Tom rose, put the baby on the floor, and said, "I guess I'll go to bed too. It's good to have you back, Royal."

Royal sat beside Morena, listening to the thump of Tom's crutches echo from the hall. Then he heard

a door slam. Finally he picked up Esther, and he and Morena went into the kitchen, where his mother dried her hands and carried the baby off to bed.

When it was past everyone's bedtime, Royal was left for a few moments alone with Sarah.

"It's real bad, Sarah," Royal said quietly. "Is he always like this?"

"I haven't seen him smile hardly twice since he got here," Sarah answered slowly.

"But surely he knows that life's not over!"

"He acts as though it is. He never talks about what is going to happen. He doesn't talk about anything."

"But there are ways that he can be helped. There are artificial legs. He could get one of those."

Sarah turned and faced her brother. "Ezra has tried to talk him into that."

Ezra Payne, Royal thought. Their hired hand, who was very clever with tools. Although young, he could make almost anything out of wood.

"Ezra could make one too. But Tom won't listen."

"But we've got to convince him."

"You remember Gus Springer?"

"Sure, I remember Gus." A light came into Royal's eyes, and he said, "Why, yes—*he's* got an artificial leg, and he gets around great."

"Yes, he does—and I asked him to come out and talk to Tom, and he did."

"Well, how did it go? You know Gus. He can do almost anything—you hardly know he's lost a leg. But—" Seeing the look on his sister's face, Royal asked quietly, "He wouldn't listen to Gus?"

"No, and he got angry with me for asking him here." Sarah's eyes filled with tears, and she abrupt-

ly dashed them away. “I—I don’t know what we are going to do about Tom.”

A feeling of helplessness filled Royal Carter. He put his hands on Sarah’s shoulders. “We’ll do something,” he said firmly. “God saved Tom’s life. He’s not through with him yet!”

Bonnets and Bugles Series 8

ENCOUNTER AT COLD HARBOR

GILBERT MORRIS

MOODY PUBLISHERS
CHICAGO

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1

Jeff Makes a Decision

A pale yellow sun looked down on the streets of Richmond as Jeff Majors made his way along the line of shops. From time to time he saw his reflection in a plate glass window. What he saw was a tall young man wearing an ash-gray uniform with a shock of black hair coming out from beneath his cap. At seventeen he looked older. He already had shoulders broader than most of the men in his company, and there was a sureness about his movements.

After passing several shops, he turned into one and greeted the short, fat storekeeper with a quick nod.

“Howdy, Mr. Bennett!”

“Why, hello, Jeff!” Mr. Bennett was quick to wait on him, for there was only one other customer in the store, a man with one arm missing, who stood looking sadly at the empty shelves that composed most of the store. “What can I do for you today?”

Casting his eyes around the depleted shop, Jeff said, “Not much, it looks like, Mr. Bennett. You’re about out of stock.”

“Well, in that you’re right.” The storekeeper nodded glumly. He dropped his head, stared at the floor, then shrugged his bulky shoulders. “If some of them blockade runners don’t make it through pretty soon, I’m gonna have to close up.”

Jeff was well aware of the shortage of goods in wartime Richmond. Ever since the War Between

the States had started, the Federals had thrown a blockade of naval vessels around the coast of the South. It had grown steadily stronger until now only the boldest captains would risk their vessels, for if they were captured they would lose everything they had.

"I guess it's pretty tough, but we'll make it!" Jeff's eyes continued to run around the shelves as he said, "I need some butter. Looks like you got some of that."

"Sure have." Bennett picked up a yellow mound of butter that had been carefully molded. "Woman that keeps cows on the outside of town, she brought this in just this morning. Real fresh."

"How much?" Jeff asked.

"Well, I'll have to get fifteen dollars for it."

Jeff stared at the man. "*Fifteen dollars* for a pound of butter? Why, that's outlandish!"

Bennett licked his lips, then shrugged. "I know it is, and if Confederate money keeps on losing its value, by this time next week it'll be thirty dollars. Better stock up while you can, Jeff!"

Taking the shopkeeper at his word, he collected a few supplies. As Mr. Bennett put them in a box, Jeff pulled a thick fold of bank notes from his pocket. Peeling off several, he said, "Used to be you had to bring your money in your pocket and take your groceries off in a box. If things don't get better, it looks like I'll have to bring the money in a box and take the groceries home in my pocket."

Mr. Bennett took the cash and managed a smile. "Won't be long before we'll whip the Yankees. Then things will get back to normal again." He stared at the money dolefully, then put it into a cigar box beneath the counter. "Tell your pa I said hello!"

“I’ll do that, Mr. Bennett!”

Jeff left the store and continued down the street. There was a mournful air about the streets of Richmond that had not been apparent when he and his family had first arrived here from Kentucky. Then, war fever had been at its height. Bands had been playing, and pretty girls had been handing out cookies and glasses of lemonade to farm boys as they flooded into Richmond to fight the Yankees.

As Jeff crossed the dusty street, his mind went back to his old home in Kentucky. *Wish I was back there!* he thought, then shook his shoulders and pushed the thought away. “Can’t be thinking about things like that,” he murmured aloud. Still, thoughts kept coming to him, mostly thoughts about his boyhood when he and Leah Carter had roamed the hills, fishing, hunting, and looking for birds’ eggs. “Sure do miss Leah,” Jeff muttered. Then, when he saw a man looking at him strangely, he grinned and said, “Just talkin’ to myself!” and laughed as the man smiled.

Many of the men on the street hobbled along on crutches, missing a leg. Many had only one arm. Some had patches over one eye, and their faces were scarred. It was a depressing sight, and Jeff had never gotten used to it.

A large black-and-tan hound thumped his tail against the floor of the post office as Jeff stepped toward the door. Leaning over, he patted its head. “Wish me and you could go out and hunt coon, boy.”

The tail thumped again, and Jeff pulled the dog’s long ears.

Inside the post office, he waited his turn, studying the notices posted on the walls. The mail did not

get priority in the Confederacy, and sometimes it took weeks for a letter to get to its destination. However, when Jeff got to the window and said, "Any mail for Nelson Majors or his family?" he was pleased to see the postmaster nod.

"Yep, got one right here! Just come in!" He handed Jeff a letter and twisted his head to one side and winked. "From your sweetheart, I'll bet!"

Jeff looked at the envelope and saw that it was Leah's handwriting. "That's right!" he said. "Prettiest sweetheart in the whole Confederacy!"

As he turned away, the thought came to him that actually Leah was not *in* the Confederacy. Kentucky had not come out to fight for the South. It was for that reason the Majors family had left there to come to Richmond, where Jeff's mother died shortly after their arrival.

He moved to one side of the walk and leaned against a hardware shop. Across the street, a blacksmith was making a rhythmic clanging as he hammered out a white-hot piece of steel. He heard the hum of voices as people passed and the sound of horses' hooves as men rode by or drove past in wagons and buggies of every sort.

Jeff opened the letter and eagerly read it:

Dear Jeff and all,

I trust that this finds you well. It seems so far away from the war here in Kentucky. The woods are quiet, and there are no sounds of guns, and even Pineville doesn't seem touched by the terrible struggles going on where you are. However, I must be more cheerful. Esther is fine. She is the prettiest, happiest little girl in the whole world! She would love you, and you would love her!

She babbles like a magpie. She is so pretty. She has the same blonde hair and blue eyes your mother had. I think she's going to look just like her when she grows up.

I'm worried about your brother. Tom's discouraged again. For a while he was doing better, but he's much quieter than he used to be. He was always so happy and laughed all the time, but now he hardly says anything. He helps Ezra and my father with the work around the farm, but he goes off by himself for long times.

Ezra made him a fine, wooden leg, as I told you the last time. We finally got him to put it on, and though he limps some, it works fine . . .

Jeff looked up as a drover passed with a wagon full of goods. The man yelled and cracked his whip over the heads of the oxen, which were straining to pull the heavy load. Jeff watched for a moment.

Tom and Sarah, Leah's sister, had planned to get married, but the war had driven them apart. Leah's brother, Royal, was in the Union Army. Tom had served with his father and Jeff in the Army of Northern Virginia until he lost a leg at Gettysburg.

Jeff looked down and read the rest of the letter, devouring the news of the farm and all the things that were going on back home. Finally he sighed, folded the letter, and stuck it into his inside pocket.

He walked on through town and out to the camp just south of Richmond. The sound of bugles, and men drilling, and the many other noises that go with an army camp came to him, but he was so accustomed to them he hardly noticed.

When he got to where his company was sta-

tioned, he glanced up at the flag that indicated the officers' headquarters.

The corporal on guard outside the tent winked at him. "Hello, Private Majors! You want to see your pa—I mean Colonel Majors?"

"If he's not busy."

"Just go right on in! He said he's been looking for you."

Jeff found his father, Col. Nelson Majors, sitting at a portable desk and staring at a map that was laid out before him. Jeff thought again how fine his father looked. He was a dark-skinned man with hazel eyes and a black mustache. At the age of forty-one, he had hair that was still totally black. Looking up, he grinned. "Hello, Jeff. Did you get something to eat?"

"Yes, I did, Pa—I mean Colonel. It cost the world, though!" He put down the box and exhibited his purchases. Then he handed over the remains of the cash and said, "It was the best I could do. The store's about out of everything."

Colonel Majors leaned back and took a deep breath. Balancing himself on the back two legs of his camp chair, he put his hands behind his head and stared up at the tent roof. "Well," he said thoughtfully, "it's not good—but it's better than what we'll get when we take to the field."

At that moment, a tall, rangy captain walked through the door and saluted.

The colonel returned the salute and said, "Well, Captain Dawes, how do the new recruits look?"

Dawes lounged at ease in front of the desk and shrugged his shoulders. "Not like much, Colonel. I guess all the good ones have already been scooped up. Some of them we got in this bunch are either

too old to do much good or so young I hate to see them coming on.”

Jeff said instantly, “I’m as old as some of them, Pa—Colonel.”

“Now don’t you start on me, Jeff! You’re not joining the Regulars! You’re going to be a drummer boy at least a few more months. Let’s hear no more of it!” Colonel Majors looked down at his map. “Not much question about what’s going to happen next, is there, Captain?”

Dawes bit his lower lip. “Reckon not, sir. I hear Grant’s got an army of a hundred thousand men ready to feed into this here war. I wish we had half that many!”

“Then we’ll just have to do better. Every man will have to cover a little more ground and fight a little harder. We knew all this would happen when the war started.”

Then the two men talked about the battle that was to come.

Throughout the early years of the war, the South had won battle after battle, but the superior weight and the manufacturing power of the North were now ready to roll. Every time a Southern soldier fell, he left a gap in the ranks. When a Northern boy was taken, all General Grant had to do was reach into the city and pick up a recruit. Many in the North were tired of the war, but President Lincoln was now sure he had found a fighting general.

“I’ve heard about Grant,” Colonel Majors said. “They say he’s merciless!”

“Yes, sir, and now that we’ve lost Stonewall Jackson, it’s going to be harder. After Gettysburg, we’re down mighty thin! Where do you think they’ll hit?”

“Right up in this area, and we’ll be moving out soon, Captain Dawes, so get these men trained as quick as you can! That’s all!”

“Yes, sir!”

Colonel Majors waited until the captain had left the tent, then said, “It’s going to be mighty tough, Jeff.”

“We can whip ’em, sir!”

A smile flashed across Colonel Majors’s lips, then he said slowly, “You know what I’ve been thinking about? Kentucky.”

“Oh, and I just got a letter from Leah. Wait’ll you hear what she says about Esther!” Jeff handed the letter to his father and waited until he had finished reading. “She sounds like a beauty, doesn’t she? Says she looks just like Ma!”

A frown creased the colonel’s brow, and his lips drew down tightly. He moved uneasily in his chair, then finally got up and walked to the tent flap. He stared out for such a long time that Jeff wondered what he could be thinking.

Finally his father turned back and said, “Jeff, I think so much about Esther—and about your mother.”

“Well, I do too, and I know Tom does.”

“I don’t feel right about letting the Carters do all the raising of my daughter. It just seems like I’ve let your mother down somehow.”

“But you couldn’t help it, Pa!”

After Mrs. Majors’s death, it had been the Carters back in Kentucky who volunteered to raise baby Esther until such time as the Majors men could get settled. That meant, of course, when the war was over, but being separated from the child had been hard on all of them.

“Maybe after this next battle the Yankees’ll quit and go home. Then the war will be over, and we can get her back again.”

Jeff’s words did not seem to reach Colonel Majors. He returned to his chair and said thoughtfully, “It’s hard not being able to have your child. I think about it all the time. I wish there was some way that we could take her, but I guess there’s not.”

Uncomfortable, Jeff moved toward the tent door. He did not like to see his father so downcast.

After bidding the colonel good-bye, he went to his own unit, where he was surrounded by his squad and took part in the activities that went on, including cooking supper. But after eating, he sat by himself for a long time in the tent that he shared with the other young men. Finally he clamped his jaw and said, “There’s *got* to be a way! Lord, please show me what to do!”

He waited for a moment as if he expected the Lord to speak out of heaven. Then he laughed aloud at himself. “Well, I *know* what I’m going to do! I’m going to write Leah!”

He found a scrap of paper that had already been used for a letter, crossed out the used side, and then with a stub of pencil began to write:

Dear Leah,

There’s something I want you to think about. You see, my pa and I miss Esther an awful lot . . .

Bonnets and Bugles Series · 9

FIRE OVER ATLANTA

GILBERT MORRIS

MOODY PUBLISHERS
CHICAGO

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1

Leah Makes a Decision

With a grunt, Leah Carter tugged at the buttons on the back of her dress. She struggled so violently that her face turned red, but no matter how hard she tried she simply could not fasten the garment.

“I’m getting to be nothing but a great big cow!” In a gesture of despair, Leah ran her hands through her blonde hair and stared at her image in the mirror. “Nothing but a big cow!”

Her full lower lip extended in a pout. Impatiently she pulled the dress over her head, held it up, stared at it angrily. She knew that it was foolish to be angry at the dress.

She glanced then at the homemade calendar on the wall and noted the date. June 20, 1864. The memory of that day a year ago came to her, and she lowered the dress slowly and sat down on the edge of the bed. The cornshuck mattress whispered and rustled.

“It was just a year ago today that I got this dress,” she whispered. “I was so proud of it—and Jeff was too.” She held up the garment. It was royal blue with beautifully executed bone buttons at the back, white cuffs, and a white collar to match. She remembered how Jeff had taken her for a walk down the streets of Richmond and how he had whispered, “You’re the prettiest girl in Richmond, Leah Carter!”

As Leah remembered, a dreamy look came into her blue-green eyes. She thought of Jeff Majors and wished that the dress still fit.

Then she thought of the party she was invited to at Lucy Driscoll's house tonight, and she threw the dress across the room. It sailed through the air, hit the wall, and dropped in a crumpled heap on the worn, blue-figured carpet.

Leah walked around the confines of her small bedroom, coming finally to stand at the window. She stared at the tall oaks lining the dusty road that led to Richmond in one direction and to the Driscoll house in the other. It was a fine day, and soon Jeff would be coming down that road to take her to Lucy's party. She felt a sudden twinge of jealousy.

"I bet Lucy will have a dress sent all the way from France on one of the blockade runners," she muttered. She turned from the window, walked over to the large, polished, walnut wardrobe, and stared inside again, although she knew it was hopeless. She pawed through her few dresses and wished that she had the green dress that she had left at her home back in Kentucky. And then she shook her head. *That one would be too small too!*

The big black-and-white cat lying in the center of her bed lifted his massive head and looked at her with golden eyes. He said, "Wow?" which always made Leah laugh.

She laughed now. Then she fell across the bed and ran her hand over the cat's smooth, glossy fur. "You're all right, Cap'n Brown!" she said. He seemed to be wearing a black-and-white suit with the white of his neck forming a white cravat. He had been placed in the barn to catch rats and mice, but Leah had taken him into the house and for some reason

had decided to call him Cap'n Brown. She picked up the cat, and he purred as she stroked his ebony fur, lifting his head to be tickled under his chin. "I know what you want," she said. "You want to be brushed."

"Wow," Cap'n Brown said, and Leah again laughed. She found his brush and began giving him long, easy strokes. Cap'n Brown arched his back with pleasure as the brush traveled down his lanky body.

"I wish my hair were as easy to fix as yours," she said, reaching up to touch her blonde locks. She had washed her hair with rainwater just that morning, and it was still slightly damp, the ends of it curling. She realized that she had to do something with it.

"I can't be brushing you all the time, Cap'n Brown." She tossed him off her lap.

He landed lightly on the bed, stared at her, then yawned and curled up and immediately went to sleep.

With a sigh, Leah went back to the wardrobe and chose the only dress that would do at all for the party. It was one she had made only four weeks earlier, so she knew the fit was right. The trouble was that it was not intended to be a party dress.

She held it up to the light. "It's just a plain, old brown dress," she said, "but it's either that or wear overalls." Quickly she slipped it on, looking longingly again at the royal blue dress that was so pretty.

She sat down then at the little desk beside her spool bed and pulled a small book toward her. This was the journal for which she had spent twenty-five Confederate dollars earlier in the year. If I were buying it now, she thought, it would cost fifty dol-

lars or seventy-five or perhaps even a hundred. Confederate money was practically worthless.

“I’m glad I bought it when I did,” she murmured, then dipped a quill into the glass inkwell and began to write. It was a pleasure to write in her journal, and she loved looking back and seeing what she had been thinking six months ago. Some of it made her laugh, and other writing embarrassed her for she was able to see her own foolishness.

The turkey quill scratched across the page as Leah wrote in tiny, ornate script, dipping the pen from time to time into the ink, which also was growing scarce. She stopped after a time and reread what she had written:

Am I a girl—or am I a woman? Just now I tried on the blue dress that fit me perfectly a year ago, but now I can’t even squeeze into it. I’m no taller than I was then, and I thank the Lord for that! I’m tall enough already at five feet seven, which is plenty. But I’ve filled out so that I’ve got to wear my brown dress, and it was never meant for a party. But I’m going to Lucy’s party, no matter what!

She sat at the desk, dreamily thinking of what her life had been like. Looking back through the journal, she saw entries about things that had taken place when she was at home with her family in Pineville. She read again, with pleasure, about bringing Jeff’s baby sister, Esther, to be with his family here in Richmond.

She read references to the Majors family and to Jeff himself, who had been her best friend all her life. They had the same birthday, and now Leah thought

of how Jeff, at eighteen, had changed from a lanky, wild-haired boy to a fine-looking man like his father, Col. Nelson Majors, and like his older brother, Tom.

The Majors family had moved South at the beginning of the Civil War. Then Colonel Majors's wife died, leaving the small child that she named Esther. And now the three Majors men were all in Richmond with the Confederate army.

Leah's lips curled upward as she thought of baby Esther, whom she had cared for and who had taken up so much of her life. Not a baby now, for she was three years old and talking more every day.

She thought also of the future. Colonel Majors and Eileen Fremont planned to be married soon, and Esther would have a new mother. Jeff, at first, had been opposed to his father's taking another wife. But he had come around and now seemed to love Eileen Fremont as much as he had disliked her before.

Leah began to write again:

I know that Lucy will have a beautiful dress, and she's so little and pretty that she makes me look even more gawky and bigger than I am. And Jeff, he's just like all the rest of the boys. Just dazzled by Lucy. What chance do I have? I'll have to wear a dress that isn't pretty, and I won't get to dance a single time with Jeff, and I'll just sit in a corner, and nobody will even notice me!

Slowly Leah leaned back, wiped the quill on a piece of cloth kept for that purpose, and put the brass cap on the ink bottle. She sprinkled a little fine, white sand over the writing to dry it, blew it off, and then read what she had written. Something

about it, she knew, was wrong, but she could not understand what. What she thought was, *I'm seventeen years old, and that's a woman—but sometimes I don't feel grown up. So what am I? A little girl or a woman?*

The Driscoll home was ornate, large, beautiful, and, Leah knew, filled with expensive paintings and decorations. As Jeff stopped the team in front of the big portico with its eight white columns, again she felt intimidated by it all. She watched as a tall slave came out and took the lines from Jeff.

The man flashed his white teeth. “Yes, suh, I will take care of this team. The party’s startin’. You better get on in!”

“Thanks.” Jeff got down and went around to Leah’s side and put up a hand.

She took it, noting that he looked very handsome indeed in his ash-gray Confederate uniform. He had begun the war as a drummer boy at Bull Run but now was a full-fledged private in the Stonewall Brigade. His black belt and boots and the red sash around his trim middle made him look very athletic. She glanced at his hair, the blackest she had ever seen, and thought again, *He’s the best-looking boy I’ve ever known.*

All the way to the Driscoll house, Jeff had talked about going back to duty. He still moved his left arm rather awkwardly, for he had been slightly wounded at the siege of Petersburg. General Grant, with thousands of Federal soldiers, was still drawn up in front of that city, and the Confederates were fighting in a desperate attempt to keep them from coming through and taking Richmond.

However, Jeff now seemed able to put this from his mind. His grin flashed, and he held Leah's hand for just a moment longer than necessary, leaning over to wink at her. "You're going to have a good time at this party," he promised. "Everybody will be here."

Leah smiled quickly. "I hope so, Jeff. Don't leave me all alone, now."

"Oh, you won't need me. There'll be plenty of fellas coming to ask you to dance. Let's go in."

Leah and Jeff entered the palatial mansion and moved down the hall toward the sound of music. When they stepped into the ballroom, she saw that the large room was filled with young people and decorations hung from the chandeliers and on the walls. Across one end stood a long table, draped with a white cloth and topped with gleaming china. Cut crystal glasses caught and reflected the light from the chandeliers.

The dancing had already started, for Lucy Driscoll would have nothing less for her birthday than a dance. The music was provided by a five-piece band, and the dresses of the young women looked like green, red, blue, and yellow lights as they moved about the room.

"This beats starving in the trenches at Petersburg," Jeff said. Then his eyes narrowed. "There's Lucy."

As Leah had guessed, the girl was wearing the most beautiful gown that money could buy. Lucy's dress was baby blue silk with a small, woven floral design. It had a square neckline, edged with a white lace frill. The lace-frilled sleeves were very short and puffed. The overskirt touched the floor and was looped up at the sides and held in place by large

white silk bows. It was worn over a large hoop. Her fair hair was coiled high on her head with long ringlets hanging down the back. She had on short, white silk gloves and a pearl choker.

“Let’s go wish her a happy birthday,” Jeff said.

Leah seized Jeff’s arm and clung to him. She had the impulse to turn and run, for she felt like a crow at a meeting of brilliantly colored bluejays and cardinals and canaries. Her brown dress, though serviceable enough for church, was totally out of place here. She wanted to cry.

I wish I’d never come, she thought and gritted her teeth. *As soon as I can, I’ll get away where nobody can see me.*

“Why, Jeff, how nice to see you—and you too, Leah.”

Lucy Driscoll was small and shapely and charming. Her hair was as blonde as Leah’s, but whereas Leah was tall and strong-looking, Lucy was diminutive and made the most of it.

“You look great, Lucy.” Jeff smiled, taking her hand. He bent over and kissed it, then laughed. “I been practicing up on that.”

“I bet it was with Leah here,” Lucy said archly. “Has he been practicing his charms on you, Leah?”

“No,” Leah said shortly, “he hasn’t!”

Jeff shifted uncomfortably. “To tell the truth, that was my first attempt. Anyway, I been practicing up on my dancin’, even though it was all by myself.” The music started up again just then, and he said, “Could I have this dance, Lucy?”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I already promised it to Cecil.”

A thin young man about Jeff’s age, who had been standing off to one side listening, stepped forward. He had chestnut hair and bright eyes and wore the

uniform of a first lieutenant. "Go ahead. I'll make the sacrifice for you, Jeff."

"Well, that's nice of you, Cecil—I mean, lieutenant. I keep forgetting you've been commissioned, sir."

"Oh, let's forget that," Cecil said, "at least while we're here." He seemed to be the only officer present among several young soldiers and many civilian boys not yet old enough to enlist. He turned to Leah. "May I have this dance, Leah?"

Glad to get away and feeling very warm toward the young man, Leah said, "Of course." She soon was sweeping around in a waltz with Cecil Taylor. He was not the best of dancers, but she liked him.

"Sorry about that," he said after a misstep. "I'm just never going to learn to be good at this."

Leah smiled at him. "You're doing fine."

Cecil was only an inch or two taller than Leah herself. She had grown fond of him on her first trip to Richmond. At that time he had proved to be a friend when Lucy had been somewhat less than friendly. His father was a wealthy planter. His mother was from one of the finest—that is to say, wealthiest—families of Virginia.

Leah glanced around the ballroom. "There aren't as many here as I thought there would be," she remarked.

"No, it's not like it used to be. I remember when fellows would come from all over the county for a party like this. But I guess a lot of 'em are in the army now. And besides, there just aren't enough horses to get us where we want to go." He looked down at her, interest in his friendly blue eyes. "I'm so glad you could come," he said. "I was afraid you might have gone back to Kentucky."

"I suppose I'll have to pretty soon. I came to bring Jeff's little sister here, but now that it looks like his father's going to remarry, they won't need me anymore as a nurse for her."

"That'll be a sorry day for me when you go back. As a matter of fact, I've missed you a lot."

"Will you be in the fighting soon?"

"I don't know. I've put in for it, but they keep me here as an aide in the War Department." Cecil sounded disgusted, and he missed another step, almost stumbling. "Sorry about that."

"What do you hear from your brother, Royal?" he asked after the music stopped and they were at the refreshment table. He was pouring her some lemonade from a tall pitcher.

Leah said, "He's in Chattanooga, but I don't think you'd want to hear about the doings of a Yankee soldier."

"If he's your brother, I would!" Cecil sipped his lemonade and made a face. "This doesn't have enough sugar in it. Here, let's sweeten it up with some of these cakes." He picked up some small white cakes coated with sugar and bit into one. "The Yankees whipped us pretty bad at Chattanooga, but I don't think they'll ever take Atlanta."

"I just wish it was over," Leah said, "and that we didn't have to hear about war all the time."

Across the ballroom, Jeff stood talking to Lucy. He was enjoying himself tremendously. He was also looking forward to having some of the refreshments, for food had gotten scarce in the Confederacy. Looking down at Lucy, he said, "That's the prettiest dress I've ever seen, I think. You sure look nice."

“Why, thank you, Jeff.”

“I haven’t seen you wear that one before.”

“No, it came in on a privateer last month. Daddy bought it for me. Had to pay too much for it, I think.”

“It was worth it.” He led her toward the refreshment table. “Sure wish there wasn’t anything to do but go to parties, and drink lemonade, and eat cake. Sure beats soldiering.”

“Leah looks nice,” Lucy said idly.

“What? Oh, yes, she does.”

“She’s so tall, though. I hope she doesn’t grow any taller.”

“I don’t know. She looks pretty healthy.”

“Oh, yes, she’s healthy all right. Look, she and Cecil are trying to dance again. Cecil isn’t much on a dance floor, I’m afraid.”

Jeff glanced over as Cecil almost tripped over Leah’s long skirt.

Lucy said, “Well, I hope he doesn’t fall down and drag Leah with him. That would humiliate her, wouldn’t it . . .”

“This is too much to ask a lady to put up with,” Cecil said.

Leah was somewhat embarrassed, but she said, “No, you’re not going to get any better if you don’t practice.”

The evening went on and on, and Lucy and Jeff—it seemed to Leah—danced almost every dance together. She herself kept going back to Cecil, who stood much of the time against the wall. “Come along, Cecil,” she would say, taking his hand.

The more she saw Jeff laughing down at Lucy Driscoll, the more unhappy she became. *If I can’t*

have the prettiest dress, I'll have to do something else to get Jeff's attention, she thought.

Leah was not a scheming girl. But having come to the party in such poor style, and then seeing Jeff so taken with Lucy Driscoll, she decided that she had to do something. She toyed with an idea. *If he's going to pay all that much attention to Lucy, then I'm going to make him jealous. I'll make him jealous of Cecil.*

The thought pleased her, and she moved closer to Cecil, saying, "You do look nice in your uniform, Cecil. I think officers of the Confederacy are so dashing, and I'm sure you're going to be a perfect hero when you get your chance."

Leah had never paid such attention to Cecil before, and he seemed dazzled by her compliments. "Why, Leah, I didn't know you felt like that!"

"Oh, I do! Now, let's try again. One, two, three. One, two, three. That's it! You're going to be the best dancer when I get through with you, Cecil Taylor."

Leah hardly saw the pleased look that came into Cecil's eyes. She looked across the room at Jeff and Lucy, thinking, *I'll make him so jealous, he won't even see Lucy Driscoll.*

Bonnets and Bugles Series · 10

BRING THE BOYS HOME

GILBERT MORRIS

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1

The Net Closes

Corporal Majors!”

Jeff stopped abruptly as a harsh voice came across the frozen air. He turned slowly, guiltily. As he expected, he saw his father, the colonel, standing outside his tent, glaring at him.

Jeff snapped to attention and brought his right hand up to a salute, touching the forage cap as he had been taught. He had been a drummer boy for two years in the Stonewall Brigade, but now at seventeen had been mustered into the regular service and appointed a corporal.

“Yes, Colonel,” he said. His lips were so cold that he found it difficult to speak. He brought his hand down, knowing he was in big trouble.

Col. Nelson Majors walked up to his soldier son. They looked alike, these two. They had the same coal-black hair and black eyes. Jeff was fully as tall as his father, though much slimmer.

“Where have you been, Corporal?”

After a slight hesitation, Jeff said, “Into Richmond, sir.”

“How many times does that make that you’ve been to Richmond in the last week?”

“Three times, Colonel.”

“Well, that’s about three times too many!”

Nelson Majors was ordinarily a soft-spoken man, but today his face was drawn with tension.

The siege of Petersburg had drained all the energy out of him. He had been wounded at the beginning of the siege and had not gotten his full strength back. He held himself up straight and said sternly, "Corporal, just because you're the son of the commanding officer doesn't give you any special privileges! I thought I'd made that clear to both you and your brother!"

"I'm sorry, sir." Jeff had no excuse. He had gotten permission from his lieutenant to go to town, but he knew that he had taken a shortcut. He was well aware that his father was never one to permit one of his sons to merit special attention, and now he made no defense.

"You can stand guard for an extra watch, Corporal Majors."

"Yes, sir."

Jeff returned his father's angry salute, and when the colonel ducked back inside the tent, he made his way down through the camp to the front lines.

Here were trenches protected by large logs and anything else that would stop a musket ball. They were not quite deep enough for a man to walk upright, so Jeff kept his head down. As he wound through the fortifications, from time to time he heard the explosion of a musket and the screaming of a minié ball as it split the air. Both sides were firing, and their trenches were less than two hundred feet apart in places.

A mortar exploded somewhere behind the lines, and he dropped down flat. When the dirt settled, he got up and continued his journey, finally arriving at the location where his squad was detailed to hold off the Yankees.

“Hello, Jeff. You bring anything good back to eat?”

Sgt. Tom Majors, Jeff’s older brother, was sitting on a cracker box. He’d been talking to Charlie Bowers, the undersized drummer boy who had entered the service the same time as Jeff but was one year younger.

“Well, yes, I did,” Jeff muttered. He flung down the bag. “There! You can have it!”

Charlie stared at him with his wide blue eyes. “What’s the matter, Jeff? You look all put out.”

“Pa—I mean the colonel—just bawled me out for going into Richmond.”

“You had permission, didn’t you?” Tom asked as he picked up the bag.

“Sure, I did. From the lieutenant. But that wasn’t good enough.”

Tom was barely listening. He had opened the bag and was pulling out its contents. “Cookies!” he said. “My, I haven’t seen a cookie in years, it seems like!”

Jeff, however, was not thinking of cookies. “I don’t see why he has to pick on me! What difference does it make whether I’m here or not?” he grumbled. He plopped himself down on a log that formed a part of the fortification and watched as the other two soldiers eagerly went through the rations. He refused the cookies. He had filled up on cookies when in Richmond.

Charlie said, “I think you’re crazy, Jeff—turning down cookies just because you’re upset with your pa.”

Tom was munching happily, making a chocolate cookie last as long as he could. Then he said, “You

know Pa's pretty tense, Jeff. He's got a lot of responsibility here."

"That's right," Charlie said. "We're trying to hold too much of the line. Spread out all thin-like. Why, if the Yankees made a run at us, I don't know if we could hold 'em or not."

Jeff knew that both were right, and it was not his father's fault.

"Well," he muttered, "I guess it was worth it. Leah and I cooked up all this stuff, and I ate all I could so the rest of you could have what I brought back. But food's getting so scarce there that they couldn't give us much."

"Seems they found a chicken anyhow." Tom bit down on a fried chicken leg. "It beats anything we've had here lately."

The three soldiers were tired and dirty. A siege was a nasty sort of way to run a war, Jeff thought. There was no glory in it—no flags flying, no bands playing—just day after day risking death every time a man raised his head.

"The net's closing in," Tom said, glancing toward the Federal fortifications. "General Grant is getting more reinforcements all the time, and we're getting thinner. There's only one end to that."

Jeff nodded. "I reckon you're right, Tom. And Pa's got too much to do. I shouldn't have gotten sore at him like that."

Colonel Majors had been fortunate enough to commandeer a horse that would hold his weight. He was in Richmond, on his way home for the first time in days.

"Come on, boy. You can make it just a little farther." He urged the weary animal down the street.

Richmond was a pitiful sight, he thought. The mortars and the big guns of the Federals had arched over their deadly missiles, blowing large chunks out of the city.

He rode through the heart of town and saw that little was left of the daily life he remembered. When he'd first come here from Kentucky to join the Confederacy, Richmond had been a busy, prosperous city. Now, only a remnant was left of all of that. He saw bombed-out buildings, burned houses, holes in the street big enough to hide a horse. And he saw little hope in the eyes of those who were still trying to keep the Confederate war machine going.

Finally he reached home, a small, white frame house, which so far had been spared the destruction of the inner city. He slid off the bony animal, slapped him with some affection, and said, "You did a good job, boy. I'll see if I can find you some fodder." He tied the horse to the hitching post, then opened the door and called out, "Hey, where's my welcoming committee?"

Instantly he heard a child's voice, and then a blonde girl, no more than three years of age, came like a whirlwind. She hit him full force, and he laughed, picking her up and holding her high in the air.

"Well, here's my Esther!" He kissed her rosy cheek. His wife had died bringing Esther into the world, and for most of her life the child had been in the care of Dan and Mary Carter in Kentucky. Now, however, she was here to stay, and she had a new mother.

"Nelson, you're home!"

Eileen Fremont Majors greeted him with almost as much vigor as the child. At twenty-nine, she had

brilliant red hair, green eyes, and, he knew, a great love for her new husband.

Nelson kissed her and then said, "You smell better than anything I've smelled in the last three weeks!"

Eileen ran her hand through his hair. "I'm glad you're here, dear. Come on. I know you're hungry. I'll fix you something to eat."

He followed her into the kitchen, noted the pleasant warmth of the wood stove, and sat down, saying, "I wish I could carry that stove back to the front lines with me."

"I'm afraid we don't have much to cook on it, but the fire's nice."

"How's the firewood holding out?"

"We'll manage."

Eileen busied herself making a meal, and soon it was set before him. "Only two eggs," she said, "but we got a piece of bacon yesterday, and here are some biscuits that I made this morning."

As her husband ate, Eileen sat beside him. Esther demanded her father's attention, and he pulled her up onto his lap and began to tell her stories, which she loved. After a time, however, he said, "Now, you let Daddy have a little time with Mommy, all right?"

"Will you tell me more stories after you talk to her?"

"Sure I will, sweetheart." He kissed her firmly, and she toddled off happily to play. "Where's Leah?" he asked.

"Oh, she's out fishing again."

"In this weather? She'll freeze to death!"

"She doesn't seem to mind, and the fish come in handy. Until the water freezes over, she says she'll keep at it. We'll have fish for supper."

Then Eileen plumped herself down in her husband's lap. "There," she said. "I've missed this lap of yours."

"I've missed having you in it." He stroked her hair. "I've missed you more than I should. I couldn't keep my mind on my business."

Eileen hesitated, then said, "I've got some more business for you to think about."

"What's that?"

"How would you feel if you had to buy another plate for the table?"

For a moment Nelson could not understand what she meant. He saw that she seemed somewhat apprehensive. And then the meaning of her question came to him. His black eyebrows went up with astonishment. "You don't mean that we're going to have a baby?"

"Yes! That's the business at hand." Eileen looked at him carefully and then said, "I hope you don't mind, Nelson."

"Mind? Why would I mind? I think it's wonderful!"

She obviously had been concerned about how he would take the news. Life during wartime was hard enough without any complications. She seemed to desperately need his assurance. "I'm so glad," she whispered. "I was afraid you wouldn't like it."

"Of course I like it, and don't you worry a bit. We'll make out fine."

Eileen whispered, "I hope it'll be a boy. That would be good, wouldn't it?"

"That would be very good!"

The dead of winter had not stopped the Yankee determination to take Richmond. Gen. Ulysses S.

Grant kept Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia off balance constantly. Lincoln had been reelected, General Sherman had captured Atlanta, and Savannah had surrendered. Now Sherman was on his way north to join Grant in a full-scale attempt to seize Richmond, which would end the war.

Even the promise of spring's coming could bring no hope to Lee's men. They were freezing and starving daily. Death, disease, and desertion slowly destroyed the once proud Army of Northern Virginia. In one five-week period, more than three thousand men simply walked off to go home and did not return.

General Lee knew that the biggest problem that winter was food. He said, "Unless the men and animals can be fed, the army cannot be held together and our present lines must be abandoned."

Colonel Majors was one of the officers called to a special staff meeting one day, and he saw that General Lee looked tired and worn. *He's become an old man!* Nelson thought with some astonishment. *This war is killing him!*

General Lee was indeed worn out and was suffering from the heart condition that would eventually kill him. However, there was always a dignity in the man, and as he explained to his officers how grim the situation was, that inherent strength that had kept the Army of Northern Virginia intact was still there.

"I must inform you gentlemen that our plight is severe," he said quietly. "As you must know, the Federals are increasing their strength daily while we are growing weaker with each hour."

"We can hold out, General," one of the officers spoke up at once.

“I pray so, but we must face reality.” He went on to speak about the lines that had been cut and about the lack of food and ammunition.

When he dismissed the men, Nelson slowly walked back to his own sector, where he found Tom waiting.

“What did the general say, Colonel?” Tom was still learning to adapt to the use of an artificial limb. After losing a leg at Gettysburg, he had been mustered back into the service as a courier. It was intended that he would serve on horseback, but now he was in the trenches with the rest of the men.

His father frowned. “I’ve never seen General Lee like this. He’s always been such a tower of strength, but now it seems that he has lost hope.”

“If *he’s* lost hope,” Tom said, “I don’t think the rest of us can do much better.”

The colonel felt the biting air cut through his uniform. “I don’t think so either. It’s just a matter of time, Tom. We’ve got to realize that.”

Tom rubbed his hands to warm them. His thoughts seemed far away.

Finally his father said, “I could guess what you’re thinking.”

Tom looked up and smiled guiltily. “Are you a mind reader now, Colonel?”

“I know my boys pretty well. You’re thinking about Sarah.”

Tom bowed his head. He and Sarah were practically engaged, but she was back in Kentucky and he was here in the frozen trenches—and he had been maimed by the war. “I still don’t reckon Sarah would want a one-legged man, Pa.”

“Don’t be foolish, son!” Nelson said. “A leg is not a man!” But he knew Tom had not fully gotten over

the loss of the leg. His older son had always been strong and athletic and now felt he was not the man he'd been.

Tom looked out over the fortifications, thinking. Slowly he turned back to his father, saluted, and then limped toward the trenches to take his place in the line.

The colonel watched him go and thought, *That boy's hurting—and he's wrong about Sarah. But I guess every man has to learn to get along with his own handicaps.*

He walked away, wondering how to make the food go a little farther, how to make the lines stretch a little longer, and how to keep the Yankees at bay for just one more day.