



HADLEY'S

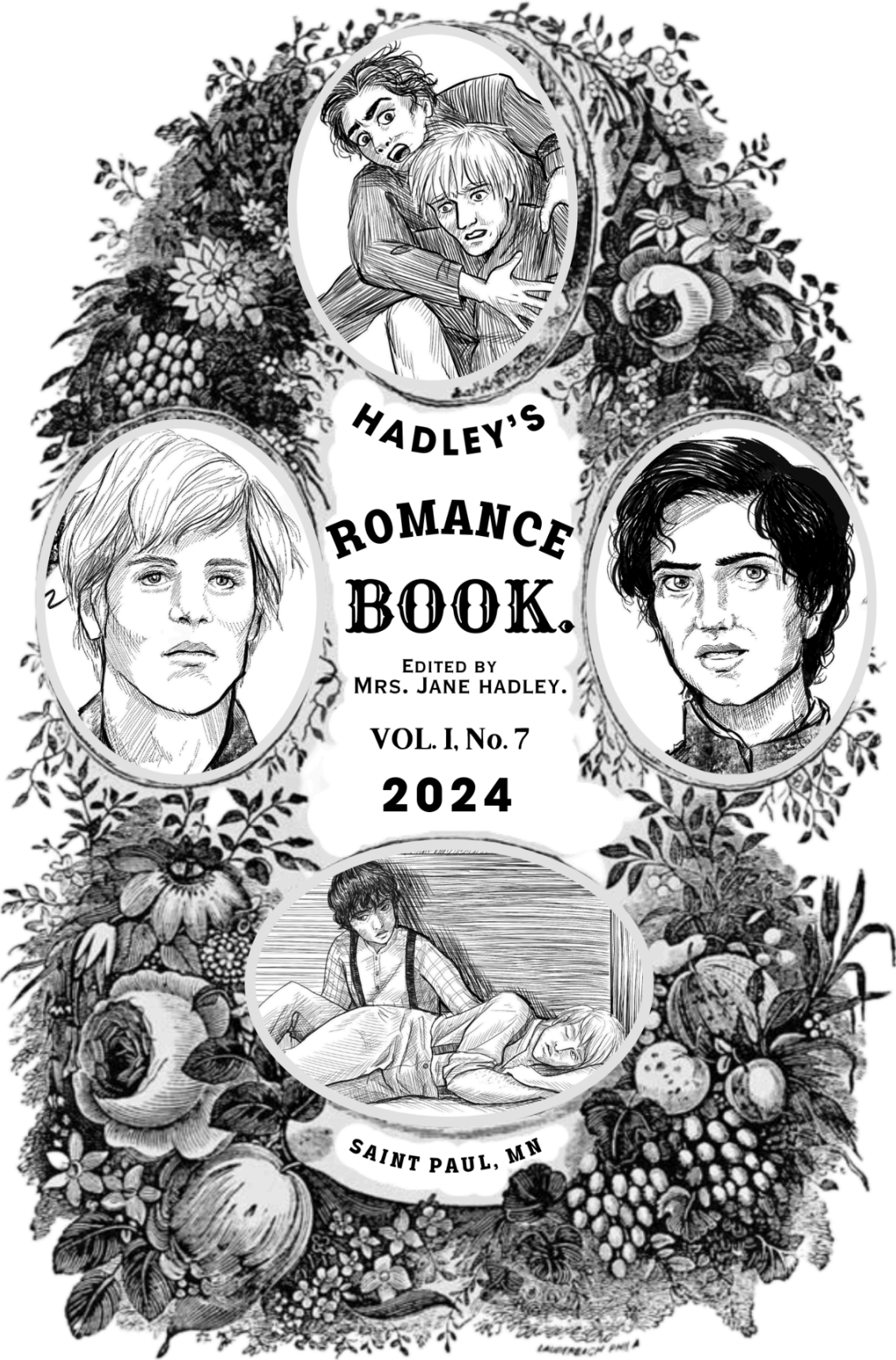
**ROMANCE
BOOK.**

EDITED BY
MRS. JANE HADLEY.

VOL. I, No. 7

2024

SAINT PAUL, MN



LAUBERACH PHILA

April 12, 2024
Volume I, No. 7

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Edited, Authored, & Designed by Mrs. Jane Hadley.

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HADLEY'S Romance Book

A JOURNAL TO STIR THE MIGHTY PASSIONS

VOL. I, No. 7

FRIDAY, APRIL 12, 2024.

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA.

A FINE LOOKING SOLDIER

BY JANE HADLEY.

XIV

*Fort Snelling, Minnesota
Sunday, August 11, 1861*

THREE feet by six feet was really not enough space for two men. Additionally, a fifteen foot square room was not enough space for eighteen men to bed down in. The two new squads were full of eager recruits, one group from Hastings and another down from St. Cloud. They were loud, boisterous, and loved euchre; Krüger was in hog heaven.

Henry avoided the barracks for as long as he could before it got too dark, strolling around the grounds outside the fort walls and then down the bluffs in the watershed to try and shake off his anger and frustration about how stupid the squad had made him feel about his suspicions. It didn't seem to matter what he thought or felt. In the eyes of everyone else, he was a fool. He wasn't much of a Turner, he wasn't much of a soldier, and he wasn't even much of a sleuth. Not to mention, he was a downright shit excuse for a son. Even though it had been months and months, he still hadn't mustered up the courage to write to his parents. He wasn't trying to avoid them either — somehow it seemed like he'd be less rotten if he'd at least made the conscious decision to sever ties. He just couldn't face them. Not until he had some sort of accomplishment to write home about.

Doing his old warm-up routine had helped him calm down, though Smith had almost thrown a wrench in that as well. He couldn't tell if the boy had been impressed or cruelly delighted by Henry's gymnastics. The boy's eyes and his mouth told entirely different stories ... just further evidence

that he was a scoundrel. Ultimately, Henry'd been too angry to get to the bottom of it.

He made his way back to the barracks after dark, sweating in his shirt-sleeves from his exertions. He made the slightest sniff towards uniform when he reached the gates by throwing his overshirt over his shoulders and buttoning the top button. His routine had helped him clear away the darkest of his thoughts, at least for now. It was difficult to feel sorry for oneself when one was trying to balance on one's hands. Sure, the boys didn't believe him about Smith. But they generally regarded him well and he fit in a lot better than Smith did. He wasn't a complete outcast. And surely, once he revealed Smith for the scoundrel he was, they would concede how dismissive they'd been. All he had to do was to show them.

When he arrived back at the barracks, the room was raucous and full of men laughing, singing, and playing euchre. One of the boys from Hastings had sneaked a flask of whiskey in and was passing it around. When Henry arrived, Jacob was smiling in a slow, lop-sided way and exuberantly encouraged Henry to join them. He had a sip or two and was not at all surprised that Smith was bundled up on the top bunk, pretending to sleep. He felt his initial theory about Grahmitism might hold true, though he wasn't sure what a Grahmite would be doing spying for the Confederacy. He supposed insufferable prudery didn't necessarily discriminate against politics.

It took nearly a full hour after lights out was called for the room to actually go quiet. Circumstances being so crowded and the weather continuing to be mild, Henry opted to sleep in his clothes, just as many of the other men did. He climbed up and perched on the edge of the top bunk, his back against

Smith's back. He tried to arrange himself so they didn't touch at all, but it proved too precarious, so he conceded and let his back rest against Smith's. He wasn't sure if the boy was sleeping at that point, but it seemed for all intents and purposes that he was. Regardless, he didn't bite Henry's head off as anticipated, which was good because Henry had been fully prepared to retort that he wasn't about to fall five feet to the floor in his sleep just because Smith couldn't abide the thought of touching his bunkmate. Besides, after what happened a few nights ago, sleeping back to back should be of no consequence whatsoever.

As Henry closed his eyes to sleep, he replayed the encounter he'd had with Smith by the river. He hadn't seen him approach so he couldn't be sure, but he seemed to have been coming from the Minnesota River side. There was hardly anything over there. It didn't make sense. Another detail to add to his list of suspicious behaviors.

The boy had been slack-jawed when Henry turned his headstand. He'd been so mad at the time, but upon reflection, it was actually pretty funny. Sometimes he wondered if the reason Jacob and Elias mocked his gymnasticks was because they were jealous. It gave him deep satisfaction to imagine arrogant Charley Smith taken aback by his superior skill.

The more he thought about it, the more he was convinced that Smith had been impressed, shaken from his usual condescending attitude to watch Henry in some measure of

awe. His usual contemptuous expression had dropped and he'd led with an apology, which was decidedly out of character. And his eyes when Henry had taken him by the collar ... he'd thrown out that sarcastic remark, but his eyes had been round and unguarded. Given the evidence at hand, one might even conclude that Smith was somewhat moony for Henry, in spite of himself. Henry couldn't help but smile at the irony of that notion.

He must have dozed off at some point, because he woke to the scaffold creaking quietly. Next to him, he could feel Smith sliding down the bed, pushing himself to the end with his hands before slipping silently down. His heart racing, Henry pretended to be asleep. Dammit, he couldn't afford to entertain any sympathetic notions about this villain. He had to stay on his guard at all times until he figured out exactly what Smith was up to. He heard soft footfalls on the floor, then the quiet creak of the door as Smith slipped out.

Henry sat up in their bunk. This was it. This was his chance to see what Smith was up to. He slipped off the side of the bunk and followed Smith out the door on bare feet, his eyes straining in the chill darkness that bathed the parade ground.

A brief look around showed Smith slinking through the shadows toward the fort entrance. Henry pursued, padding silently over the boardwalk and then the gravel damp from the earlier rain as he wove between the sutlery and the munitions.



Just as he wondered how Smith planned to get out of the gate with guards on duty, Smith carried on in the shadow of the hospital on the far side of the gate, following the wall round the fort and down to the lower level of the officer quarters.

Unlike the soldier barrack basements, which were scarcely more than dank cellars and accessible only from the inside, the officer quarters had their lower level kitchens open to a narrow passage that ran between the fort wall and the officer barracks. Some of the officers paid a cook, while others let their wives have run of the kitchen. Now that the regiment was nearly full, the three companies had veritably filled the fort to the brim. It was a treacherous risk indeed for Smith to sneak off now, with so many more people around to catch him.

Henry kept a distance between himself and Smith, doing his best to stay quiet and ensure Smith didn't know he was being followed. As Smith picked his way behind the officer's quarters, he furtively glanced behind him as he reached a door across from one of the officer latrines. Henry quickly pressed himself up against the wall, doing his very best to stay out of sight. He waited a good, long moment and then a few seconds more before peering around the curve of the building toward where Smith had been.

The passage was empty. There was no sign of Smith.

Henry swore under his breath and padded up the passage, towards where he'd last seen Smith. From that vantage, he could see down the rest of the passage to where the Half Moon Battery emerged at the northwest corner of the fort. Scanning the boardwalk above and the passage below, Henry spotted a kitchen door ajar just a few feet from where he'd last seen Smith. Henry took stock of the location, determined to find out whose quarters these were. The boy must have snuck inside.

He couldn't say for certain the kinds of things Smith might acquire by sneaking around the officers' quarters in the middle of the night, but he could certainly speculate. Maneuvers, tactics, battle plans — surely there was information of that kind with their Lieutenants. The officers studied all the time, referring back to their tactics manual regularly, sometimes even reading the drills aloud as they trained their squads. Perhaps Smith had wanted to become corporal in order to gain access to a manual. Perhaps now that he'd mucked that up for himself, he was looking for another way to acquire one.

As Henry's mind turned, he realized that Smith was likely to retreat back the way he'd come. And if he arrived back before Henry did, he would know he had been followed. A

sense of urgency pumped through Henry's veins and he hurried back down the passage. He had to get back to their bunk before Smith did. He had to be lying down, curled up under his blanket, snoring lightly in feigned sleep, lest he be discovered tailing Smith.

Henry hurried back through the shadows of the two-story limestone hospital, across the gate, and down the boardwalk back to their barracks. He fought to regulate his shallow breath as he scrambled back up the scaffold to the top bunk.

"Henry, is that you?" Jacob murmured from the middle bunk. "What're you doing?"

Henry shushed him harshly.

"Quiet," he hissed, "Smith snuck out so I tailed him. He could be back any minute."

"Where did he go?"

"Shhh, I'll tell you later."

"You expect me to be able to sleep until then?"

"Shut. Up."

Jacob grumbled, and Henry could hear the rustling of his blanket as he tried to settle back in. Webster snorted in his sleep. Henry flung his blanket over his legs and turned toward the edge of the bunk, trying to resume the position he'd been in when Smith snuck out. His heart still hammered in his chest as he tried to calm himself, anticipating the moment when Smith would slip back through the door. He wanted Smith to think his movements had gone undetected. As much as he felt sure that his hunch was right, he still hadn't seen anything that would serve as solid evidence to accuse him. This realization raised his ire and made it harder for him to smooth his breathing. At this close proximity, he didn't want his body to give him away, no matter how well he could lay still and keep his eyes closed.

The door creaked. There was soft rustling. Smith must have been digging around for something in his satchel. Henry resolved to find a way to investigate later, perhaps when Smith had dish duty.

Fabric rustled on the hooks as Smith climbed up the scaffold. Henry prayed that Jacob would have some sense for once and keep quiet. Carefully, Smith crawled up the bed and settled himself on his side between the wall and Henry. His back was cool against Henry's. He could feel his lungs expand and contract.

And there was a coarseness, a subtle series of ridges down his back. Henry hadn't noticed it before. He tried to tune into the feeling without moving. It couldn't be his spine, could it? The boy wasn't that skinny. Henry wanted to shift, to straighten himself out some so that his back would have more

contact with Smith's, but he didn't dare move. The sensation puzzled him, beckoned him, rooted suspicion deep in his bones. It was another piece, a clue — he was sure of it. It taunted him because he knew he couldn't do anything to find out more.

He told himself he would wait until Smith fell asleep, then try to feel out what it was. Even as he told himself this, he yawned. In the end, he fell asleep before he could be sure Smith was and the chance was lost.

—

Monday, August 12, 1861

When reveille sounded, it was still dark inside the barracks. Cate blinked her eyes open, but all she could see was the dimly lit, whitewashed walls. The air was chilly, but she felt uncommonly warm. It wasn't until she tried to roll onto her back that she was rudely reminded of her bunk-mate, whose shoulder made a firm obstacle to her attempt to shift.

The rest of the men were groaning as they stirred in the relative darkness of early dawn.

"Webster, get off," she heard Robinson complain. "I'm not your wife."

Webster snorted awake and said in a groggy, disappointed tone, "Unfortunately."

Cate sat up and ran her fingers through her tousled curls. Schaefer rolled onto his stomach to look down over the edge of the bunk.¹ He smelled like rain and earth and sweat and she had no business cataloging his scent right now, for heaven's sake.

"Aagh, my shoulder is all kinked up," Williamson moaned from below.

"Did you sleep in the same position all night, then?" said one of the boys from St. Cloud.

"Have you seen my bunkie? I didn't have a choice."

"Guten morgan," Krüger rumbled.

"You gotta master the simultaneous turn," the St. Cloud boy replied. "When you turn together, you can get off the offending limb and still have space."

"Maybe we should do some drilling on that point," one of the other St. Cloud boys replied with a laugh.

Cate slipped down off the foot of the bunk, her bare feet waving for purchase on the lower bunk rail. As she lowered herself down, Schaefer's feet filled her vision, hanging off the edge of the bunk, and her nose wrinkled at the sight. His feet were black with dirt, like he'd done the previous day's drilling barefoot.

"Schaefer, your feet are filthy," she accused as she hopped to the floor. "If you know you're sharing a bunk with someone, the least you could do is wash up before bunking down."

"I hate to break it to you, but you don't smell like a bed of roses yourself, Smith," he retorted even as he pulled his feet up and under his blanket. She rolled her eyes as she tried to determine which pair of boots were hers in the dim morning light. He wasn't wrong; she'd managed standing baths in the officer's latrines, but was overdue for another scrub-down. Thing was, she couldn't find the privacy to do it now that guard duty had ended. Besides, she was fairly loath to risk it again considering how close she was to being caught the last time. She'd just have to find a way to do a more thorough standing bath somewhere private. Somehow.

Looking around the room filled with men bumping around each other trying to get dressed and ready for roll call, she shifted uncomfortably. She was a veritable sheep in a lion's den. It was far past time for her to buckle down and get serious. No more mistakes. No more false alarms. This was war. She had to admit that Sergeant Osborn was right. She couldn't continue to jeopardize her chance to fight the Rebs for some stupid feud.

Last night, Cate had woken up certain that she was bleeding through her trousers. She had taken great pains to sneak out of the barracks, right under Schaefer's nose, to go to the officer's latrines and check. Turned out, she'd just been paranoid. She still had a light emission, but nothing that'd needed immediate tending. The courses would peter out and finish within the next few days. And she'd almost blown her cover just to check. It was humbug like this that she could not afford anymore. She had to get herself in line, tamp down her argumentative streak, and focus on the task at hand. Train for war. Fight like hell. Be a force for justice in the world. Any ignoramus with half a brain could argue; it took real courage to stand up and put oneself on the line to fight for what was right. She pulled her overshirt on and carefully pocketed her dry guard-napkins as she buckled her belt.

Corporal Hower poked his head into the room.

"Anyone seen a journal?" he asked tightly. The din was such that only his own squad members, at the bunk nearest the door, could hear him. The boys looked at each other and shrugged.

"Nope, sorry," Webster said.

"What kind of journal?" Robinson asked.

Hower gave a brusque sigh and said, "You know the one, Jacob. My leather field journal. I was keeping my notes in it for drills and now I can't find it."

Robinson shrugged with his hands up. "Search me."

"Don't you even," Hower snapped, shaking an accusing finger at him. "If I find out this is just another farce like with my hat, I'm gonna tan your hide."

Robinson snickered as Hower swung out of the room and stalked down the boardwalk. Once he was out of earshot, Schaefer spoke.

"But really, Jake, do you have it?"

Robinson gave a sigh and said, "I wish. That would have been a good one."

Cate took extra care to look sharp that morning, even smoothing down her hair with a wet comb. She stood extra tall at roll call, focused on accepting her dish duties with a crisp "Yes, sir!" She made a point not to look at Schaefer, whose eyes could be felt on every step she took to mess, his suspicion bearing down on her. She ate her breakfast with prim efficiency and focused on ignoring the banter bouncing around her. Quiet and observant. No mistakes. Schaefer could watch her as closely as he wanted. He'd tire of it before long.

As soon as she was done, she went down to the washroom to scrub an army's worth of dishes (well, at least a companies' worth). The two other lads assigned from the other squads were content to goof off. Cate tamped down the frustration that threatened to bubble up. She did her work (and a fair bit of theirs) quietly and efficiently. Her head was nearly all the way inside a massive soup kettle, scrubbing bits of grease and crusty potato with a stiff brush when she was interrupted from her task.

"Smith."

She looked up, eyes wide and guarded, as she turned slowly and saw Schaefer standing in the doorway. His eyes were accusatory and his mouth grim as he beckoned her over. She felt her stomach drop. The dozen or so steps to the door took an eternity to traverse. She didn't even dare let herself articulate her fears inside her own head. Asking "what if" would only shake her composure more. If a reckoning was imminent, she'd need her wits about her.

Silently, Cate glanced at the other two fellows as she approached. They were playing at drying dishes while laughing over some comrade's unfortunate showing at baseball the night before.² She looked Schaefer up and down for a moment, trying to gauge her risk, before ultimately following him out of the washroom into the cramped landing at the foot of the stairs.

Cate crossed her arms over her chest and looked up at Schaefer like he was a supreme inconvenience, covering for her trembling hands. "What's this then?"

Schaefer's eyes were dark, his brow burying them. The corners of his mouth twitched up in satisfaction.

"I know your secret."

Cate's breath flew out of her chest. It felt like the floor had dropped out from beneath her. It was all she could do to train her face to a neutral expression.

His eyes narrowed. He opened his mouth as if to say something more, then closed it again. He smirked. And with that, he turned and climbed up the stairs to the ground level, leaving Cate slack-jawed and choking on her own fear.

"Fuck," she whispered, her tongue thick and sour in her mouth. Her hands were shaking and she couldn't manage to move from where she stood as her mind raced. It was too late. No amount of focus was going to save her now.

What am I gonna do... she thought, drawing a shaky breath.

He was probably on his way to reveal her to Osborn right now. He was going to tell him her true identity and she would be taken to the surgeon for a confirmation. After being thoroughly humiliated, she'd be thrown out. Or worse, they'd send for Richard.

She looked up the stairs, then into the washroom, where her kettle sat waiting for her. She couldn't take this lying down. She'd sworn an oath. She was here to fight. No blockhead farm boy was going to send her back to Richard Ellis before she ever got to see battle.

Gritting her teeth, Cate gave in to her instincts and raced up the stairs, taking the steps two at a time. She rounded the barracks, skidding on the gravel. Bursting out onto the parade ground, she searched the groups of men walking around, taking full advantage of their leisure until 9 o'clock called them to drill practice. It took her a moment, but she found the shock of straw-colored hair moving toward the officer's barracks. Heart in her throat, she raced across the parade ground, dodging a group of laughing fellows from Company I and nearly crashing into the orderly sergeant carrying reports.

She caught up to Schaefer as he was mounting the step onto the boardwalk in front of the officer's barracks. She had no plan, no strategy. She just had to stop him. She was shaking with energy as she leapt up, launching herself off the step to tackle him from behind.

He swore as he staggered with surprise, but he didn't go down. Instead, she found herself clinging onto his back, her hands gripping his shoulders, scrabbling for purchase around



his neck, and her feet wrapped around his waist. She squeezed his throat and he reached overhead and grappled with her shirt, yanking her as he dipped forward and threw her to the ground.

Soldiers nearby eagerly gathered around to watch as he stood over her.

“You son of a bitch,” he growled. However, what he was about to do next was unclear, because she threw a resolute punch to his crotch. He dropped to one knee with a groan and she scrambled to make the most of his momentary incapacitation. She turned to all fours and launched herself on top of him, throwing him back and knocking him against the stone wall of the barracks.

He gripped her by her shirt and she elbowed him in the eye, not entirely on purpose, as he pulled her off kilter. Catching herself on one hand, she squeezed her thighs around his hips and steadied herself as he tried to throw her off. He was stronger and heavier than her, but she had the superior position. She used it to her advantage and delivered a forceful punch to his left cheek. His head snapped to the side and he shouted, his grimace contorted in rage and pain. His blue eyes slid onto her and she got the sense that she had made another mistake.

He grabbed her by her shirt collar and yanked her close, then pushed off the ground with one bent knee and toppled her over. He laid full out on top of her and wrapped his legs

around her knees, disabling her ability for leverage. His hands were still in her shirt and Cate held her arms up to protect her face as Schaefer raised a fist. She squeezed her eyes shut and braced for the blow. But the blow never came.

“Soldiers! Order, I’ll have order this minute!”

Peeking out one eye, through her fingers, she saw Elias Hower holding Schaefer’s arm with both hands, his stance wide as he and Sergeant Osborn yanked him off of her.

Schaefer stumbled to his feet and spit blood on the boardwalk. Wiping his chin, he snarled at Cate and shouted, “Damn rascal son of a bitch!”

“That’s ENOUGH!” Sergeant Osborn commanded, looking up from his slight height at Schaefer while Hower held him back. He turned and glared down at Cate. “The both of you.”

“Sergeant, what is the meaning of this?” Lieutenant Thomas approached, slightly out of breath. His eyes darted between Schaefer, straining against Hower, and Cate, who propped herself up dazedly on her elbows. “To the guardhouse now until I can figure out what to do with you.”

The soldiers gathered all went quiet.

“But, sir —” Cate tried.

“Get them out of my sight,” the Lieutenant ordered. His cheeks were red with anger ... and embarrassment? Cate blinked again as Robinson pulled her to her feet. Captain Noah stood to one side among the observers, his hands behind his back and his expression severe. His eyes met hers and she immediately cast her gaze down.

So much for lying low.

XV

Henry was gonna kill Smith. He could feel his left eye swelling where the little duffer’d hit him. Elias led Henry across the parade ground, holding him firmly by one arm, and he squirmed under the stares of the regiment watching as he and Smith were led to the guardhouse. Jacob had Smith, shuffling along ahead of them, and Henry glared so hard he must have felt it, because Smith looked back over his shoulder at him.

Smith’s eyes were round as saucers and smudged with shadows from too little sleep. He didn’t look as angry as he did desperate, which just confirmed in Henry’s mind that his theory was right. He was a scoundrel and a spy. He’d be willing to bet Elias’ journal would turn up somewhere among Smith’s effects.

"That's the last straw," Henry muttered so only Elias could hear. "That little piss pot is finished."

"Please don't make wild accusations," Elias sighed, tipping his head back. "You're already in enough trouble as it is."

"He started it, Elias," Henry hissed defensively. "He tackled me out of nowhere. I can't think of anything more incriminating."

"Some tangible proof, perhaps?" Elias suggested with an eyebrow raised.

Henry let out a growl and carried on swearing, but in German.

"Seriously, Henry, this kid is not worth it. He's not some espionage mastermind. He's a smarmy little brat who's too big for his britches. Don't let him bring you down to his level."

Henry shook his head, his jaw working, as Lieutenant Thomas led them into the guardhouse. The narrow, one-story stone structure was nestled along the fort wall between the front gate and the Quartermaster's warehouse, opposite of which was the Round Bastion. Entering the guard room behind them, the lieutenant ushered them into the prison room. This Henry expected, but when Lieutenant Thomas crossed the room and opened the door to one of the cells, he became markedly less steady.

The cells could not have been much more than six feet by eight feet. Despite there being two available cells, Lieutenant Thomas made a show of throwing them both into one cell for Captain Noah. The small, dark space had a sobering effect on Henry's outrage, as the reality of the punishment set in. They could be court-martialed. Elias was right. This was serious and he was being treated on the same level as Smith, even though all he had done was defend himself.

In New Ulm, boys who tried to get out of trouble by throwing another over the rails were punished just as harshly as the guilty party. Now was not the time to lay out his case. It would just make him look like a child trying to avoid responsibility and foist it on someone else. Henry pinched his lips tight to keep himself silent.

"If you're going to fight, do it in here," Lieutenant Thomas snarled at the two of them. Henry had never seen him so mad. "Let me know when you've worked it all out and maybe you won't be docked a month's pay."

"Thomas," Captain Noah intoned. He didn't say anything, but his eyes fell onto the heavy wood door of the cell. Then, the captain picked up a lantern and placed it wordlessly inside the cell. Lieutenant Thomas glanced at his superior officer with irritation, then proceeded to slam the

prison room door shut behind them. The lock clunked into place with stark finality.

Henry felt like the wind had been taken out of him. He drew in a steadying breath, waiting for his eyes to adjust in darkness so he could take stock of the room around him, but they never did. The cell was barren, with no windows to speak of and very well-pointed stone walls. It was pitch dark. Though it was broad daylight outside, the only indication of the hour within the cell was what scant light made its way through small cracks in the roof beams. None of the cracks were big enough to allow light enough to see by.

Henry spun on his heel and groped blindly for the lantern, pulling his flint out of his pocket and striking it on the steel to cast sparks. The scant light from the sparks did little to help him arrange the wick of the candle in the proper place to catch.

"Just to your left."

Henry felt blood rush in his ears at the small directive coming from Smith's corner of the chamber.

"Shut your filthy trap," he snapped. It took him a good long while to get the candle lit, but once it was, he was able to hang the lantern on a hook in the wall and see Smith standing against the far in stark, flickering shadow like a cornered racoon.

"What in the actual Hell was that all about?" Henry snapped.

Smith looked him squarely in the eye and crossed his arms.

"Self defense," he replied curtly.

"Excuse me?!"

Smith leveled a glare at him. "Don't act like you weren't trying to find the Sergeant to report me."

Henry's lip curled defensively. "So what if I was? If you aren't hiding anything, what do you care if the officers come poking around?"

Smith sighed and shook his head. He said nothing. Henry waited for a moment, but the silence only thickened. He sighed as well and leaned against the cell door.

"If anyone was practicing self-defense, it was me," Henry continued, sliding down the wall to sit on the floor, gingerly exploring his tender jaw with his fingertips. He glared hard up at Smith, whose features were largely cast in shadow. His posture was turned in, clasping his biceps tightly with his hands as he bowed his head. Henry hadn't expected him to be cowed like this, to be so resigned to his discovery. He had imagined he'd try to throw him off his trail, to defend, to

misdirect, to engage at all whatsoever. This passive silence — it was unnerving.

Henry spun a snagged thread on his trousers in between his fingers.

"I wouldn't sit down there if I were you," Smith intoned.

Henry sneered at him. "Where else am I supposed to sit?"

"There's rats."

Henry scrambled back to his feet, even as he retorted, "How would you know?"

"Didn't you see them when we were posted here last weekend? They'll steal the food right off your plate if you let them, little varmints."

Henry peered at Smith. He could not get a read on him and it wasn't just the dark room and the guttering tallow candle. He could see the planes of Smith's face, the trained neutral expression, the dark, deep-set eyes under a set of brows that belonged on a much older, grumpier man. Even as he stood in a vague imitation of informality, casually leaning against the back wall of the cell, he watched Henry's every move under guarded lids. Either he was resigned to the fact that Henry had caught him out, or he was calculating his next move and Henry was in way over his head.

"So I assume that by attacking me from behind, you admit your guilt," Henry taunted, looking down at his hands as he cracked his knuckles. He looked up out of the corner of his eye to track Smith's response.

"I don't recall admitting to anything," Smith replied, his deadpan tone making a mockery of his professed innocence. "I can't even imagine what the charges might be."

Henry's eyes turned steely. "Bunkum. You know."

Smith's eyebrow lifted. "Well, if you know, and I know, then who in this cell are we keeping it a secret from? The rats?"

Henry's fists curled. "Just admit it! You're stealing military tactics to undermine the Union."

Smith jerked back and stood, stunned.

"You're a spy," Henry spat, the word sour in his mouth. "And I for one am not going to sit silently while you put all of our lives in danger."

Smith pressed his lips together and made a suppressed, guttural sound. And then he burst out laughing.

Whatever Henry had expected from him in response to his accusation, it was not that.

"A spy? Me?" Smith managed to say between guffaws. "Why on earth would you think that?"

Henry's eyes narrowed. "Nice try, but I'm not going to be put off so easily. The gun, the rendezvous with Southern sympathizers, the disguise —"

"— The disguise? What disguise?"

"That filthy excuse for a lady's unmentionables I found by the river. You were acting so strange, but I know what you were about now. You were using it as part of your disguise so you could gather tactical secrets undetected."

Smith pressed both hands together against his mouth and closed his eyes. "Let me get this straight. You think I was disguising myself as a woman to steal tactical secrets?"

Henry glowered. He got the feeling he was being mocked. "Yes."

Smith's lips pressed tightly together, his eyebrows high. "The tactical secrets in the Hardee's drill manual?"³

Henry shrugged, looking away to disguise the fact that he did not know what that was. "Among them."

Smith dissolved into laughter again. It took him two tries to compose himself enough to say, "Hardee is a Confederate! I don't think he needs me to help him discover tactics he wrote himself."

Smith doubled over laughing. Henry worked hard to suppress the urge to hit him. There was nothing he hated more than to be treated like he was stupid.

"Fine, I didn't know that about Hardee's manual, but the manual isn't the only source of tactical information being bandied about our regiment's command. Colonel Van Cleve went to the US Military Academy."

Smith snorted. "Yeah, thirty years ago!"

He held his stomach as he laughed, leaning one shoulder against the stone wall.

"Oh my God," Smith sighed, wiping moisture from his eyes. "And, uh, the Southern sympathizers? Who might they be?"

Henry scowled and clenched his fists. This is his defense, he reminded himself. He's trying to put you off.

"You were sneaking around Franklin Steele's farm. He's a known Democrat—"

"Democrat? A Democrat is not a Southern sympathizer as a matter of course."

"Steele is in with Sibley and Rice, and Rice said he thought the Southern states had the right to secede!" Henry shouted. "I read the newspaper, don't treat me like I'm an idiot."

Smith snorted again. "Wow, that is quite the series of assumptions based on, what, one newspaper quote? They should make you the prosecutor on my court-martial. I'd be sure to get off."

"Verpiss dich," Henry hissed in German as he took one step forward and snatched Smith up by the collar, pinning

him up against the far wall. It was satisfying to see the snide grin fall off Smith's face as Henry's superior strength startled the derision out of him. In New Ulm, they had been sharply discouraged from using anger and physical strength as a force for influence in the Turner Hall's training. That was reserved for times of war and the defense of their community. While they might spar or wrestle to hone their strength, any interaction that devolved into an actual fight was immediately stopped.⁴ He'd never had the opportunity to realize the power his strength could garner against a smaller foe, the power to influence, to silence, to coerce. That power was both intoxicated and, as a result, frightening. His grip on Smith's collar faltered.

"You might consider taking this seriously," he snarled, "because regardless of whether you get off or not, the accusation of sedition is enough to destroy your entire military career before it ever starts. They don't need you — there are plenty of men out there willing and able to fight for their country. And I'm not taking any chances of being brought up on charges with you because I knew something was wrong and didn't say anything."

Smith studied him, his defiantly raised eyebrow lowering as he came to understand that what Henry said was true.

"I don't even care if I'm right or not," Henry continued, seizing upon his advantage. "By making the accusation, I will ensure that everyone is watching you, that they're looking into what you're doing. Maybe you're not a spy, maybe you're not conspiring sedition, but I know for damn sure you're up to something. No matter what it is, once I lay out what I know, they're not going to rest until they put the pieces together."

Smith delivered a flinty stare as he deliberately plucked his collar from Henry's fist, smoothing it back over his neck with all the dignity he could muster. His nostrils flared with heightened breath and Henry could swear he detected beads of sweat forming on his brow in the flickering candlelight.

"What if ...?" Smith's jaw tensed as he swallowed hard. He tilted his chin up and tried again. "What if I could prove my patriotism?" His eyes darted to the cell door and back to Henry. "What if I could prove to you that I've not broken any of the Articles of War? That my behavior is easily explained by a relatively innocuous reason?"

Henry's jaw worked as he took a step back. "Fine. I'd love to see you prove me wrong. Despite what you might think, I'm not just out to make your life miserable."

Smith gave him a withering look.

"What? I'm not," he insisted, crossing his arms. "Though I can't imagine how you expect to explain stealing that gun..."

Smith smiled humorlessly and shook his head at the floor. "And despite what you may think, that is actually the one thing I've been completely truthful about."

"Bull. Shit," Henry spat, pressing his weight forward intimidatingly, so that Smith flinched and his hands involuntarily rose in his own defense, pushing back against Henry's shoulders. Henry forced himself to step back again; despite how satisfying it was to see Smith flinch, he was not going to be the kind of man who took advantage of his power. He was not like his brothers.

"I'll prove to you I'm innocent," Smith repeated, more warily this time. "I'll explain everything. I'll even answer your questions. All I ask in exchange is that once I prove you wrong, you must swear not to tell anyone the truth."

Henry's brow furrowed. "If you're innocent, why the secrecy? If it's not treasonous, why are you so worried someone will find out? Be a man and take some responsibility for God's sake."

Smith screwed up his face painfully. "It's not so simple. I ... it might not be technically legal, but I can certainly prove I'm not hurting the Union's cause. And I know for a fact I'm not breaking the Articles of War or our oath."

Henry stared at him in the dim light. He would be lying if he said he wasn't sorely tempted by Smith's offer. He had been completely focused on getting to the bottom of Smith's motives for weeks now, and he desperately wanted to know what was really going on. And Smith was offering it up to him, willingly. It had to be some sort of trap.

"How will I know you're telling the truth?"

Smith scrubbed his face with his hands and sighed. Looking away, he said resignedly, "I have incontrovertible proof."

"Right now? In this cell?"

"Yes."

"How convenient." Henry peered at him sidelong. "What if you tell me and I disagree with your interpretation of the Articles?"

Smith's brow furrowed. "What do you mean?"

"What if I think you have violated military law even though you think you haven't?"

Smith pursed his lips. "You have accused me of sedition. You are culpable to report sedition or mutiny. You are not responsible for other offenses. If you agree, you forfeit your right to tell. No matter how you feel about it."

Smith's jaw flexed. Henry wrinkled his nose. He was trying to find the trap. This was Smith, after all. There had to be a catch. He supposed he could swear but then decide to

break his oath later depending on what he confessed. But breaking his word ... it would have to be really awful to get him to break his word.

Smith shook his head and sighed impatiently. "If you're not going to take it seriously, then you can just forget I said anything."

"No, wait, wait," Henry waved his hands in the air, as if Smith had anywhere else to go at present. "Why me? Why now?"

Smith leveled him with a patronizing glare. "You're blackmailing me. I rather thought I didn't have a choice."

Henry licked his lips and nodded, wincing. The power of intimidation was intoxicating indeed. It didn't sit well with him to be reminded of how it made him behave.

"It's not like you're my trusted friend, Schaefer. We hate each other," Smith pointed out matter-of-factly. Henry couldn't tell why, but the bluntness of that word stung. "If I could think of literally any other way to get you off my case, mark my words, I would do it. But they didn't let us bring weapons in here, did they?"

It took Henry a moment. "Are you threatening to kill me?"

"It's a joke, you blockhead."

Henry let out a frustrated growl. "Fine, alright, I won't tell. I promise."

"Swear it."

"I swear it."

Smith was not having it. "Swear on something you actually care about. Like you mean it."

"Fine, fine," he flung up his hands and took a steadying breath to tamp down his frustration. "I swear on the Union, auf das Vaterland, on my mother's life. I swear on my honor and my own life that I will not speak of anything you tell me here in this cell, providing you can prove you haven't been disloyal or betrayed the Union."

Smith stared up at him under his thick brows. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes. Then, pressing his lips together and wincing slightly, he spoke quietly, in a low tone.

"I'm a woman."

FOOTNOTES

1. These triple-decker bunks were precarious at best. There's an account of one of them collapsing in Osman, Stephen E. *Fort Snelling and the Civil War*. Ramsey County Historical Society: St. Paul, 2017.

2. I just really wanted to make sure everyone knew that baseball was a Civil War army past-time. There are still historical baseball

groups that will play to the old rules (which do not include using a mitt to catch the ball — these guys all play bare-handed!) <https://www.vbba.org/>

3. Copeland, Susan. "William J. Hardee." *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, last modified Dec 23, 2016.

4. Jahn, Friedrich Ludwig. *A Treatise on Gymnastics*. Translator Charles Butler. Northampton, Mass.: S. Butler, 1828. Accessed on Internet Archive.

NOVELTIES FOR APRIL

RIDDLE

Emblem of thought and suffering too,
Alas! upon this earth
Unhappy man alone has me,
And I came with his birth.

There is no other living thing,
Save one sad silent tree,
Has ever yet been known to have
The attribute of me.

Answer to previous: Stage.

HEALTH DEPARTMENT

INTENSE MENTAL APPLICATION IN LIGHT READING — *In reponse to a truly outrageous claim in the annals of the 1859 Godey's Lady's Book*. It is the opinion of some in the medical field that the intense application of the mind interrupts free breathing and prevents full expansion of the lungs. Hence, they so advise, writers and literary persons should sedulously use every means calculated to counteract the tendency to contraction of the chest and consequent diminution of vitality. It behooves us to point out that imperfect respiration is not only the result of abstruse investigations, but also that species of light reading so common among ladies, suggesting that this assessment has perhaps less to do with an interest in a lady's health and more to do with a desire to prohibit the nature of her reading and enjoyment. It is the opinion of this periodical to summarily disregard such quackery.

DRESS: HOW TO ADORN THE PERSON

[in your mid-nineteenth century historical romance novel]

PART II

CAPS, BONNETS, & HATS — Caps under bonnet have a much softer effect than bonnet worn without caps. Straw bonnets are admirable in the variety we now see them, and

they so much more readily accord with a variety of dresses than silk ones do. Trimmings must, we suppose, be left to the milliners, yet a straw bonnet should never be overloaded with flowers; ribbons, in general, seem more appropriate to them. We sometimes see fruit placed upon bonnets, and always considered it bad taste. A bunch of grapes, to ornament a large Leghorn hat, would give some idea of the vintage, and would not be amiss; garlands of leaves encircling hats, or wreaths of hop for the same purpose, have a pleasing effect; they are generally, however, restricted to younger children. Flowers and feathers for silk bonnets are very appropriate trimmings; the feathers as now worn are graceful; we cannot say the same when they are elevated on the summit of the bonnet, to serve as vanes for the wind. Hats are much prettier than bonnets, but, as they are considered as exclusively appropriate to children, our ladies are unwilling to adopt them; they certainly are less convenient for travelling (that is, packing) or for carriage wear. To wear in travelling, there is certainly nothing more uncomfortable than either bonnet or hat; the position is constrained to an upright one, it being impossible to rest the head anywhere in comfort. We should like to see introduced some sort of hood, turban, or coif for that purpose. Lately, there has been an improvement in the style of ladies' riding-hats; they are much more becoming to a lady than the high, narrow-brimmed beavers.

LITERARY NOTICES

HUDDLE FOR WARMTH! FRECKLES! UNSTARCHING
OF A VIRGIN HENRY!

**IN WHICH MARGO HALIFAX EARNS HER
SHOCKING REPUTATION**

BY ALEXANDRA VASTI.

THE HALIFAX HELLIONS are the most scandalous, outrageous, ungovernable ladies in London. From the day of their debut—in which Matilda smoked a cheroot and Margo tied a cherry stem in a knot with her tongue—they've turned the ton upside down. But when Matilda elopes with a dangerous aristocrat, Margo must stop her twin before this new misadventure becomes a permanent marriage. For help, Margo turns to her brother's best friend—because if anyone can get them to Scotland in time, it's starchy solicitor Henry Mortimer.

Henry Mortimer has precisely one secret in his otherwise buttoned-up life: he's been in love with Margo for seven wonderful, agonizing years. When she turns up at his

doorstep, soaked to the skin and desperate for his help, he cannot turn her down. A week alone in a carriage with the object of his desires an arm's length away? Surely he can survive that. He hopes.

But the road to Scotland is paved with disasters—caves and crashes and the bloody rain that keeps forcing Henry to hold a damp, shivering, sinfully tempting Margo in his arms. Only an unstoppable force could drag the truth of Henry's affection from his lips. Unfortunately for him, Margo Halifax has yet to be stopped.

SMUGGLING! BEETLE-HUNTING! LOG-SEX!

THE SECRET LIVES OF COUNTRY GENTLEMEN

BY KJ CHARLES.

ABANDONED by his father as a small child, Sir Gareth Inglis has grown up prickly, cold, and well-used to disappointment. Even so, he longs for a connection, falling headfirst into a passionate anonymous affair that's over almost as quickly as it began. Bitter at the sudden rejection, Gareth has little time to lick his wounds: his father has died, leaving him the family title, a rambling manor on the remote Romney Marsh...and the den of cutthroats and thieves that make its intricate waterways their home.

Joss Doomsday has run the Doomsday smuggling clan since he was a boy. His family is his life...which is why when the all-too-familiar new baronet testifies against Joss's sister for a hanging offense, Joss acts fast, blackmailing Gareth with the secret of their relationship to force him to recant. Their reunion is anything but happy and the path forward everything but smooth, yet after the dust settles, neither can stay away. It's a long road from there—full of danger and mysteries to be solved—yet somehow, along the way, this well-mannered gentleman may at last find true love with the least likely of scoundrels.

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