

HADLEY'S

ROMANCE  
BOOK.

EDITED BY  
MRS. JANE HADLEY.

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# HADLEY'S Romance Book

A JOURNAL TO STIR THE MIGHTY PASSIONS

VOL. II, No. 7

FRIDAY, AUGUST 29, 2025.

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA.

## A RIGHT HONORABLE SOLDIER

BY JANE HADLEY.

### XII

*Lebanon, Kentucky*

*Friday, December 13, 1861*

THE fire in the Sibley stove had gone out, as it usually did by dawn, and Henry was shivering. It was colder than it had been in Lebanon so far, but they'd only been there since Tuesday, so he didn't have much in the way of expectations. Cracking an eye open, he saw Charley's dark curls peeking out from the edge of her wool blanket. Beyond her, Osborn and Webster were tucked up tight together, sharing blankets and warmth quite platonically. Henry peered at them for a moment, his jaw set, before he scooted toward Charley and curved himself around her, tossing the edge of his blanket across her side along with his arm.

She stirred as he embraced her, eyes fluttering before she settled back into his chest with a sigh. When it was cold enough, no one cared about personal space. Most fellows with brothers grew up sharing beds.<sup>1</sup> So why did Henry feel like he was getting away with something?

Henry pressed his nose into Charley's hair and enjoyed the bloom of her singular scent. She was warm and comfortable and pliantly sleepy. Though the shape of her was well obscured by her uniform and greatcoat, Henry couldn't help but try to trace the curve of her hip with his hand.

All week he'd been completely wrapped up in daydreams about Charley. It didn't help that she stood behind him during drill, so her presence was a constant awareness prickling at the back of his neck. He couldn't stop thinking about the Sterling House and the way Charley had looked at him when she'd wished they had a room there. The top brass had

tightened up camp rules considerably since that first chaotic day, setting up a perimeter with guards on duty and requiring passes for soldiers to go into town. Command worked them around the clock at picket duty and drills, and Henry scarcely had a chance to visit the Ninth Ohio, much less entertain the thought of finding somewhere private to pull Charley off to. That didn't mean it wasn't constantly at the top of his mind, though.

A private room, perhaps with a fire and a proper bed, would be a godsend. An absolute miracle. If Henry could manage a safe encounter there, perhaps he'd revisit his conclusions about a benevolent god. It was perhaps his greatest dream at present. The idea of being alone with Charley, to have time with her, perhaps to undress her and enjoy the taste of her skin—it was more than he could bear to contemplate.

Henry shifted his hips. The spiral of his thoughts had got his blood pumping, and it being so close to dawn, he couldn't risk the evidence of his interest being noticed. He tried to put a little space between his erection and the curve of Charley's backside, but she immediately noticed. In fact, Henry wasn't convinced she was asleep at all, because she *rolled* her hips back into his groin.

A flush rushed into Henry's cheeks, but it was half-hearted because the majority of his blood had dropped to his prick. What on earth was she trying to do? Torture him? There was nothing to be done about his current state of arousal in a tent full of other men when Reveille was going to play at any moment. He could only conclude she was prime evil.

He was pressing back into her, his hand slipping inside her greatcoat and sliding over her chest, when Reveille played. Her quiet growl of frustration was somewhat of an understatement. Henry had to struggle to hide his disappointment as she turned away from him and sat up.

Later at breakfast, Henry sat next to Charley cross-legged on the ground, slurping up porridge from his tin plate without a spoon. The rest of the squad, and the Hastings boys too, were all gathered round. They lit up the fire they'd built between their Sibley tents, for percolating coffee but mostly to stave off the lingering early morning cold.

"I am looking forward to when we can return to the Sterling House," Hower declared, to the exasperated groans of Sergeant Osborn and Webster. Henry paid him little attention. He was too busy keeping an eye on Sam Corbett. He was sitting on the other side of Charley and kept whispering in her ear. She was sniggering at something he'd said, and Henry knew it was petty and jealous, but he was certain it wouldn't be an overreaction to pop the snivelling weasel in the chin.

"Hower, you're going to lose your rank if you sneak off," Osborn said. "And I hope you know that you're making my bid for First Sergeant particularly difficult."

"Oh, Sarg, we all make your bid for First Sergeant difficult," Robinson laughed. Osborn sighed into his tin cup of coffee.

"I'm telling you, though, the place is really very elegant," Hower insisted. Charley elbowed Henry and rolled her eyes. Henry, relieved she'd turned to him instead of Corbett, laughed.

Krüger laughed too. "It's a bawdy house."

"Yes, but that's not what I went there for," Hower scoffed. Henry shook his head. If that man got a chance, any chance at all, he'd take it. Henry had no doubt about that, given his friend's penchant for dirty novels set in brothels much like the one currently being discussed.<sup>2</sup> "They had barrel whiskey and a pool table. There were tables full of fellows playing cards, and I heard the proprietress, well one of them anyway, is a first-rate euchre player."

Krüger's brow indicated he remained unconvinced. Hower was not at all deterred.

"I keep hearing folks accusing the Sterling House of having a less-than-sterling reputation," Hower grinned at his own wordplay as the other fellows groaned, "but how many of them have seen the place for themselves? I shan't jump to conclusions about the nature of our host village, or any of its amenities."

Corporal Harris of the Hastings Squad burst into laughter.

"What?" Hower sniffed.

"You're a veritable man about town, you are," Harris chuckled. "What are you, sixteen?"

Hower puffed up like a rooster. "I'm twenty-two, thank you very much."

"Twenty-two, la di da," Harris replied as he strolled past Hower toward the parade ground. He flicked the bill of Hower's forage cap as he sauntered off, Hower's face turning a lovely shade of fuschia.

Henry's eyes tracked back to Hower, who had straightened with the affront to his dignity. "We'll see how he likes it," Hower said, "when Osborn gets First Sergeant, and I'm promoted to sergeant."

"In the meantime," Sam Corbett sniggered, "you best get yourself to Sterling House. Sergeants don't get the privilege of being so many ants under the boot of the big bugs. They're just important enough to be noticed."

"—But not important enough to do anything of use," Charley muttered under her breath. Henry snorted.

Hower continued to smooth his ruffled feathers.

"Ah, don't get your dander up," Corbett sighed as he got to his feet. "You know we're all riled up to go with you."

Hower cast him a wary glance.

Krüger laughed and clapped him on the back. "I'd give my left arm for fresh euchre players."

"First rate," Hower said, a smile creeping onto his lips. "I'll let you all know when there's a good opportunity to slip away."

Henry looked down at Charley with a grin. Knowing Hower, he'd perfectly organize a group escape into town. Hotel or bawdy house—it didn't make a difference. Both had beds. Henry had his backpay burning a hole in his pocket. And Charley had a French letter burning a hole in hers. She glanced up at him and shook her head, but she was smiling too. God, he hoped Hower would find an opportunity sooner rather than later.

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The rest of the day was spent drilling, and Cate found that in spite of the change in scenery, the drills did not become any more interesting than they had been in Lebanon Junction, or anywhere else for that matter. In the dearth of information from command, rumors abounded as to the whereabouts of Zollicoffer and his Rebel troops. It didn't help that their wagon train of supplies still hadn't arrived from Lebanon Junction. It would have been one thing if the roads were

washed out with rain or snowed over, but the weather had been quite mild. The teamsters had no excuse. Spare moments were filled with speculation and the prevailing rumor was that the teamsters had all either been captured by Secesh or defected. Given how little action they had seen, Cate was beginning to wonder if the latter was indeed more likely.

The wagon trains finally arrived after lunch, and Company K was assigned to help them unload. Cate managed to catch up with them quickly after begging a point of personal privilege in the woods—her monthly had come on strong after she'd choked down the pastille from the pharmacist, thank heavens. It had been a fumble to address it without drawing any undue attention, but gratefully, it was exhausting itself as quickly as it had exhausted her.

As she dashed across the camp grounds, she nearly tripped over two young Black children loitering near the cooking tent.

"Scuse me," she said as a matter of course, teetering around them so she wouldn't collide.

The elder of the children looked up and started. "Begging your pardon, sir," the child said, eyes on the ground as he skittered out of her reach, yanking his younger counterpart along by the collar.

Cate stilled. It was like one of those strange moments when she was reminded how differently people treated her when she walked the world as a man, but instead, it was a reminder of how differently people treated those of color. A reminder that in this town and in this state, there was a caste system, and regardless of whether Cate agreed with it, she was standing near the top. Complicit by association with her officers, her president, and the Union that prioritized loyalty over righteousness. She wished she had something to give these boys, some peace offering. But she had nothing, so she had to settle for a soft, deprecating laugh.

"Please, I beg your pardon. I was gathering wool and wasn't looking where I was going." Cate gave her best approximation of a disarming smile. Admittedly, she was imitating Henry. "Carry on, and pay me no mind."

Cate walked off before the boys could reply, her chest tight with discomfort. She felt like an imposter, not because she wasn't actually a man, but because she rankled under the fearful deference with which the little boys had reacted to her. She couldn't spare it any mind, however, because the whole squad was already starting to unload the first wagon, and she wasn't yet accounted for.

The whole squad was in relatively good spirits as she caught up, bantering about the artillery demonstration from Kenney's Battery the previous day.

"It is quite a heady thing, I should think, to be aiming a cannon," Robinson pontificated.

"I suppose you would know," Hower quipped. "I'm sure your woman veritably shudders to think—"

"*Corporal*," Osborn warned.

"Aw, Sarg, you're no fun."

"Boys." It was Webster and he looked much too serious for the nature of the current discourse. Cate turned her attention to the older man's grim expression and followed his gaze beyond the wagons. A small group of soldiers flanked a sour-looking man looking rather worse for wear as they escorted him toward the village.<sup>3</sup>

"Is that a Reb?" Robinson squeaked.

"It must be," Osborn murmured. Cate glanced toward Hower to get his read on things, but the corporal had already slipped off, presumably on reconnaissance.

"Do you think they saw any action on their way here?" Robinson asked.

"It would explain why it took so long," Henry replied.

"Hell, if I had known guard duty for the mule train was the way to finally fight, I would have been more eager to volunteer," Cate grouched, crossing her arms.

They approached the wagons, their heads swiveling back to watch the prisoner as he was marched across camp while Lieutenant Thomas set them to work unloading crates of rations.

"Say," Robinson said to the teamster, Griffith, climbing from the covered wagon bed as Henry started handing crates down from its bed, "did you all see some action on the way here?"

"Oh, aye," Griffith replied tiredly. He was Scottish or Irish—Cate couldn't tell the difference by ear. "Some of the guards were rustling up forage from a local cabin, and the Secesh was particularly uncooperative."

The whole squad stopped what they were doing and leaned in eagerly.

"The bastard shot off some buckshot and caught Cardwell in the arm. We managed to capture him though."

"Capture him? Were you all not armed yourselves?" Cate had an overly large crate in her arms, but that didn't stop her from leveling the man with eyebrowed skepticism. Surely the teamsters knew how to fire a rifle and were able to defend the supplies they'd been entrusted with for the soldiers.

"I couldn't say," Griffith shrugged.

"Is Cardwell alright?" Osborn asked, shooting a sideways glare toward Cate.

Griffith rolled his eyes. "Aye, he's first rate. They got the buckshot out fine, and he's been complaining loudly, but that just goes to show he's not too bad off."

Cate accepted one of the last crates from Henry so he could hop down from the wagon bed. They followed the squad, each laden with a crate, into the camp proper. They carted the crates to the outdoor kitchen and left the cook to dig through their contents. It was around this time that Hower returned.

"Excellent timing, Hower," Webster said crossly, picking at a splinter his crate had lodged in his palm.

"You'll never guess what happened," Hower declared. "It's an outrage."

"A Secesh shot Cardwell from Company D while procuring forage?" Robinson said serenely.

"Yes, but—"

"And they captured the perpetrator but didn't return fire?" Cate added in.

"Yes, but—" Hower flailed. It was too easy. Cate tried to hide a smile.

"And Cardwell is shot and will carry those scars for the rest of his life?" Webster added gravely, leveling the rest of them with disapproval at the flippancy with which they were treating the situation.

"Yes, *and* Command has put the bastard up in a jail cell, waiting on him hand and foot with rations, while Cardwell gets on with his duties," Hower burst out. Cate felt her belly drop out from underneath her and her back teeth ground together. That certainly got the rest of the squad's attention. They all swarmed Hower.

"Turns out a couple of Cardwell's pals were ready to execute the bastard," he continued, "but the officer in charge stopped them and made them march him back here for some sort of court-martial."

Cate had been reprimanded for her outburst at Lebanon Junction, after the bridge had collapsed. She pressed her lips together and tried her damndest not to articulate how damned pigheaded and shortsighted the asses in charge were to privilege the enemy thus.

"Can we court-martial an enemy?" Williamson asked. "Seems like war would be a pretty tedious business if we court-martialled every enemy soldier."<sup>4</sup>

"I don't know," Osborn replied.

"This prick—Jackson's his name—ambushed and shot one of our boys and the damned incompetents in charge of this outfit might as well give him a goddamned medal." Hower curled his lip in disgust. "I got this all from the fellows from D.

They're spitting mad and ready to lynch the bastard if command won't implement justice."<sup>5</sup>

Henry's mouth dropped open and he was not the only one. "Isn't that a bit extreme?"

Cate heard a roaring in her ears. Her throat was tight with the effort of keeping her damned fool mouth shut.

Hower shrugged. "I figure if you're willing to shoot, you need to accept that it may result in you getting shot."

"Yes, but we aren't barbarians, who pay violence with more violence, and execute our enemies *carte blanche*. There are rules and rights we must adhere to," Osborn said. "The fact that it's frustrating is how you know you're doing it right."

Cate threw up her arms. "And look at how far *that's* gotten us. The big bugs care more about this one Secesh's rights than all the slaves we've passed by since coming to Kentucky. They're damned hypocrites. I for one hope they give that Secesh what he deserves."

"What makes you think we know the right of it?" Webster replied. "'Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God.' I'm certain there is a great deal we don't know. After all, we weren't even there."<sup>6</sup>

Cate leveled him with her nastiest glare.

"The boys in D were there," Hower interrupted before Cate could lay in. "And they seem to have a pretty clear idea of what justice should look like."

"When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers," rumbled Krüger, and his dark tone made the hairs on the back of Cate's neck stand up.<sup>7</sup> This was the kind of righteous moralizing she got caught up in, and it brought her back to the abolitionist sermons she'd attended in Pittsburgh and St. Anthony. Any tool that was sharp was good enough for Cate. So long as it cut away at the institution of slavery and pressed closer to liberation for those in bondage.

The words came back to her lips like a homecoming. "God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you."<sup>8</sup>

"That's enough," Osborn cut in, his voice slicing firm and solid through the mounting tension. "None of us will be participating in vigilante justice. I don't care if it's righteous or not. If any among you are out of line or unaccounted for, you can bet I will be kicking it up the chain of command and asking for a court-martial. You can quote Bible verses at me all day long, but until there is an order to execute the man, we'll have nothing to do with him. *Is that clear?*"

Cate gritted her teeth and stared, fuming, at the Sarg, but said nothing more. Williamson and Robinson looked rather



chastened, while Hower and Krüger glared defiantly. Cate disgruntledly noticed Henry looked more relieved than anything. Osborn shook his head and turned on his heel, stalking off toward the kitchen tent.

"You'll all report to the parade ground in five minutes," he threw out over his shoulder. Cate clenched her fingers into a fist until her stubby nails dug into her palms. Hower shook his head in frustration. Webster frowned disapprovingly at the rest of them and made to go after Osborn.

"If war isn't the time for men to mete out lethal justice, when is?" Hower drawled, his arms crossed.

Robinson looked at him incredulously but didn't reply. Henry didn't take the bait either. The boys ducked into the tent to get their kits for drill. Cate stalked over to their stacked arms and snatched her rifle from the pile. Henry approached and took up his rifle too.

"If we don't get to fight some Secesh soon, they can't be surprised if we mutiny," she muttered to him, shaking her head.

"You must admit, there is a big difference between firing on a man in the heat of battle and executing him in cold blood," Henry said quietly.

"I'm struggling to see how the Secesh in question did anything but the latter," she said through gritted teeth. "Just because he didn't succeed and Caldwell walked away doesn't erase the attempt."

Henry looked harrowed as the two of them set off toward the parade ground. "This is why I have no interest in becoming an officer."

"I would tend to agree if I didn't fear the utter fallibility of the men who *are* in charge. We are meant to trust their leadership, but they're not any wiser than we are. For Chrissakes, they were all up late studying the drill manual when we were at Fort Snelling so they could look like they knew what they were talking about the next day."

Henry sighed. "You're not wrong. I'm not sure there is an easy answer."

"Neither am I." She frowned at the pale winter grass, watched her boots hit the cold, packed ground beneath it. "I know it's not noble or wise, but if it were up to me, the world could use significantly fewer slavers. Peace and rational argument have long since proven to make no difference."

"I'd tend to agree. But no one ever said this man owned slaves."

Cate looked up at the sky and implored divine patience. "Fine. Yes. That is true." She let out a frustrated growl as they approached the gathering men falling into rank on the parade

ground. "But if I'm facing down a line of Secesh on the battlefield, I'm not going to worry about which of them have slaves and which do not. Fact is, they're all fighting for the *right* to have them, whether they do or not. To own another human being—God, Henry, it's revolting. Do you see these people in this town? There's so many people held in bondage here, and I can't see one damn thing that makes them different that isn't skin deep. The children sing and play. They worship every Sunday. They form communities and families and they love and they lose and how, Henry, *how*? How can someone ignore that they are just as human as the rest of us? How can they look at these children and see them as something to be bought and sold?"

Henry blinked. "I don't know. I truly don't."

Cate looked at him for a long moment, searching for a reflection of the fire she was feeling, burning her up on the inside. Henry only looked weary. He didn't have the same fight in him, somehow. For all he knew the arguments and the reasons and the evidence, he didn't feel the imperative to rip it all to shreds the way she did. In all the relief of their reconciliation, she'd forgotten how lonely it could be, even in this crowded camp. She remembered now.

Cate shook her head and stalked off into the ranks. He let her go, and she hated every moment of it.

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Drills were so rote by this point that they required no thought. Even when the officers thought they were being clever and mixing up the order of their commands, it required scarcely any attention to comply. Henry spent the entirety of forenoon drills moving his body through the motions as the Company proceeded this way and that, puzzling out the moral conundrum of this morning's argument. The squad was a little less playful than usual but there didn't seem to be any hard feelings. That wasn't the problem. The problem was that he didn't know what to think.

He could see the situation from both sides. The Secesh man had shot a Union soldier and justice needed to be served. But the soldier hadn't died and even if he had, would it be justice to kill another, and a civilian at that? He didn't know. And what Charley had said complicated things even further. Was there really that big of a difference between killing an enemy combatant on the battlefield and killing him on the march? What was the difference between an enemy combatant and an armed civilian? A uniform? A commanding officer?

The point of the chain of command was to rest these decisions and moral gray areas in a hierarchy of structure and order. But when he was faced down with a line of men in gray,

would he be able to see enemy combatants? Or would he see other men, just as confused and fearful as himself?

It was a thought that struck him somewhere deep, and he flinched away from it, bringing his focus instead to his weapon and the commands Captain Noah was ringing in his ears. He couldn't scarcely remember what he expected when he'd been so eager to enlist. This certainly wasn't it.

After drill was over, Henry lagged behind, bending to tie his boot as the others hustled to the commissary tent to get their dinner. He had this nagging feeling that there was something he needed to unpick in his mind, that in between all of these moral questions was an answer that would satisfy him, but he couldn't figure out what it was. A part of him was scared to try.

He was ambling back toward the main camp when his uncle Karl caught up with him.

"What's got you looking so pensive?" Karl asked in German, nudging his shoulder.

Henry shook his head and smiled guiltily. "Oh, it's nothing. The boys were all in a fit this morning over a Secesh the teamsters captured." He shrugged.

"Sounds very exciting," Karl said with an indulgent sort of smile.

"Say, you've been on the field a good deal already," Henry said. "What is it like?"

"Hm? How do you mean?"

"I don't know. I don't know what I don't know, you see. We haven't seen battle yet, and I'm just wondering what it's like."

Karl frowned. "Well, it's loud. Smoky. Some think it's exciting while others find it terrifying."

"How do *you* find it?"

Karl scratched his beard and frowned deeper. "It's not as gallant as they'd like to make us think. It's messy and bloody and painful and ... well, I count myself lucky to have made it through in one piece thus far."

"Is it worth it?" Henry was singularly focused.

Karl tilted his head and studied him under a furrowed brow. "Pardon?"

"Is it worth it? Is it worth all the mess and the blood and the pain?"

Karl sighed and looked around. "I don't know. I hope to heaven it is, but I suppose that depends on which side wins, ultimately."

Henry looked at him for a moment and sighed. "Well, you're no help."

Karl laughed. "I never claimed to be. Damn—what a dreary topic. Say, did you get a chance to speak to that young thing you were on the outs with?"

"Huh?"

Karl raised an eyebrow at him. "The one who broke things off after you 'um'...?"

Henry blushed hard and spluttered. He felt Karl settle a hand on his shoulder.

"It's alright, Henry, I know," his uncle said quietly, leaning in. Henry's stomach dropped out from under him. "I saw you go into the alley."

Henry turned sharply to face Karl, his eyes wide and face ashen. Oh shit. Charley was going to murder him. His mind scrambled for an excuse but all that came out was, "Uhhh..."

"Don't panic," Karl murmured and glanced up to make sure no one was near enough to overhear. "It's very normal for fellows in this kind of situation to seek comfort among one another."

Henry's eyes widened. He opened his mouth to protest and choked on his denial. If Karl had seen him go into the alley with Charley, anything Henry might say to protest against his insinuation would reveal her secret. Karl was a good man in many respects, but Henry wasn't about to find out if he was the kind of man who would let a woman go into battle. He couldn't do that to Charley. He shut his mouth with a click of his teeth.

Karl had him by both shoulders now and was looking him squarely in the eye. "I will not say a thing. You can count on me, you know you can. This might surprise you, but I'm glad for you. You were twisted up pretty bad over this fellow the other day, and if you can find some comfort, you should take it. War is a nasty business and there are a lot less honorable ways for a man to cope than what you've found."

Henry experienced a stillness. His nerves stopped jangling, and he breathed easier. It scarcely occurred to him to contradict Karl out of some conceptual defense of his interest in women. Because Charley wasn't a woman, not in the way he knew them in bell-shaped dresses and bonnets adorned with flowers and lace. She moved in a space between, carrying herself as a man but in a body that defied expectation. She was both. She was neither. And in that sense, Karl had Henry pegged completely right. So what would be the point of arguing?

"I, um," Henry said, his voice cracking.

Karl shook his head. "It's alright, Henry. You'd be surprised how common it is."

"Common?"



Karl lifted his eyebrows and nodded significantly. "Very."

It took Henry a moment to catch up with what Karl was implicating. Was this happening? Were men slaking desire with each other? When? Where? They had no privacy in camp at all. The implications made his mind reel, all the way back to the Athaeneum in Cincinnati, and several awkward encounters he'd stumbled into in the changing room after a gymnastics practice. Now that he thought about it, one of those memories featured Karl and Herr Mayer... If it was possible, Henry blushed harder.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to embarrass you," Karl said with a light chuckle. "I just wanted you to know you have an ally if you ever need one. And also, you need to be more careful."

"Careful?"

"About your choice of location, for one thing. Anyone on the boardwalk could have seen you as they walked by, had they deigned to look."

Henry flushed, horrified. Karl let go of his shoulders and gave him a long, paternal look.

"You're lucky it was dark, is all I'm saying," Karl said with raised brows and a shrug. "So be careful. But also, be careful with your heart, Heinrich. This is a bloody war and even in the best of times, fellows aren't terribly dependable. If he's cut you once already, you can expect he can do it again."

Henry exhaled shakily. He could only nod. He didn't trust himself to say anything.

"There, now, buck up," Karl said with a smile, letting Henry's shoulders go. "You'll find your way, you'll see. Now, I've got to get back before battalion drills, but I just wanted to check on you." He paused, then chuckled. "Are you going to be alright or do I need to take you to the hospital tent?"

Henry shook his head furiously, and Karl laughed.

"Very good then—I'll see you around." He smiled and turned on his heel toward his own camp.

"Karl, wait."

Karl turned and tipped his head inquiringly.

"Am I—" Henry started, unsure of how to articulate this feeling bubbling up in his chest. "Am I being a fool?"

Karl closed the distance between them again, lips pressed to a thin line. "How so?"

Henry let out a shaky breath and pushed a hand into his hair. "I mean, for chasing after Smith?"

Karl shrugged. "Probably. But remember this: only *you* know what's best for you. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. And if I've learned anything from the field of battle thus far, it's that life is too short to have regrets."

Henry nodded slowly. That was for damn sure, and Cardwell from Company D was lucky to count himself as living proof.

Karl gave his goodbyes again and trotted off, but Henry continued standing on the hill for a moment. He was deeply relieved he hadn't blown Charley's secret. He was also somewhat surprised to find he didn't care at all that his uncle assumed he was "finding comfort" with another man. In many ways, it was true. He was much more concerned about keeping Charley's secret. Besides, it seemed like every Greek work he'd ever read was filled with fellows finding love amongst themselves. While it hadn't occurred to him that such a thing might be happening under his nose, he found it didn't surprise him. What was really sticking in his craw was that last comment—"Only you know what's best for you."

No one had ever said that to him before. It made him feel incredibly exposed and alone. How was he supposed to know what was best for him when he couldn't even explain what he had enlisted for? He'd said to Charley he was more interested in asking questions than having answers, but was that what he truly wanted, or was it only what he had?

The bugle sounded, calling them all to battalion drill, and shook Henry from his thoughts.

"Henry! You missed dinner."

He turned and saw Charley coming up the hill toward him. She had her rifle over one shoulder and a heel of bread in the other. She put it in his hands as she approached him, then carried on toward the parade ground effortlessly. Her previous ire seemed to have faded. He stood frozen for a moment, crust crumbs on his fingers. She'd never seemed so ... in focus before. Everything about her—her shiny curls, her dark slash of brows, the bow of her lips—seemed crisp and simultaneously both new and achingly familiar. It felt strangely like a reunion, even though he'd only seen her thirty minutes ago.

"What's got your dander up?" she asked, brow lifted, when she realized he'd failed to fall into step with her.

Henry shook his head and trotted after her. "Nothing. Thanks."

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### XIII

*Lebanon, Kentucky*

*Sunday, December 15, 1861*

IT was Sunday, strangely enough, when Elias Hower seized upon his chance to return to Sterling House. Cate and the rest of the squad had been heading to Sunday service after breakfast when Sam Corbett and the other fellows from

Hastings had fallen into step with Hower, murmuring about something or other. Cate lurked as Henry asked what Corbett had said, half-expecting an effort to punish the Secesh, who was still being held prisoner. Hower grinned and told them in a very hushed voice that he was off to revisit the fiery Venus of Lebanon, Miss Sterling herself.

Cate rolled her eyes—Hower's tale of fascinating vice had grown more elaborate all week, and she had concluded that the bulk of it was pure bunk. Nevertheless, a hotel with a busy clientele and rooms for hire was very welcome, a thought which encouraged her to glance in Henry's direction. His eyes flicked to hers, and he seemed to be resisting a flush that began to appear at his collar as he said to Hower, "I should like to see that."

"Why don't you come along?"

"How will we get out of camp without being caught?"

"Corbett's got some pals on guard duty tonight that'll look the other way."

"So will we go after nine o'clock roll call, then?" Cate asked, insinuating herself into the conversation and earning an appraising look from Hower.

"Yes, that's the idea," Hower said slowly, looking between the two of them. "Look—Corbett's heading there with a few fellows from his squad. Don't tell anyone else, alright? The larger the group, the less chance we'll get in and out of camp unseen."

Cate raised her eyebrows, pressing her fingertips to her chest. "You don't have to worry about me. I'm quiet as a churchmouse. It's this Johnny-Come-Lately you've got to worry about." She smacked Henry on the shoulder for effect. He glowered at her but said nothing.

They hatched a scheme with Hower and agreed to meet him outside the tent after lights-out. With Osborn in the hospital tent with a bad cold, it was the perfect time to slip out unnoticed. Then they strode off to the Sunday service, which would have been a nice and peaceful gathering in a copse of woods if it weren't for all the moralizing pouring out of the army chaplain's mouth.

They had a little leeway between dinner and brigade drill (it seemed even the Lord's day was cut short in wartime), so Cate took up their squad's bucket and brought it to the well without spending too much time thinking about why washing was her first priority for leisure. Usually, the boys would slop off in the morning before drills with a wet rag. A miserable excuse for a standing bath. There hadn't been an opportunity for a formal bath for months, but there was water and soap and a furtive semblance of privacy under the cover of long

shirttails. Cate brought her bucket, so full it was slopping a bit over the edges as she lumbered along to the Sibley tent and was pleased to find the shelter empty.

She salvaged her sliver of soap from her satchel and shrugged off her coat. She thanked all of her lucky stars that as heavy as her courses had been upon their sudden and furious return, they'd spent themselves quickly and were tenuously concluded. She'd sneaked out of camp and pilfered rags from a laundry in town—she wasn't proud—and between changing rags out and washing and drying in a thicket down a ways from the camp, she'd scarcely been able to keep up with the whole affair. Regardless of the burden of secrecy, though, she found she couldn't mind too much given the knowledge she wasn't compromised. The relief was expansive.

Waistcoat was discarded after her sack coat, then suspenders shrugged down and trousers shucked. She'd tied the flap of the tent shut, but that didn't seem to deter whomever it was that attempted entry as Cate was standing over the bucket in her shirttails.

"Hey, can you wait a goddamned minute?" she barked as soon as she heard whoever it was scrabbling at the ties. She reminded herself that she was covered, that there was nothing suspicious to see through her shirt stooped over as she was. "I'm washing."

"In the middle of the day?" It was Williamson's voice. "I just want to get my canteen."

"Aren't you supposed to have that with you already?" Cate replied with exasperation. Dropping the soap in the bucket, she went to Williamson's little burrow on the opposite side of the tent. "I'll get it for you. Just stay there."

The tent flapped open and the sun shone a triangle on the dirt floor. Cate immediately crossed her arms and stomped her still-booted foot. "Williamson! Come on!"

Williamson scowled in her general direction. "I don't want you digging through my things."

"Oh, what am I gonna find, a goddamned love letter to Abe Lincoln?"

Williamson shot her a dubious look.

"Who's writing love letters to Lincoln?"

Cate whirled around to see Henry's shoulders blocking the light through the flap. She was covered, but she also wasn't at all and it felt entirely different for him to cast eyes on her with her legs bare. Not bad, but definitely worse than if Williamson hadn't been there.



"Smith, sounds like," Williamson said, canteen in hand as he sidled around Henry to exit the tent. "Takes one to know one!"

Henry stepped inside for Williamson to leave. A grin was creeping wide onto his blunt jaw as he cheerfully retied the tent flaps.

"What are you up to in here?" His eyes were assessing.

Cate glowered. "Washing up. I haven't had a chance to dunk my hair in weeks, and I need it to feel like separate strands again." Dear God. What the hell was she saying?

Henry's mouth was turned up but only on one side. "What a judicious idea." He shucked his coat and began unbuttoning his waistcoat too. Cate found it was rather hard to swallow. "Well, what are you waiting for? Unless you want me to go first?"

"No! I hauled this water, I'm using it first."

Cate stood over the bucket again and took up her rag, scrubbing it against the soap bar. She looked up at Henry. He was watching her while he pushed his suspenders off his shoulders, and when he caught her eye, he grinned. Oh God, she desperately hoped they'd find a way to some privacy. Not the kind they had presently, furtive and fleeting at any moment. Real, dedicated time, just the two of them. Preferably in the vicinity of a bed, but Cate wasn't about to be picky. Cate watched audaciously as Henry pushed his trousers down and stepped out of them. God, those thighs. Pale skin flashing where his shirttails curved up over his flanks. Cate's breath was short.

"Come here," she said.

"That would be unwise," he replied with that grin.

"I sincerely doubt that."

"I'm alone with a libertine. I should be surprised if I escape with my innocence." His voice was hushed, for who knew what fools were just outside the canvas, but the way his voice husked softly past his lips made her want to plunder them with her tongue. "Well, what are you waiting for?"

"Huh?" Cate blinked.

Henry nodded to the bucket. "Get on with it. I'm freezing."

Cate remembered she had a soapy rag in her hand. Right. There was no point dithering, but she felt utterly exposed under his gaze. She'd intended to soap herself down under her shirt and then wash her hair, but she couldn't bring herself to push the rag under her shirttails with his playful eyes watching her every move. So she bent and gripped the rim of the bucket, rag still scrunched in her palm, and dunked her head in.

With Henry out of sight, she could seize the soap and scrub suds through her scalp under the pretense that he wasn't watching her, even though he was and she could feel his eyes on the back of her neck like a palm. Like a promise.

She scrubbed her hair and rinsed it thoroughly, a bit hesitant to proceed to the next section. Her curls were getting long, long enough to gather in her palms and ring out a bit, so she did that before straightening.

Henry was closer now. Within reach. Her heart leapt toward him in her chest. His cheeks were flushed, even though it wasn't particularly warm in here and both their legs had goosebumps. Cate's eyes were drawn to the front of his shirttails, where the evidence of his arousal was pitching a tent—

The actual tent flaps burst open.

"Honestly, I can't believe they make us drill on the Lord's day at all," Robinson was saying to Webster as they both tumbled into the tent, then paused when they saw Cate and Henry standing around a bucket in their shirts like a couple of loons.

"What're you up to?" Webster asked in that dubious voice he probably used with his children.

Cate found her arms crossed again, to her relief, and glowered. "Washing. What's it look like?"

Robinson raised a brow.

"I was *trying* to snatch some privacy," she rushed to add, "but Schaefer's such a damn *tag-along*—"

"Come now, it's Sunday," Webster sighed. He'd already dug up his kit and was strapping it on. "Do we have to swear on a Sunday?"

"Sorry, Pops. A *flim flam* tag-along," Cate corrected sourly.

"It's been an age since my hair's had a wash," Henry cut in. "And Smith already fetched the water."

Robinson and Webster exchanged looks.

"True enough," Webster said consideringly. "I admit my scalp's been itching for a wash."

"I'd been meaning to do that too," Robinson agreed. "I washed up this morning, but a good scalp scrub wouldn't be amiss."

Cate let out an exasperated sigh. "Well. By all means. Don't let me, the person who fetched the water and bought the soap and who was *trying* to snatch a little privacy, get in your way."

Robinson very graciously let Henry wash his hair next, and Cate finished washing up in the strange veneer of privacy provided by the rest of the fellows being thoroughly distracted



with themselves. As she pulled her trousers back on, she caught Henry's eye while he dried his hair with a spare shirt. He smiled, his expression so tender it made Cate feel exposed. She shook her head.

Sterling House. Tonight. She made a point to make sure, as she strapped her kit on, that the French letter was securely in her pocket.

### FOOTNOTES

1. Rotundo, Anthony. "Romantic Friendship: Male Intimacy and Middle-Class Youth in the Northern United States 1800-1900." *Journal of Social History*, Autumn, 1989, Vol. 23, No. 1. Pages 1-25.

2. [Fanny Hill](#) was among the most popular yellow jacket novels to make its way through the Union camps. Giesberg, Judith. *Sex and the Civil War*. The University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 2017.

3. The story of the teamsters' tussle was recorded in the letters of D.B. Griffin to his wife. Griffin, David Brainerd. *Letters Home to Minnesota: Second Minnesota Volunteers*. Minnesota Historical Society, Stacks E515.5 2nd.G75 1992.

4. Okay, I have to go aside here to talk about this idea of court-martialling enemy combatants because the context is wild. In a state of war, you can't charge an enemy combatant with murder because it's kind of the point of being in a state of war. Court-martials on enemy combatants during the Indian Wars, however, were used strategically. First, in the [US Dakota War of 1862](#), they court-martialed over 300 Dakota men—enemy combatants in a war—and sentenced them to death after sham five-minute trials (Lincoln reduced this to 38, resulting in the largest mass execution in US history). This action assisted the narrative that it wasn't a war at all, but an uprising, a narrative that persisted for over a hundred years and provided justification for abrogating the Dakota treaties, exiling them, and cutting them off from their due payment for the land they had ceded. Meanwhile, after the Wounded Knee Massacre (1890), a Lakota man named [Plenty Horses](#) who had killed a US officer in cold blood was found not guilty of murder. This was because the US government needed to be in a state of war with the Lakota to avoid accountability for their own war crimes. If they were not in a state of war, they'd be obliged to also court-martial the US soldiers who had perpetrated the Wounded Knee Massacre. The presence of a trial on an enemy combatant discerned which violence was excusable in war and which was not.

5. [Lynching](#) is a group execution by mob without a fair trial. The term as we know it refers to racially motivated murders that became rampant after Reconstruction, as the KKK rose to power and the nadir of race relations set in. To the characters in this scene, the word has not yet taken on its racist mantle, but it is still a violent and extreme action.

6. For the unreligious among us, the citations for these Bible verses: Romans 12:19.

7. Proverbs 21:15

8. 2 Thessalonians 1:6

## NOVELTIES FOR AUGUST

### RIDDLE

7. I AM composed of three syllables.

My 1st is a vulgar name for a young woman.

My 2d is a n article of a man's dress.

My 3d is a preposition.

My whole is the name of a town in one of our new States.

Answer to previous: 6. A watch.

### RECEIPTS &c.

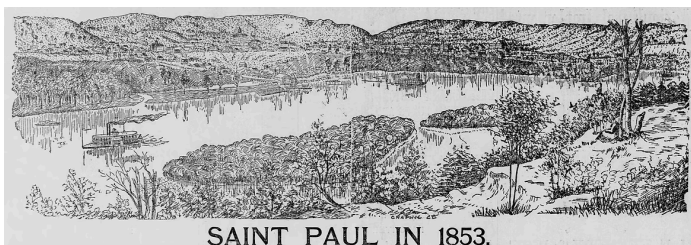
TO PRESERVE APPLES: Pare, and core, and cut them in halves or quarters; take as many pounds of the best brown sugar; put a teacup of water to each pound; when it is dissolved, set it over the fire; and when boiling hot, put in the fruit, and let it boil gently until it is clear and the syrup thick; take the fruit with a skimmer on to flat dishes, spread it to cool, then put it in pots or jars, and pour the jelly over. Lemons boiled tender in water and sliced thin may be boiled with the apples.

NEW-FASHIONED APPLE-PIE—Pare and quarter the apples; scald them; beat them with a spoon with some of the liquor; add grated lemon-peel, the juice of a lemon, or Seville orange, or a part of a quince, when they are to be got, cloves, white sugar finely powdered, and a piece of butter; put a paste [pie crust] round the dish, and cover it with bars or flowers of paste, the excellence of the pie consisting of the sort of apple and the goodness of the paste; the fruit should be raised in the middle, as it shrinks in the baking.

### AN ILLUSTRATED VISION FOR THE FUTURE

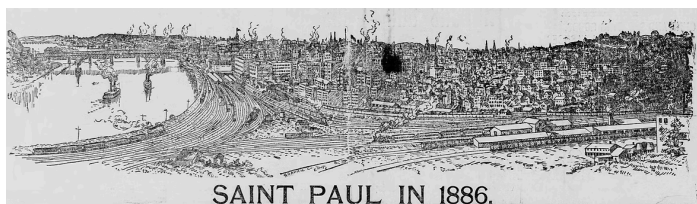
In 1886, the St. Paul Globe published these illustrations as a part of a celebration of St. Paul history and its seemingly inevitable future as the most important city in the Midwest, surpassing even Chicago. A noble and optimistic vision, these illustrations provide amusing and humbling insights into how people of the past imagined the future.

#### PAST



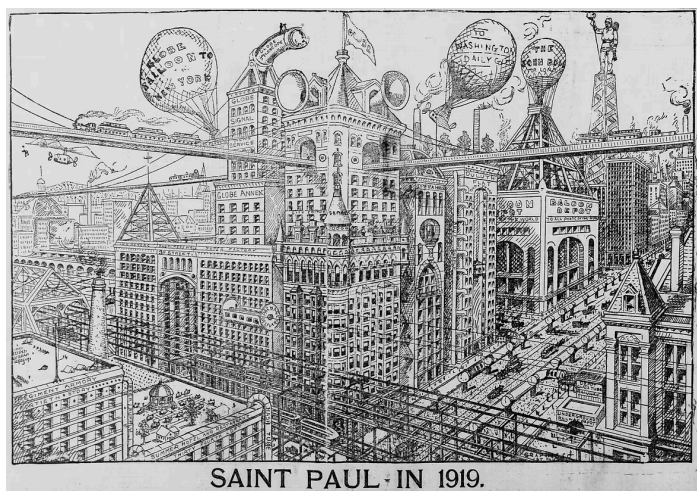
SAINT PAUL IN 1853.

## PRESENT



SAINT PAUL IN 1886.

## FUTURE



SAINT PAUL IN 1919.

## LITERARY NOTICES

It has come to our attention that other journals find it necessary to provide their readers with snide commentary about the subjective quality of the book rather than an objective summary of its contents. We reprint this shockingly caustic review from Godey's Lady's Book July 1859 as an illustrative example:

LILY WHITE: A Romance. By Edward Goodwin. It is very evident that the author is capable of writing a romance that would be more worthy of criticism and more generally popular than this can be. Writers who are prone to exaggerate the truth in order to discolor or to render odious the failings even of those in error, are too apt to lose the confidence of their readers. Monk Lewis had his day, but he is forgotten now, except by some "fogies" of the old school of romance readers. Price \$1.00.

While this editor has no interest in providing subjective evaluation of a writer's competency, having no legs to stand on in that regard as an author herself, she has determined that we expand on upon the tropes we include with each literary notice to provide a bit more editorial flair.

DUAL TIMELINE HISTORY MYSTERY SECONDARY ROMANCE WITH SELF-INSERT MUSEUM EMPLOYEE AND THE GUY WHO WRITES REALLY ENDEARINGLY FORMAL EMAILS!

**A SHOWGIRL'S RULES FOR FALLING IN LOVE**

BY ALICE MURPHY.

IT'S 1897, and a new fashion for thin threatens to end the career of proudly fat vaudeville performer Evelyn Cross. Enter Thomas Gallier, the man behind the new palace of entertainment promising to be the apex of New York City's theatrical scene. He's in search of a star for his vaudeville spectacular, and when he hears Evelyn sing, he knows exactly who he needs to grace his stage.

In a grand finale, present-day narrator Phoebe steps in to reveal secrets and show readers what it really means to claim self-love. Inspired by the true story of a Progressive Era troop of plus-size dancers, this is a story about the spirit of community and the power of romance.

AN ELABORATE RUSE TO TAKE YOUR CRUSH TO RESTAURANTS TO LISTEN TO THE ORGASMIC SOUND HE MAKES WHEN HE EATS EXCELLENT FOOD!

**COPPER SCRIPT**

BY KJ CHARLES.

DETECTIVE Sergeant Aaron Fowler of the Metropolitan Police doesn't count himself a gullible man. When he encounters a graphologist who deduces people's lives and personalities from their handwriting with impossible accuracy, he needs to find out how the trick is done. Even if that involves spending more time with the intriguing, flirtatious Joel Wildsmith than feels quite safe.

Joel's not an admirer of the police, but DS Fowler has the most irresistible handwriting he's ever seen. If the policeman's tests let him spend time unnerving the handsome copper, why not play along?

But when Joel looks at a powerful man's handwriting and sees a murderer, the policeman and the graphologist are plunged into deadly danger. Their enemy will protect himself at any cost—unless the sparring pair can come together to prove his guilt and save each other.

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