



**HADLEY'S**  
**ROMANCE**  
**BOOK.**

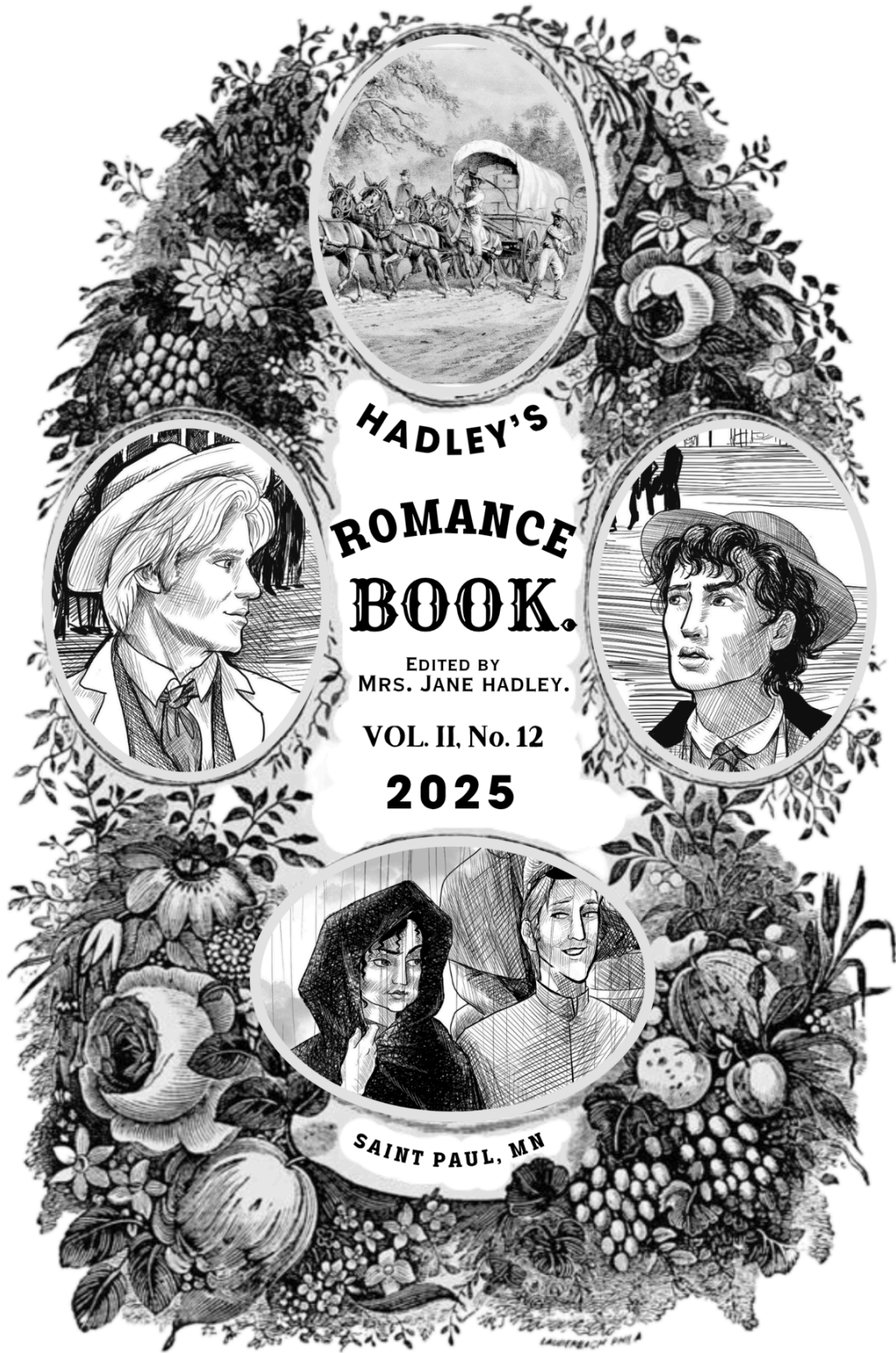
EDITED BY  
MRS. JANE HADLEY.

VOL. II, No. 12

**2025**



**SAINT PAUL, MN**



LAUDERBACH PHILA

November 7, 2025  
Volume II, No. 12

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# HADLEY'S Romance Book

A JOURNAL TO STIR THE MIGHTY PASSIONS

VOL. II, NO. 12

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2025.

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA.

## A RIGHT HONORABLE SOLDIER

BY JANE HADLEY.

XXIII.

*Outside Columbia, Kentucky*

*Sunday, January 12, 1862*

HOWER was right about one thing—the Hastings boys had made first rate work of that still. Perhaps that was giving them too much credit. The only reason the other soldiers were at liberty to molest it was because the Big Bugs were on reconnaissance. In the absence of Captain Bishop, who was officer of the day, the guards of Company A had taken first pick and were now so sauced they could not do their duty.<sup>1</sup> Other squads rolled barrels out of the building with abandon, the rain and muck forgotten in the joy of striking gold. The applejack was flowing deeply before any of the commanding officers could manage any counteraction. Perhaps they didn't have the heart to, after all. The colonel and their captain were both back with the wagons, so Lieutenants Thomas and Woodbury were in charge. Woodbury was incensed, but Thomas knew better than to waste his energy. After the haystack the Ninth Ohio had burned down, and the rails, it was clear that the men knew their strength in numbers. If they all decided to loot an abandoned applejack still, then that was what they were going to do, commanding officers be damned. Besides, in light of Captain Noah's sickness, which seemed less and less likely to improve the longer it went on, the Lieutenants were competing for a promotion. It certainly didn't hurt to have the men's goodwill on that count, for men who respected their leader, who trusted them, were worth their weight in gold.

Or in this case, applejack.

"God, this stuff's vile," Charley said, taking another glug from her tin cup to confirm.

"Not at all," Webster argued. "This is finer than any we had back home. Right, Ned?"

Osborn was with them now, begrudgingly holding a cup of applejack he'd barely sipped at all. He looked up at Webster sharply and said, "It's certainly stronger."

"That's how you know it's good," Hower replied. "If it tasted good, there'd hardly be any alcohol in it."

The afternoon whiled away with no sign of the wagons. The applejack flowed from the still's storehouse, barrel after barrel rolling steadily away into the woods where the soldiers took cover from the endless rain.<sup>2</sup>

"What the hell is on your head, Smith?" Robinson slurred hours later. They sat around a smoking wet fire, the flow of applejack slowed as their senses were slowed by it. Williamson was already snoring against Krüger's promontory shoulder.

"It's my gum blanket," Charley sniffed. "It's waterproof. It's keeping my head dry. Tha's how you prevent colds, you know."

"Keeping your head dry?"

"Naturally."

"Keeping your head dry, and your mouth wet," Hower shouted, swilling a mouthful of applejack. The boys roared laughing even though the wordplay was terrible.

Charley couldn't help it. Her eyes swivelled over to Henry. She thought about the other night in the woods. About fingers and mouths and God, she was lusty when she'd been drinking. Either that, or the sinking ache in her belly the previous night had in fact been a sign of her impending courses rather than hunger. Counting the days, it was expected

soon. Battle or marches aside, her infuriating womb waited for no one. God, that didn't bear thinking about. Lusty inspiration was much preferred.

"I'm sick of sitting in the mud," she declared. "I'm gonna go take the measure of this place." She got to her feet and found they were fairly inept at finding solid purchase with the ground.

"I thought you wanted to keep dry?" Robinson asked. He sure was dim when he was drunk.

"My gum blanket can go with me everywhere," Charley replied, flapping its edges like wings. "Come on, Henry."

"What?"

"We're taking a ramble," Charley repeated, rounding the smoking wet fire they'd barely managed to light and standing in front of him. "Keep up."

"You don't have to go with him, Schaef," Robinson said with a roll of his eyes. "Just because he's fool enough to go bandying around camp in the rain. What d'you think you're gonna find, Smith? Another storehouse, but full of cake?"

Charley ignored Robinson and held Henry's gaze instead. His smile was even more crooked when he'd been drinking. His blue eyes searched hers for a moment. Christ, if they could find a merely empty storehouse, Charley would be delighted. A shack—anything, really. It had been four days since the woods, and Charley could not hardly close her eyes without seeing the memory of Henry with his fingers in his mouth. Somehow, even though they had increasing liberty to touch and show their fondness in small ways around camp, it had become even harder to deny her desires. She wanted him all the time, now that she knew the scope of what she was missing.

"Sure," Henry said and took Charley's hand to pull himself up. He glanced over at Robinson and grinned. "I gotta walk off this applejack if I wanna drink more."

Hower snorted. "Lightweight."

Charley was willing to bet that Henry could hold his liquor a mite better than their fool ex-corporal, but she had better things to do than challenge him. She didn't drop Henry's hand once he was on his feet, but rather swung it a bit as they walked off into the clearing.

"I never dreamed joining the army would be the path to walking hand in hand with a lover on a fine spring day," Charley mused as they proceeded out of earshot from the boys.

Henry snorted. "Fine spring day? Is this what you call spring?"

"It's very like April in Minnesota. Don't you think?"

"I s'pose." His fingers squeezed hers. They walked apace, heading toward the outbuildings across the clearing where the still was humming with soldiers. "I don't know how you do it."

"Do what?"

"Argue with officers like that."

Charley wrinkled her nose and twisted her mouth. "I s'pose I was out of order, earlier, wasn't I?"

"Maybe, but it worked. I wish you could do that with the Top Brass."

"I don't think they'd listen to me. They'd probably demote me or discharge me." Charley smirked wryly. "Throw me in the guardhouse. That's been a popular one so far."

Henry snorted. "Sure, but not since we marched out. Anyway, I could never do it."

"Why not?"

"Cause... I dunno. I just couldn't." Henry sighed. "I've only ever followed orders. I don't even think to challenge them."

"A product of a Turner upbringing?"

Henry laughed. "Not hardly. Questioning authority is our central principle."

"And you question clerical authority very well," Charley said. She squeezed his hand in hers. "I think you might be more defiant than you think."

Henry shook his head, but he also didn't argue with her.

"So what are we looking for on this ramble?" Henry asked.

Charley's smile grew into a grin, and she craned to whisper in his ear. "A dry, private spot with a roof to fuck you in."

"Charley!" He shoved his shoulder into hers, but he was grinning too. Charley was so off kilter from the applejack, she stumbled, and he had to steady her with their joined hands.

"Where there are products, there are storage buildings," Charley declared as though she hadn't missed a step.

There were storage buildings. There was the still itself, set near the winding creek they'd had to ford over and over again, and the out-building where all the casks had been stored—a very busy and decidedly not private area. A rod or two off was a vacant pigpen whose residents had already been mustered into service. There was a privy, as well, farther off still, but also in heavy use by the soldiers.

Charley frowned. The area was a veritable marketplace of sodden soldiers. "Hmph. Let's walk down the apple orchard. Maybe there's something on the far end."







She pulled on Henry's hand. Her feet and legs groaned at the prospect of extra exertion, but she ignored them. Just as she ignored the several braying soldiers who bellowed out, "What's that—a nun? Come to drink with us?"

They could only be referring to her gum blanket. Charley glowered and charged on.

"You've got a fine-looking soldier, there, Mother Superior! Gone to convert him?"

Henry was laughing. Charley couldn't manage to join him. The feminine connotations rankled, made her feel exposed and vulnerable, and she didn't like it one bit. The sooner they could find some privacy, the better.

They turned down the first avenue between bare apple trees, dwarf-size in comparison with the towering oaks, maples, and hickories of the woods proper. Goddamn it—nothing about this property afforded any cover.

"Who do you suppose owned this place?" Henry wondered aloud as he ambled along the deadened grass path.

"Probably some Reb who's gone and joined up with Zollicoffer's army," Charley replied, kicking at the ground. It was sloppy in places, squelching beneath her boot.

"I s'pose," Henry acknowledged quickly, then pointed. "Say, what's that down there?"

Charley glanced down the line of trees and spotted what Henry had with a jolt of excitement. "Is that a shed?"

"Only one way to find out."

They hoofed it to the end of the orchard, where a ramshackle little shed stood soggily with a tin roof and weathered clapboards. The door was ajar, so Charley swung it open. Inside was a wheelbarrow, pruning shears, and other sundry items she assumed were tools of the trade for apple farming, all covered in a delicate layer of dust. Without thinking at all, she seized the handles of the wheelbarrow and began to haul it out.

"What do you want with a wheelbarrow?" Henry laughed. He was swaying a bit on his feet, cheeks pink with applejack.

"I want it out of our damn way," Charley said, dumping the thing up against the side of the shack so that the rain slid over the bottom of the barrow. "Come on."

She hauled Henry inside the shed by his collar and shut the door as firmly as she could.

"It doesn't latch from the inside," Henry noted.

"That's fine," Charley said, pulling Henry in by the waist of his trousers. "There's no reason anyone will come over here when there's alcohol over there."

"Unless someone else is looking for a place to slip away."

"Who on earth would do that?" Charley pressed herself against the wall to one side, dust kicking up and making her sneeze.

"I dunno," Henry said, bracing himself on the wall over her and sending a shiver up her spine. "Other bunkies similarly enamored with one another."

"Do you really think there are other bunkies that have made a surrogate of one another? I know your uncle had some wild notions, but really—"

"I think he has those notions from experience," Henry said. He pressed his mouth against hers and for a moment, her mind went blank in the bliss of homecoming. But good as her reputation, she didn't let it go.

"Experience? With whom?"

"Kloepfer, I'd wager."

"But he's his NCO!"

"You'd be mine if you get promoted to corporal." His expression darkened. "You wouldn't let that get in the way of this, would you?"

"No, don't be a lunkhead," Charley waved away. "Now I see why Krüger kept cautioning me from you."

"Did he? What did he say?"

"Oh, you know, that Turners are all deviants. He implied you'd take advantage of my boyish innocence or something. I can't remember." Charley said as she worked free the buttons of his greatcoat and sack coat.

Henry snorted and took up her greatcoat buttons as well. "When was this?"

"Way back at Robinson's wedding."

"Robinson too, now that you mention it," Henry said. "He said he'd been in love with Hower when he first met him."

"*WHAT?* No. That cannot be. I refuse to believe that."

"It was unrequited, but it's not uncommon among young men."

Charley blinked for a moment. Then, her lips curled up at the edges. "So what you mean to say is that I'm perfectly capable of loving you and being a man at the same time?"

"It seems that way," Henry said with a sly smile.

"Wonderful," Charley replied with gusto.

They kissed, decadently at first, then with thickening urgency. Charley had her hands behind Henry's neck, under his collar, tracing down his suspenders.

"No waistcoat?"

"It's filthy. I need to find someone to wash it." Henry gave her a twinkling, winning, devastatingly crooked smile.

"I heard that teamster, Griffith, is taking in laundry," Charley said flatly, then yanked him in for another kiss.<sup>3</sup> His hands finished working her sack coat buttons free, then started at her waistcoat.

"Too many damn buttons," he muttered, then dove down to press his hot mouth over the slope of her scant breasts still swathed in her flannel shirt. She gasped and arched against him, uncomprehending the reason why it felt almost more erotic for him to mouth at her through her shirt than it would to push it aside in favor of bare skin. She'd have to test the latter for an accurate comparison. Her fingers curled in his hair as he pulled on her trouser buttons.

Next thing she knew, his hands were under her shirt, pressing into her belly and tracing lines of shivering awareness across her skin. Oh, that was incomparable, but also, not the same as his mouth. She pressed his head down with her hands, but he didn't stoop to push her shirt up and expose her bare skin to the chill air. On the contrary, he dropped to his knees without a second's hesitation and pressed his mouth to her bare belly.

"Oh," she managed as his searing blue eyes glanced up, filled with mischief. He unfastened her suspenders and pushed her trousers down to her knees, nudging her legs apart with his thumbs pressing into the insides of her thighs. "*Oh.*"

"I want to taste you," Henry whispered, his eyes entreating. She must have nodded or blinked twice or something, because with a twitch of his crooked smile, he pushed his nose into her curls and pressed his tongue in between her folds. She made a very unmasculine sound as she gripped his hair with both hands.

"You're so soft," Henry breathed, his voice almost reverent.

"Dear God, Henry, don't *tell* me about it," Charley gasped as his breath tickled her wet skin.

"Like satin," he murmured and buried his face between her legs. The sensations she felt then made her wonder quite hysterically what on earth he could possibly be doing. There was hot, wet pressure, then slick sliding, then suction, *good God*. Her hands grappled at his hair—his cap was on the floor somewhere—and she let out an ungodly moan. He was working the spot at the front of her cunt, where she swelled and pulsed when she used her own fingers. She must have been swelling and pulsing now, underneath his mouth. She wondered if he could feel it, feel the difference, when he travelled lower and breached her with his tongue.

She held back a shout, just barely, seizing his hair and pulling him closer, even though there was nowhere left for

him to go. She threw her head back against the wall. Her thighs shivered, and she gave the wall her weight. She felt her edge, but only danced upon it even as he worked her with his tongue. Christ, it was maddening. Exquisitely maddening.

She yanked at his hair. He seemed to understand her rudimentary language, because he moved his attention back to her swollen nub, though not before licking around the circumference of her entrance. She shuddered along that edge, like a train on a tight-turning track. Her thighs tightened around his head as he worked her, pressing firm with his tongue or sucking or something—whatever it was, it felt *marvelous*. She felt herself slide over that edge, exquisitely, bountifully, and it was like a train crash, cargo spilling everywhere, car after car. Her muscles seized in waves of it, shaking with effort. He gripped her thighs and pressed his mouth open over her, intent, as though it gave him great pleasure to feel her pulsing. To taste her. She shuddered, then the door to the shed shuddered too.

"Oh, there you both are—CHRIST ALMIGHTY!"

Charley screamed. Henry reeled backwards and fell in a dusty pile against the opposite wall. Charley's heart wailed in her chest, and she yanked at the tails of her shirt down instinctually as she faced the intruder. It was Jacob Robinson, pink-cheeked and bleary-eyed with drink, clutching his collar like a lady with pearls and stumbling over his own fool feet in the doorway.

"Smith!" Robinson slurred. "What—what happened to your *cock*!?"

*Fuck.*

Charley scrambled to pull up her trousers, tucking her shirt between her slick thighs and cursing every goddamned ancestor Robinson ever had for bringing him into the world. She had to do something. She had to act, *now*, before he left and ran his big damn mouth to Osborn, or worse, Hower, and she ended up on the first wagon back to Lebanon.

"Shuddup, Robinson, come in here," Charley hissed.

"I will *not*!" Robinson squawked. His shoulders and hands twitched with an anxiety that his voice did not. Charley glanced over at Henry and saw him rising to his feet.

"Henry, get him in here and shut the door," Charley said.

Henry, bless him, did just that, yanking Robinson into the shed and shutting the flimsy damn door that didn't lock as best he could. It was so tight in there, they were all nose to nose. Robinson's breath reeked of applejack.

"Listen up," Charley whispered, "and be quiet about it. You didn't see nothing. You hear me? *Nothing.*"

"I damn well did," Robinson said obstinately. "I knew you two were up to no good, but I didn't ever imagine he'd snuck a damn *woman* into the army."

"He didn't *sneak* me in," Charley exclaimed, affronted. "I enlisted myself. Keep him out of it."

"So you don't deny it?"

"How could I, you son of a bitch? You caught me *en flagrante*."

Henry's fist tightened in Robinson's collar and yanked him hard enough that his head snapped about.

"Listen up, Jacob," Henry said low. The rumble of his voice sent entirely unwanted shivers down Charley's spine. "We have two choices. Either, you agree to keep Charley's secret, or—"

"—Or what?" Robinson scoffed.

"Or I hurt you so bad you won't be able to tell anyone anything."

Charley turned her head slowly to look at Henry. Dear God, he looked like he meant it. He could too, his strapping shoulders square and imposing. He looked huge in this tiny shed. Robinson looked up at him, his upper lip quivering slightly.

"Come on, Henry, we're friends..."

"There's only one thing a friend would do in this situation," Henry retorted.

Robinson's eyes flicked between the two of them. He licked his lips tentatively. "I wasn't gonna say anything. I never was. I was just gonna—"

"—Shut up and swear," Charley said low. "Swear to God, swear on your honor, swear on your *mother's grave* that you won't tell a soul. I've given up everything to fight and I won't lose it now, not when we're so close to finally seeing battle—"

"Right, okay, fine," Robinson blathered. "I swear. I swear on my mother's grave. I won't tell anyone, not a soul. Wait—does that include Mary?"

"*Yes!*" Charley and Henry said over one another.

"You can't *write* anything down!" Charley exclaimed. "Forget this ever happened. Forget you even know."

Robinson's chin quivered. "Yeah. Know what? Heh heh. It's easy enough. You're not much of a—"

"—Don't. Finish. That. Sentence."

"How do you do it?"

Charley gave a deep glower.

"I just—why? Why give up so much?"

"Why give up your wife?" Charley shot back. "I'm here for the same reasons you are. I want to fight for the Union. I

want to fight against slavery. I can't stand on the sidelines and wait for all of you idiots to take care of it."<sup>4</sup>

"Was I this tedious when I found out?" Henry asked.

Charley let out a frustrated growl. "Yes, dammit."

"Oh, when did you find out, Schaefer?"

"After we were in the guardhouse together," Henry replied.

Robinson snorted. "Which time?"

"We're not doing this. Not right now. Not ever," Charley cut in. "Because you're not going to remember this happened, right, Robinson?"

"Right."

"Because you were way out of line spying on us."

"I wasn't spying! I was just trying to find you."

"Oh really? For what?"

"The wagons arrived," Robinson said. "Oh yeah, the wagons arrived. We need to go and help unload and set up the tent."

"Oh," Charley said. She looked over at Henry. "You can let him go, I guess."

Henry frowned, but he released Robinson's collar. Robinson looked between the two of them, almost obediently.

"What are you waiting for?" Charley asked after a moment of unnerving eye contact.

"Permission to fall out, I guess," Robinson said, as though he surprised himself with his answer.

"Oh," Charley said. "Well, repeat back to me who you're gonna tell."

"Just—oh! Wait a minute," Robinson smiled tentatively. "That's a trick question. No one. Not a soul. It never happened."

"Right."

"Great." Robinson turned and pushed the door open, taking a step outside. Then he spun back. "Wait—what if I have questions?"

"Give up on them," Charley replied with her arms crossed over her chest.

"All of them?" Robinson frowned. "Come on, if we're all alone, can't we talk about it?"

"No! What part of 'forget it ever happened' don't you understand!?"

Robinson smiled sheepishly and rubbed his shoulder. After a moment's thought, he pushed himself back inside the shed and shut the door. "Sorry. Just a couple questions."

"No!"

"How long you been married?"

Charley flinched. "I'm—I'm not."



"What?"

"I'm not married. Not anymore."

"What? No, I mean, you and Schaefer gotta be..."

Charley winced. Henry was looking anywhere but at either of them, which was a feat considering how small the shed was.

"But... but if you're not married, how come you're..."

Henry grew silent. Charley's eyebrow raised high on her forehead. "Folks don't have to be married, Robinson. Come now, you know that."

Robinson frowned, a curl to his lip. "Why not? Are you just here as a bed-warmer then?"

Charley saw red for a moment. "How *dare* you!"

"Jacob, that's out of line," Henry added.

"Well, I don't know! You're not married, but it's not a practical arrangement—what *is* it, then?"

Charley didn't have any kind of answer for that. Neither, apparently, did Henry. But that didn't matter, because Jacob Robinson wasn't owed anything of the kind. "None of your business, Robinson. Now forget it. Let's go."

Robinson glowered but he went, thank God, and Charley and Henry followed him out the door and into the rain.

#### XXIV.

*Outside Columbia, Kentucky  
Wednesday, January 15, 1862*

Two days later, Charley's hands were still shaking. It was really frustrating, because it had made her fumble the iron tent pole and canvas as they packed up the camp that morning. She'd like to say it was because of the cold—they'd had some light snow in the morning as they were loading the wagons. But she knew better. She could ignore it for one day. But two? She'd eaten some rations before marching out, she'd had a good, long swig from her canteen—there was no reason her hands should continue to shake like this.

There was no good reason, but she did have a notion as to why. She'd been careless, and now she was so full of regret, her hands were shaking. She ran the situation in circles around and around in her head as they trudged through the muddy slop, rain spitting down upon them. Charley shouldn't have been so reckless as to let her desire for Henry overshadow the fact that she was always—*always*—in a precarious position in this squad. No matter how comfortable she was with them, no matter how tolerant they were of her and Henry's particular friendship, she could never, ever let her guard down. She was walking around in a primed cannon of a body—it could blow

up her life at any time, just by virtue of existing. It was a goddamned trap, is what it was. From the inherent risk it posed by being female, to its monthly courses and insatiable desires—it felt like all of its functions, apart from eating, posed a risk. Just because she'd gotten used to some of its challenges didn't mean she could let her guard down.

Jacob Robinson had kept his mouth shut so far, thank God. At least, as far as Charley knew. Everytime she lost sight of him, her heart skipped a beat, until she found him again, lagging behind on the march or emerging from the soldier sinks. Goddammit, she shouldn't have drank so much applejack. She'd impaired her judgment and now she had a massive liability on her hands.

"I think you're unsettling Jacob," Henry hissed in her ear. "You've been watching him like a hawk for two days straight now."

"Good," Charley growled.

"He's as good as his word," Henry said, grasping her elbow as she teetered on a particularly slippery patch of mud. "He would never break a vow on his mother's grave."

Charley frowned but didn't reply. She didn't want to argue about her perfectly rational fears. It was nice of Henry to try and reassure her, but her fear served a purpose. It kept her vigilant.

They marched through the afternoon and stopped somewhere outside of Columbia to wait for the wagons. Rain was coming down steadily. Lots more fellows were using their gum blankets as a hood now. They took cover under a small wood of oak and maple. There wasn't much shelter to be had under their bare branches.

"Let's make a fire," Webster said.

"Oh, a fire," Williamson sighed, like he was dreaming of a sweetheart back home.

"Everything is soaked through," Hower pointed out. His teeth were chattering. "And all the axes are back in the wagons, which are probably stalled a half mile from where we struck camp this morning."

Krüger grunted. He'd born most of the march thus far in stoic silence. "To Hell with that. We are men. We make fire."

Maybe Charley's shaking hands were just from the cold. All she knew was that she couldn't bear sitting and waiting. She had to be doing something. "That's right." Her eyes snapped to Robinson, but he didn't even flinch. "There's got to be something we can do to get the tinder to light."

The boys scattered, scavenging branch and bramble wherever they could find it. They worked fast—other squads

were doing the same, and soon the forest floor was picked over.

"Looks like the Hastings squad beat us to this area," Charley said. She'd ended up with Krüger, and she surveyed the barren ground with her arms crossed over her chest.

"Look. That branch is dead," Krüger said, pointing up above. Charley followed his gaze. The silver maple tree did indeed have a branch a little ways up that had no bark, with a brittle crack down its length.

"Yeah, but we got no axes," Charley murmured, thinking.

"Climb on my shoulders," Krüger said. "Climb up there and kick it down."

Charley regarded him warily. She didn't want him handling her liability at all.

"I will not drop you," Krüger said flatly. "What do you weigh? A half stone?"

Before she could put him off, Krüger seized her by the waist and lifted her. She reeled in the air for a moment, then grappled for the first sizable branch of the tree. It was slick with rain, and she faltered, slipped, and fell backwards into Krüger's barrel chest. Her heart was slamming, somewhere up in her throat.

"I need to get higher," she choked out. Her fear could keep her vigilant, but it would not own her. "Grab my leg, give me a boost that way."

Mercy, but necessity was the mother of invention. Krüger crouched and gripped Charley by the muddy boot, boosting her higher this time. She managed to cling to the first branch, and Krüger shoved her leg up enough that she could leverage herself onto the branch.

"Ah, there!" Charley was astonished. "I'm up."

"Go higher," Krüger pointed.

She looked up. She could see her path easily. A handhold, then a foothold. Her body was light enough to haul up to the dead branch without much effort at all. Perhaps it wasn't entirely a liability. When she got her hand around the dead branch, she gave it a firm yank.

"It's on there good," she reported.

"Go higher," Krüger called up. "Kick it."

Charley frowned. She wasn't going to have the balance to just kick it while perched on a tree branch. She climbed higher anyway. The dead branch stuck out from where the main trunk of the tree bisected into two main branches, orphaned. It was a strange place for a tree branch to die and made Charley wonder for the longevity of the tree in general. She braced herself against one of the large branches, wrapping her arms around behind her, and wedged the heel of her boot

against the dead branch. She pushed her weight against it in sharp bursts, a little at first to test its strength, then harder as it held.

"*Antauchen!*" Krüger called up. His face was intent, the same way it was when he was gambling. "Give it a swift kick!"

Charley sighed. "I dunno. Maybe you should come up here. You're stronger."

Krüger let out a jolly laugh. "*Nein, nein*. You can do it."

Charley winced at the encouragement, then frowned at the branch. Carefully, she got both her feet braced against the dead branch, her arms holding onto the living tree for dear life, and shoved as hard as she could. The branch splintered with an ear-splitting crack, startling her back to solid footing.

"There it is!" Krüger crowed.

Charley grunted. "Not quite." She positioned her feet again and shoved the branch again. It broke through this time, swinging down and hanging on by a splinter. Charley climbed down a bit, then reached out and yanked the branch. It came free and she let it drop to the ground.

Krüger bent and picked it up like it was the sword of his enemy. Charley couldn't help but cheer him on. It was deeply satisfying.

"*Nun*." Krüger put the branch down against the tree, then reached up toward Charley. "Jump down."

Charley regarded him for a moment. "No, I got it." She slid her feet down and found herself sort of dangling out of the tree. It was still a ways down to the ground. Well, there was nothing for it. She let herself drop, then felt Krüger's paddle-sized hands on her waist, catching her.

"Ah, Krüger, get off," she snapped, twisting out of his arms and stumbling onto her own two feet. He looked at her with his distant, Krüger-esque amusement, but he didn't say anything. She scowled at him, her fiercest one. Her shoulders were tight and so was her chest. She didn't want to consider the possibility that these utilitarian touches could have revealed anything to him, but the notion was already making her hands tremble again. For Chrissakes.

She snatched up the branch and charged farther into the woods, picking up anything that looked remotely flammable. Krüger followed, but he didn't speak. His English wasn't great, so his stoicism was understandable, but Charley hated what her mind filled into those silences. God, she was a wreck. She'd passed for months and months. Robinson's rude interruption just had her spooked.

Back at camp, which was nothing more than a regiment of men loitering in the woods without the wagons, the squad pooled their forage. Webster was crouched on the ground over

a small, carefully constructed pile of tinder with his matches, but match after match was wasted on the sodden tinder.

"Ugh, it's no use," Webster grumbled after a few minutes.

"Let me try," Hower said. He spent another few minutes doing the same thing to the same results. "Nah, it's too wet. I told you all it was too wet."

"Give me the matches," Robinson said. Charley rolled her eyes. Were they all going to take turns doing the same damn thing? This was nonsense. They needed something dry, maybe a scrap of cotton or linen cut from their shirts or ...

Charley's eyes alighted on the branch she'd kicked down from the tree earlier. It was wet, too, but it was thick enough, unlike their other tinder, that it might be dry in the middle. Charley grabbed it and held it between her knees.

"Anyone got a sharp knife?" she asked.

Krüger handed her a rusty jackknife. She took it, frowned, and started whittling away at the branch, scraping off curls of wet wood.<sup>5</sup>

"These are still wet," Hower said, picking one of the curls up off the ground.

"Yeah, but maybe it's dry at the center still," Charley replied, not pausing at all in her efforts.

Henry walked over and held his gum blanket out to shelter the wood. When she got to the heart's wood of the branch, she crouched down and made a little pile of the driest shavings. Someone put the matches into her hand and she struck one. It still wasn't catching.

"Henry, stay still," she said and unbuttoned his coat. "I'm just going to take a scrap of dry linen from your shirt."

Henry gave her a look of supreme consternation but he didn't say anything. Under layers of wool, his shirt was dry, or at least, much drier than it was at the collars or cuffs. Charley used Krüger's knife to cut away the bottom of his button placket, no more than an inch square over his sternum. It was sewn on over the shirt, so it wouldn't leave him with a big hole or anything. Just a raw edge at the bottom of the placket that would need repair at some point.

Charley took the scrap of fabric as Henry furtively buttoned his sack coat and great coat again. She glanced up and saw the rest of the squad huddled around them, watching intently. She picked at the square of fabric until she got the threads unraveling. Dry linen would foster the spark, which would hopefully get a flame going long enough to light the dry wood shavings, which would then gain strength enough to light the other, wetter tinder and fuel.

"What are you doing?" Hower was skeptical.

"Patience," Charley murmured as she rubbed the threads she'd unraveled between her palms. The ball of linen fluff was placed on the tiny bed of wood shavings. Charley reserved the driest shavings. "Here, someone hold these. Keep them dry."

Someone did—she didn't look up to see who. Charley struck the match again and held it to the linen. It caught.

"Here, more shavings. Quickly," she said, and took them from the proffered palms of Robinson. She fed them to the tiny flame until it was happily licking a half foot high, feeding greedily on the dry tinder. "Quick, more tinder. The driest we've got."

The squad scattered while Charley stayed crouched under the cover of the gum blanket Henry held steady above her. She blew on the sparks and took twigs and leaves, carefully building up the fire. Meanwhile, several of the other fellows took up larger branches and started scraping the wet outer layers off those too. The flame dried the smaller tinder with its growing heat, gaining strength until it could handle the larger branches. Before she knew it, they had a merry little fire going.

"Oof, it's hot," Henry said, gingerly still holding his gum blanket over it.

"I think it's alright now," Charley said. The rain was spitting more than pouring. The fire was hot enough that she was pretty sure it wouldn't make a difference.

Henry took a step back, and the whole squad crouched around the fire, holding their hands out and warming themselves.

"Commendations, Smith," Webster said after a long moment.

"Good things come to those who wait," Hower said. "I thought we were never gonna get it."

"The thread was a good idea," Robinson said.

Charley cringed at the attention. "Necessity is the mother of invention."

"I hope you'll be fixing my shirt," Henry said with a nudge to Charley's shoulder.

"No," Charley replied glibly. "I'll be needing a lot more where that came from if this rain keeps up."

"Hey!"

The other boys laughed.

"Schaf will be our walking, talking tinder box," Hower declared. After the long day, the relentless hardship, it felt good to laugh.

Long after dark, when it became clear the wagons weren't coming, Williamson had the bright idea that they use their gum blankets to make a shelter. Everyone agreed it was preferable to huddling under their own alone, so they worked

together to drape their gum blankets over a low branch. The shelter was only large enough for three, maybe four of them, so they moved the fire close and took turns catching some sleep in the shelter, while the others fed the fire carefully with the cape of their greatcoats flipped up over their heads. It was a boon to Robinson in particular, because he'd tossed his gum blanket too when the weather had been good at the start of the march. Charley could see how humbled he was when they insisted he get some sleep in the shelter somewhere in the wee hours of the morning.

Despite the horrid weather, Charley felt warmer than she had in days. It felt wonderful to work as a team, to make decisions together and take care of one another. She'd never known this sort of reciprocity before, not even in her own family. Maybe this was what family was supposed to feel like. Around dawn, she noticed her hands had stopped shaking. Must have been the cold after all.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Bishop, Judson Wade. *The Mill Springs Campaign*, p. 61. "Arriving at camp, I found my company in a very exuberant condition. The instructions to keep all the other soldiers away from the still had been faithfully obeyed; but, alas! there had been none to guard the guards. The seductive apple-jack, be it explained, smells and tastes like innocent cider, but intoxicates like sin itself."

2. *Ibid.* This is perhaps a gross exaggeration of what actually happened. To my understanding, it was only Company A who ended up getting wasted, and only directly in and around the still.

3. Griffin, David Brainerd. *Letters Home to Minnesota: Second Minnesota Volunteers*. Minnesota Historical Society, Stacks E515.5 2nd.G75 1992. After camp followers were dismissed in Lebanon, they had no laundresses or other services of that kind, so some enterprising soldiers—like Griffin—took in laundry for extra funds.

4. There is a world of contentions among historians about the causes of the Civil War and the reasons people fought. Particularly in the Union, many soldiers enlisted and fought not to eradicate slavery, but to preserve the Union. So when Charley asserts her abolitionist motivations, she's not fully aware that her fervor isn't necessarily shared across the regiment. All this to say, however, that the Ninth Ohio's account of their exploits contains an enormous amount of abolitionist sentiment and fervor (there's poems). The Minnesota Civil War memorial erected by the Minnesota Grand Army of the Republic explicitly also states that the war was fought to end slavery. The assertion that most Union soldiers didn't fight to end slavery is a generalization, and I would argue also somewhat a vestige of the Lost Cause interpretation, where the war is fought for state's rights and has "nothing to do with slavery." As the war becomes a blood bath and the Union starts drafting soldiers, there is a decline in fighting fervor, so while across the whole war, Union soldiers don't see abolition as a number one priority, it stands to reason that early volunteers were more likely to.

5. Bircher, William. *A Drummer-boy's Diary: Comprising Four Years of Service with the Second Regiment Minnesota Veteran Volunteers, 1861 to 1865*. United States, St. Paul Book and Stationery Company, 1889. p. 11. "Necessity is the mother of invention, and with dull and rusty jack-knives —

for there was hardly a good one in the company — we fell to work. It was a long job, and required much patience to hew off the dampened surface, and still more to obtain the necessary amount of shavings to ignite the wet and soggy wood which we could pick up in the woods. When did a man undertake a job in downright earnest that he did not accomplish? and after almost an hour of steady labor, we had a bright blaze leaping and cracking through a generous pile of wood and throwing out a cheering light through the dark woods, while our shivering bodies absorbed the heat with gratitude, which none can appreciate until they have gone through the same exposures."

## NOVELTIES FOR NOVEMBER

### RIDDLE

12. My first is seen on table,  
At breakfast, every day;  
My next is in the stable  
And holds the horse's hay.  
My whole, as every body knows,  
Contains my first arranged in rows.

Answer to previous: 11. A primrose.

### HOMEMADE WINES.

*The editoress is eager to learn how well this Godey's explanation of fermentation stands up to modern science:*

Now, that the difficulty and expense of making is trifling compared with what the latter used to be, all housewives may add wines to their household stores as easily as they may preserves. The four requisites for fermentation are sugar, vegetable extract, malic acid, and water; and upon the proper regulation of these constituents the success depends.

The fermentation requires great attention, and should neither be suffered to continue too long, nor be checked too early. Its commencement, which will be about a day after the articles have been mixed, will attract attention, by the noise it makes. For a sweet wine, the vask should not be closed until the sound of fermentation has almost ceased. If a dry wine, have ready a barrel which has been subjected to the fumes of sulphur, and draw off your wine into it. Rack off the wine, clearing it with isinglass, and bottle in about ten weeks after it.

APPLE WINE.—Add to a barrel of cider the herb scrulea, the quintessence of wine, a little nitre, and a pound of syrup of honey. Let it work in the cask till clear and well-settled, then draw it off, and it will be little inferior to Rhenish, either in clearness, color, or flavor.

APPLE JACK.—This spirit, also known as apple brandy, is made when fermented apple cider freezes over winter and what remains is poured out, increasing the alcoholic content.



**HADLEY'S ARMCHAIR**

*A Right Honorable Soldier* will complete its serialization in this volume December 5 (two more issues!) and the back-issue archive will close December 31. The book will be available in full in eBook and paperback January 2, 2026. Illustrations featured in the serial will be available in paperback only. Preorders are open now at [janehadleywrites.com](http://janehadleywrites.com).

If you have enjoyed reading this serialization of *A Right Honorable Soldier*, please consider posting a review. Reviews are integral for self-published projects like this one, and help independent authors find readers who will enjoy their stories. In a publishing world ruled by algorithms and bottom-lines, independent authors provide works that are not shaped for maximum market saturation. Support free and independent stories and make some noise if you've enjoyed this free serial experience!

**LITERARY NOTICES**

TRANS RAKE! BRASH BOTANIST! MAKES YOU  
WANT TO SEW A BICYCLING COSTUME! (JUST ME?)

**A SHORE THING**

BY JOANNA LOWELL.

FORMER painter and unreformed rake Kit Griffith is forging a new life in Cornwall, choosing freedom over an identity that didn't fit. He knew that leaving his Sisterhood of women artists might mean forfeiting artistic community forever. He didn't realize he would lose his ability to paint altogether. Luckily, he has other talents. Why not devote himself to selling bicycles and trysting with the holidaymakers?

Enter Muriel Pendrake, the feisty New-York-bound botanist who has come to St. Ives to commission Kit for illustrations of British seaweeds. Kit shouldn't accept Muriel's offer, but he must enlist her help to prove to an all-male cycling club that women can ride as well as men. And she won't agree unless he gives her what she wants. Maybe that's exactly the challenge he needs.

As Kit and Muriel spend their days cycling together, their desire begins to burn with the heat of the summer sun. But are they pedaling toward something impossible? The past is bound to catch up to them, and at the season's end, their paths will diverge. With only their hearts as guides, Kit and Muriel must decide if they're willing to race into the unknown for the adventure of a lifetime.

STARCHY RELUCTANT HEIR! A WALKING SCANDAL  
WAITING TO HAPPEN! A MARRIAGE OF NECESSITY!

**AN HEIR UNRAVALED**

BY JANE MAGUIRE.

Benedict Prescott never wanted to be heir to a marquessate. Born to a father who rejected his highborn family and turned his back on the peerage, he can't help but feel that embracing his bloodline, and the title inevitably coming his way, is the ultimate betrayal. However, when an uncharacteristic scandal leads to his expulsion from university, he has few places left to turn but the countryside—and the flailing estate his uncle, the Marquess of Rockcliffe, tasks him with managing. Little does Benedict know, his turmoil over the future is nothing compared to the upheaval that enters his life when he's caught in a compromising position with a viscount's daughter—and honor demands he marry her.

If Miss Violet Collingwood learned anything after her father's dissolute antics prompted her exile to the country, it's never to rely on a man, and certainly not to fall in love with one. She's more than content to have found a suitor she esteems and who can offer escape from the taint on her family name. But just as her betrothal looks imminent, her path intersects with Benedict Prescott's, and an innocent encounter becomes misconstrued until she's embroiled in another scandal. With her reputation and her sister's own betrothal in peril, Violet has little choice but to accept a marriage proposal from the aloof stranger with whom she collided—even though he's the starchiest, most straitlaced man she's ever met.

Thrust into an unwanted union, Benedict and Violet are bound by duty but divided by uncertainty and secrets. Yet as Violet's strong will clashes with Benedict's cool reserve, the tension between them evolves into something they never imagined: desire. As fragile passion blooms, a ruthless neighbor threatens the estate they share, and ghosts of the past linger around every corner. With their home and future at stake, they must decide if they'll take a risk neither thought themselves capable of: opening their hearts and letting each other in.

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