

Daughter of the Regiment



William Kincaid



A "New Woman" Novel



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By William Kincaid

Even though the hour was early, the July sun made the old men sweat in their buttoned-up suits. Accompanied by family members, reporters, boy scouts and politicians looking to rub off some of their hard won glory, the old men in white beards and distinctive, military headgear stumbled or shuffled on canes through the well-manicured lawns and rows of small white tombstones, fighting through crowds of well-wishers as they had fought each other fifty years ago. Occasionally one of the old men would pause at a grave and memories would flood back of the days when they were young and life was eventful but cheap.

Some of the crowd congregated at the monument to the Gettysburg Address, the only monument ever dedicated to a speech, the people proudly said. One

of the attendees, a proud, handsome woman, now in her late sixties, stared intensely at the bronze bust of the president, flanked by the words of his speech. Her children and grandchildren stood with her, although her husband was absent having unfortunately passed away several years before from diabetes. The woman then broke into a grin that her eldest daughter noticed.

"I wonder what it would have been to have known President Lincoln," Caroline, the woman's daughter mused. "It's too bad you were so young at the time."

The woman smiled broadly, "But I did meet President Lincoln, twice in fact. You can say he pretty much freed me too."

"How is that, mother?" the woman's son, Michael, a Captain in the Navy incredulously asked.

"Let me show you something," she responded, beckoning her family to follow her through the Gettysburg National Cemetery. She searched among the section reserved for the Pennsylvania soldiers until she finally found the small stone block she sought, T. Blankenship 81 PV.

"T. Blankenship. Who is that?" Elizabeth, her youngest daughter, asked.

"That's supposed to be me," the woman grinned.

"You?" Michael responded.

"It's a long story, but I suppose it's time to tell you. I was once Thomas Blankenship, the heir to the Blankenship Iron Works in Philadelphia."

"You are the heir to the iron works for almighty's sake, I am not going to let you run off and join Mr. Lincoln's army and get killed, besides you are only fifteen years old," iron magnate Ebenezer Blankenship thundered at his son.

"But father," Thomas stood resolute, "the army would take me as a drummer boy or guidon bearer, I talked with the regiment that they are recruiting from our neighborhood. I just need my parent's permission."

"It will not be forthcoming. Enough of this nonsense. Besides, this war will be over in two months."

"And the army is so full of bad elements," Elizabeth Blankenship added to the ostensibly closed matter. "Drunks, card players, blasphemers, men who consort with loose women. You are too nice a boy to be exposed to such unseemliness."

"I will serve in the Army, somehow," Thomas answered with tears choking his young eyes as he left the parlor. He marched up the winding staircase to his room on the third floor of the family's mansion overlooking Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia. The sun was setting, and Thomas turned on the gas lamp which gave a soft glow to the room. Immensely frustrated at his parents' refusal to let him join the Union Army, Thomas sat on the bed and started to undress for the night.

Once naked, Thomas did not don his night shirt, but instead opened the bottom drawer of his dresser, moved aside some pants, and pulled out his most secret collection; a silk negligee, necklace, earrings, tiara and lip rouge all stolen from his socialite mother's boudoir. Thomas quickly dressed in his

purloined finery, turned down the gas lamp, and gazed into the mirror at the girl smiling back.

Thomas would regularly dress as a girl in the privacy of his room and pose in front of the mirror for hours, believing himself to be a young coquette, but tonight his privacy was interrupted. Caroline McDougall, an Irish immigrant and one of the many house maids, had witnessed the confrontation and felt sorry for him. She had prepared a tray of milk and crackers for Thomas and wanted to cheer him up. He was very nice to her in a non-patronizing or sexually aggressive way, and she actually liked the young man.

Seeing the gas light in the room, she entered and found a young girl instead.

“Oh, I am so sorry,” she said to the horrified Thomas.

“Please don’t tell anybody,” he pleaded with the maid.

A child of the streets of Dublin and Philadelphia, Caroline quickly regained her composure, and laughed. “Don’t worry, your secret is safe with me, Master Thomas, or should I say Miss? So do you have a young lady’s name?”

“No,” Thomas meekly muttered.

“Well,” Caroline grinned, “you will now be Miss Lucinda, Lucinda Fairchild. I kind of like the sound of that.”

“So my dressing as a girl doesn’t bother you?”

“Miss Lucinda, I have two beloved cousins that are working as sporting women even though they are stags and not does underneath their finery. One is now a rich man’s mistress. They are quite striking. I think you will be even prettier.”

Thomas, now Lucinda, could only stare with rapt attention as Caroline McDougall continued, “Here are my terms that I recommend you take. You are a good student at that fancy school of yours, or so your mother says to all her friends. Teach me how to read and my numbers. I don’t want to be a maid all my life. In exchange, I will teach you how to be a pretty young lass who should be able to find a man who will roger you good,” Caroline grinned devilishly.

Lucinda gulped, but Caroline saw desire mixed with fear. “She really is a girl on the inside. I owe it to her.”

Caroline continued, “Your mother is taking your younger sisters to Cape May for the summer next week and your father is always so busy at the factory so we will stay home. You will say you are continuing your studies. In the evenings you will educate me, but in the day we will dress you as a proper young lady and I will teach you how to be one. Your sister Elizabeth is your size, and she has too many clothes to wear. She will leave plenty for you while she is at Cape May. I know a store where we can get you a wig with curls. You will be quite comely.”

A week later, wearing a corset, dress, lace gloves, wig, and elegant hat, the young Lucinda Fairchild was quite comely. Caroline had done her job well in dressing her new mistress.

“Goodness. Is that me?” the young lady excitedly asked.

“The Saints be praised, I would roger you myself if I were a man.”

Lucinda pondered that thought for several seconds before smiling, “I would like to kiss a boy someday,” she said in a reasonably feminine voice.

“All in time, dearie. First we have to teach you how to walk and talk like a girl. In a few days we will go out and about Philadelphia.”

“I promise to be a good student,” the young lady said, hoping to win her teacher’s approval.

For the next few days, Caroline coached Lucinda on how to be a young lady while the rest of the household was away. Lucinda’s father took dinner at a local restaurant, feasting on Delaware Bay oysters and roast beef with his competitors, while liberally drinking whiskey and smoking cigars, unaware that his son was rapidly transforming into a girl.

Caroline had Lucinda walk up and down the steps with a book on her head, sit primly in a chair with her hands in her lap, and read passages from the newspaper or from her extensive book collection with her developing feminine voice. She also taught her women’s work, such as knitting and cooking. Together they would eat dinner, with the young maid and young lady sitting at the dinner table, where Lucinda taught Caroline the alphabet and addition.

Finally, the big day came and Lucinda went out in public with butterflies in her stomach, but Rittenhouse Square was too caught up in patriotic

fervor on this beautiful May day to notice the young eonist, presenting a very passable and attractive young woman of quality. Several stages were decked out with red, white, and blue bunting and featured orators urging the imminent destruction of the rebel army and the capture of Richmond. Resplendently dressed army officers with sashes and swords paraded around the square with equally resplendent young women, causing Lucinda to look upon them with a deep envy.

Tents had been set up on the square and small squads of men drilled with ancient muskets more suited to shooting at Redcoats or the broad side of barns. Recruiting officers at makeshift tables constantly barked out their tickets to fame and glory and young men stood in lines twenty deep to prove their manhood.

From under her hat with a delicate veil that accented her fine, youthful features, Lucinda savored the sights and sounds of a city preparing for war. As Thomas, she could not join the army, as he was too young and small to lie about his age, but as Lucinda she could thrillingly take in the admiring glances of young soldiers, and smile as they chivalrously bowed to her and took off their hats. She just wished that she was a real woman who could make love to them.

The mistress and her maid continued their forays into Philadelphia for several days, with Lucinda getting more and more confidence, talking and flirting with the young lions, when Catherine took her strongly by the arm one evening.

Lucinda looked puzzled but followed Catherine for several blocks until they gazed upon the smoke-filled room of her father's favorite restaurant.

“Your father should be leaving soon, I want you to walk right by him. I am sure he will have no idea it is you.”

After a wait of ten minutes, Ebenezer Blankenship emerged, savoring an expensive Virginia cigar after a satisfying meal. Catherine pushed Lucinda into the sidewalk and ducked away, so that she would not be recognized.

Lucinda saw her father walk towards her, gulped, then confidently strolled past him, hearing him grumble something about how proper young ladies should not be unescorted under his breath. Her own father had failed to recognize her. She was a girl.

The summer and the Battle of Bull Run came and went, and Lucinda was joyful, even in the face of an embarrassing Union defeat. Her reverie, however, was coming to an end, as her mother would soon return to their home with her sisters in tow.

With that depressing thought in mind, Lucinda and Catherine made their way past a regimental encampment, observing two young women sporting Army tunics, skirts, and colorful trousers reminiscent of the Zouave regiments now fashionable. “Women in the army?” Lucinda asked Catherine.

“Those are Vivandieres, woman soldiers. I doubt if they do much actual fighting though.”

“What do they do? Lucinda asked.

“Women’s work most likely; nursing, mending clothes, laundry, fetching water, sucking a man’s cock.”

“I would like to do that.”

“Sucking a man’s cock? Dearie, you are getting ahead of yourself, aren’t you?”

“I want to do all of it. I can pass for an eighteen-year-old girl and actually serve in the army.” Lucinda was beside herself with excitement.

“Enough of that nonsense, dearie, I have someone who would like to meet you. He will be calling at your home in an hour.”

Lieutenant Douglas Howell of the Pennsylvania Reserve Light Battery had grown up a shy, sickly but studious child, and his family were part of the Philadelphia elite. His wayward father, however, precipitously left his wife and children for the gold fields of California, had found a new wife and was running a successful mining operation, leaving Douglas’s mother to fall back into the protective bosom of her family that lived across the square from the Blankenships.

Now Douglas was an awkward young volunteer officer in an ill-fitting uniform trying to win the respect of a section of barely trained artillerists with three Napoleon twelve-pounders. Catherine had observed the young man for several weeks coming back to his home after a day’s drill, and thought he would be quite appropriate as Lucinda’s first gentleman caller. She had told the boy about Lucinda and he seemed genuinely interested in meeting her, being too painfully shy and awkward to start a conversation with a real lady. Catherine met the officer at the door with a knowing smile and led him to the parlor where Lucinda sat in anticipation.

“Miss Lucinda?” Douglas asked.

"It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Lieutenant Howell," Lucinda smiled, holding her delicately gloved hand to the young man who no longer felt so shy and awkward.

Catherine kept the young couple plied with milk and cookies as they talked into the evening. Finally, Lucinda walked the young man to the door.

"I would like to continue to visit, Miss Lucinda," Douglas announced. "You are very much a young lady in my eyes."

"Why thank you, kind sir. You are a true gentleman."

"Shall we say tomorrow?"

"I will look forward to our meeting tomorrow with sincere anticipation," Lucinda smiled, coquettishly turning her head slightly.

For the next week, the young Lieutenant made a call at the Blankenship home, much to the puzzlement of the neighbors, who knew the Blankenship women were still away for the summer. Lucinda and Douglas got along famously, while Catherine kept up a constant supply of milk and cookies.

One night, Douglas took Lucinda's soft hand in his own.

"Lucinda, my battery has orders to report to Washington by steamer tomorrow. We are moving out."

Lucinda's heart felt a sudden pang.

"I will miss you, Douglas."

“And I will miss you. But there is one thing I want to do before I depart.”

“And what is that?” the dejected girl asked, looking down at her skirt.

Douglas paused for a minute without saying a word, then leaned over and placed his lips on Lucinda’s. The gentle kissing became more and more passionate until Lucinda thought, “I wish he would not be such a gentleman and take me upstairs.”

Douglas, however, was a gentleman, leaving a disappointed Lucinda to watch him disappear into the summer evening.

Lucinda was despondent the next day. In two days her mother would return and she would have to be Thomas again. She did not want that. She never wanted to be Thomas again.

“I am going into the Army,” Lucinda resolutely announced to Catherine.

“Well, I’m going with you. You will need somebody watching over you. The Army is not a fit place for a young woman of quality like you have become.”

“Go home and play with your dollies,” the fourth union recruiter in a row said to the young girl who wanted to join his regiment. Lucinda looked increasingly depressed as she and Catherine made their way to each recruiting station. There were only two more regiments in Philadelphia and she was resigning herself to becoming Thomas again, as much as she loved being Lucinda and was starting to fall for young Douglas Howell.

“Can I help you ladies?” a captain with dark hair, dark eyes, and a handsome mustache asked Lucinda and Catherine as they approached his recruiting table.

Catherine spoke for the two of them as Lucinda could barely speak now in her disappointment. “We want to join your regiment. We can do anything a man can do. Lucinda here can even pee standing up. We are both patriotic women and want to loyally serve in your Army.”

Captain Michael McMahon laughed and studied the pair. A professional soldier of fortune, he knew the value of women in the military and studied them with interest. The Irish maid with the sassy sense of humor would keep the troops laughing through mud, ice, and storm and shell. She would feed their bellies and bind their wounds and stay with his company until they were victorious or all dead, including herself.

The young lady on the other hand he had to look at with greater discretion. He looked directly into her eyes and she confidently met his gaze. A young lady of quality would make his company truly special. The men would not curse in her presence, nor would they carry on like a bunch of louts. She would elevate them by her quiet, dignified, and beautiful young presence. She would assist her friend with the mundane chores as would be expected, but she would help his soldiers compose thoughtful and touching letters to their sweet hearts and family. She would bring them from the pit of despair with her sentiments as they straggled away from the charnel house he knew the battle field would become. They would sally forth the next day and storm hell itself in order

to show the proper young lady the nobility in their hearts. She would be what they fought for.

“I can’t officially sign you in as soldiers, but as your Captain, I will order you to return here tomorrow at seven in the morning ready for soldiering. I will have Sergeant Collins prepare you a tent and add you two to our ration list.”

Leaving a letter to her mother and father as Thomas, stating that he would somehow join the army, Lucinda carried a large valise with clothing to the camp the next day, while Catherine carried a much smaller satchel and haversack with smoked meats and crackers for the two new soldiers.

Lucinda’s mother was correct, the army was full of drunks, thieves, consorters with loose women, and it frightened her for several days, until she embraced the soldier’s zest for life. Captain McMahon was correct as well, Lucinda’s presence had a refining influence on his company. They always received the highest marks at inspections, and presented the most soldierly air in the otherwise undisciplined and unprofessional 250th Pennsylvania Volunteers. Their campsites were immaculate, and their latrines well kept, preventing the soldiers from dying from the dysentery and diarrhea that ravaged the Army during the winter of 1861 once it assembled at Washington D.C.

That winter, Lucinda befriended Dr. John Hall, the regimental surgeon, as they struggled to keep men alive in the hospital tent. As a trained and highly experienced physician, Dr. Hall saw through Lucinda’s disguise but as a gentlemen, declined to confront her. Although a novice to military life after a career in Philadelphia’s finest hospitals, he noticed Lucinda’s

effect on the men of Captain McMahon's B Company. They acted like soldiers around her, smart and professional, and they were almost never at sick call, whereas the rest of the regiment was still foundering in its own inefficiency and squalor.

The capital of the United States of America was in a state of near bedlam as it tried to recover from the humiliations of Bull Run and Ball's Bluff. The roads were clogged with traffic, wagons, artillery limbers and guns, mule teams, and expensive carriages with courtesans of the highest caliber that worked at exclusive brothels in the very shadow of Mr. Lincoln's White House.

One cold but bright February afternoon, Lucinda and Catherine picked their way through drunken soldiers, hurried clerks, escaped slaves, and an army of peddlers as they returned to Camp California from the farmer's market. The newly literate Catherine had started a sutler's store for the regiment, selling foodstuffs, clothing, playing cards, and camp goods and she was looking to increase the variety of her stock. Now she and Lucinda lugged two duffel bags through the throng. Catherine had served as Lucinda's protector through the months with the regiment, and regarded her as her younger sister, in all respects a young woman.

A well-dressed woman with a Colonel on one arm and a parasol in the other strutted on the sidewalk towards them, but cut in front of Lucinda.

"Sweetie, I know what you really are, and you are beautiful. My name is Sal Austin and I run the best house in the city. You can make a lot of money working for me." Lucinda acted like a giddy school girl when praised by Sal Austin, and could say nothing

but thank you and ask the address, which brought a bark of disgust from Catherine, who grabbed her hand and hurried her away.

“Oh no, she is not a painted tart. Lucinda here is a good young lady and goes to church service every Sunday,” Catherine hissed, leading an enthralled Lucinda through the city.

Nonplussed, Sal Austin called out to the retreating pair, “I won’t forget you, young lady. Just come by at any time and I will put you to work. This war is going to last a long time with McLellan in charge of the Army so there is money to be made. It will set a girl like yourself up for life.”

True to the madam’s prediction, McLellan’s army was in serious trouble as General Johnston’s army attacked it at Fair Oaks in May just outside Richmond, threatening to overrun the part of the army encamped south of the raging floodwaters of the Chickahominy River. The 250th Pennsylvania, now attached to Howard’s Brigade in the Second Corps of the Army of the Potomac waited its turn to wade across the submerged Grapevine Bridge, hastily constructed from tree branches, and come to the rescue.

Bringing up the rear of the regiment, Lucinda could hear the guns firing in the distance and saw the dread in the soldier’s faces. She stepped onto the bridge and the muddy water soaked her skirt almost up to her knees. She now constantly wore a soldier’s tunic with a forage cap with a brass B 250 PV on its flattened face, a sky blue Army overcoat and a pair of expensive women’s riding boots that she had purchased in Washington.

The regiment had yet to experience a real battle, but by the time it reached the scene of the day's fighting, the combat had petered out in the darkening sky. Catherine and Lucinda huddled next to a cooking fire with the men of Company B, fearful of the morrow when Captain McMahon sought them out.

"I will not be able to worry about the two of you tomorrow. I want you to stay with Dr. Hall. He will need you."

"Sir, Lucinda and I are part of Company B even though we don't carry a rifle. You can bet that some of your men will die tomorrow. If we die too, it is by our decision, right, young lady?"

Emboldened by Catherine's words, Lucinda nodded, not able to say a word. She was realizing Thomas Blankenship's hope of being in battle and she was proud to be there, even as a young lady.

"Thomas Blankenship," she thought. "How little I feel like him now, he is so distant. I have become the company mascot of Company B of the 250th Pennsylvania as Lucinda Fairchild and I couldn't feel better about myself. I only wish my family knew where I was."

The next morning the regiment advanced and took positions on a railroad embankment surrounded by woods on both sides on the far right flank of the brigade. The regimental commander, Colonel Biddle, positioned his best company, Company B, on his right flank, the most exposed position.

For several hours the woods to the regiment's front remained quiet and the heat of the day started to be felt by the men in their thick Army tunics. Canteens

started to run dry, but the men had to remain where they were, waiting for the inevitable attack. Positioned just behind the men, with the officers and file closers, Catherine and Lucinda started collecting empty canteens until they looked like bunches of grapes, with twenty canteens strapped across their shoulders. A small creek lay two hundred yards to the rear, and the women staggered back with their load, much to the gratitude of the men of the company.

Gunfire started to erupt in the front of the regiment, and the skirmishers positioned in the woods hustled back to the safety of the main line.

“The Rebs are thicker than the curls on Miss Lucinda’s pretty little head,” Corporal Dawson announced as he took cover beneath the safety of the embankment.

Several men started shooting at fleeting shadows in the woods, when Captain McMahon vehemently ordered them to cease firing. He wanted to hold their fire until the Confederate lines were close, otherwise the fire would be ineffective in the heavy foliage.

A sharp whistle passed over Lucinda’s head, then another and another, causing her to feel tightness in her bowels. She looked at Sergeant Collins, who smiled back and winked. “Take heart, young lady, the Rebs won’t break Company B.”

The Rebs disagreed with Sergeant Collins’s assessment, and started to pour volleys onto the rim of the embankment. Private McGill crouching in front of Lucinda was flung onto his back, with his nose and eyes missing. Dead.

Lucinda tried to vomit but she had not eaten that day, and only could feel bile in her throat. Sensing the uneasiness in the men, Captain McMahon decided it was time to shoot back.

“Aim low and fire at will.”

The men responded with a volley, and began to rapidly fire into the woods. Finally, the Confederate lines emerged and the two sides exchanged fire until both sides were obscured by clouds of sulfurous smoke. Private Hastings cried out in pain, dropped his Enfield musket, and clutched a shattered, bleeding forearm. Instinctively, Lucinda went to him and supported the wavering soldier as she led him to the rear and Dr. Hall. In front of her, Catherine led a soldier, wounded in the shoulder, who left a trail of blood droppings for Lucinda to follow.

Lucinda and Catherine continued their shuttle service for the better part of an hour until the Confederates retired into the woods, leaving their dead where they fell, including a regimental Colonel, who lay on the slope of the embankment. A fresh brigade came through the woods from the rear and relieved the men of Company B who staggered away from the embankment on rubbery legs.

Seeing Lucinda emerge from the fight, Dr. Hall called out to her as he walked through a yard full of wounded men, evaluating their wounds before they were sent to the makeshift operating table in the dining room of a plantation house.

“That damn useless Thomas can’t stand the sight of blood and gore,” Hall shouted, referring to one of his medical orderlies. “I need your help now that your company is out of the battle.”

Lucinda looked puzzled ten minutes later as Dr. Hall handed her a bloody leg that he had sawed off above the knee.

“He won’t need it anymore.” Dr. Hall said as he beckoned towards the open window. Lucinda understood and by the time she and the doctor had finished, she could reach out the window and touch the pile of arms and legs, but the Army was saved that day.

Nothing could be done to save Lieutenant Howell’s artillery section a month later as the Union lines that had fought all day along a swamp at Gaines Mill finally collapsed in a massive dusk assault that swept over them. Discerning that the battery would be overrun, Lieutenant Howell felt surprisingly calm, knowing what had to be done.

“Load with double canister, Sergeant,” he ordered to Kurt Koenig, his section sergeant. Howell then felt a sharp pain in his arm, but would not leave his section. The advancing Confederate lines disappeared as the canister annihilated the front ranks.

“Now Sergeant, we run like the devil.”

In the confusion following the firing of the canister, the embattled artillerymen had a small window of time to make their escape before the Confederates reformed and shot them down. Seeing the blood drip onto the flanks of Lieutenant Howell’s white horse, Sergeant Koenig was proud of his Lieutenant. Inside the slight frame beat a warrior’s heart.

The Union artillery and lines at Malvern Hill were not cracking four days after the confederates overran Howell’s battery, despite confronting furious charges

of Confederates smelling blood from an enemy that had been in retreat. The 250th was on the far right flank of the Union line, under the command of Colonel Barlow from the 61st New York and had stood their ground for hours in an open field in front of a wood lot. Guns fouled and grew too hot to touch, but Lucinda and Catherine had brought the parched troops canteens all afternoon and helped wounded men make their way to the crest of the hill, behind the artillery batteries, where ambulances carried the wounded to Harrison's Landing, a plantation on the James River.

At dusk, both sides were exhausted and out of ammunition but the click of bayonets being fixed to muskets could be heard in the woods. The Confederates were going to make one final charge and there was no more ammunition.

Shouting the high pitched Rebel yell, the Confederates emerged from the woods and sprinted towards the Union line with bayonets at the level.

"Here, grab my hand," Sergeant Collins yelled at Lucinda. She locked arms with him and a file closer to her right, forming a human chain behind the front ranks. The Confederate tide crashed onto the Union shore which fell back until it pressed against the seawall of file closers. Lucinda gripped Sergeant Collins's hand as if by force of will the line could hold. Men pushed against them as they were forced back but Lucinda would not let go. The file closers took a step to the rear, two, then three, but then the pressure relented, and the Confederate wave receded back to the woods. The day had been won.

Being on her feet for three nights had exhausted Lucinda who made her way to the side of a wood

framed house behind the crest of the hill. She could sleep all night here and be ready for the battle the next day.

Unfortunately, General McLellan did not know what to make of his victory and withdrew from an impregnable position to retreat to the safety of the Union gunboats that prowled the James River with their massive guns. The exhausted army did not notice the girl sleeping against the house and walked away into the night, while she slept the sleep of the victorious.

The Confederates were in a foul mood the next day when they found the drowsy girl in the Union Army tunic and hat. Thousands of casualties the day before had not helped their humor in the triumph of pushing a far larger army to the banks of the James.

“What’s this we have here, a little Yankee girl all alone,” a powder-streaked Confederate snarled as he leveled an Enfield at Lucinda.

Lucinda was terrified. What if they tried to rape her? What if they found out her secret? If they found out they would probably kill her.

The Confederates were not about to rape Lucinda, but she would still bear their wrath. A hatless and wounded Captain pushed through his troops. “Well, Miss, your army left you behind to help us with our dead.”

In a blazing sun and without any water, Lucinda toiled through the fields, helping slaves load mangled and foul-smelling corpses on wagons for burial at Richmond. Her gloves were covered in dried blood, her tunic reeked, and her skirt had lumps of flesh on its hem. The slaves looked on her with sympathy

while passing Confederate soldiers shouted at her in derision. Some of the dead Confederates looked as young as she was and some soldiers' ages were impossible to identify, the corpses having lost their heads to artillery fire.

Loading the last corpse into an overflowing wagon, Lucinda staggered away to a rank of mowed down Confederates. "More casualties of artillery," fire she thought, fearful of the bloodbath she would have to again wade in. She dumbly stumbled towards the bodies when her path was blocked by the flanks of a gray horse. She tried to step around it but the rider spurred it forward, blocking her way. She again tried to move past the horse's head and the driver repeated the action.

Finally she looked up at this annoying horseman and saw a Confederate General with stern, intelligent eyes and a white beard.

"Young lady, what are you doing?" the General asked.

"I am a prisoner of war, sir. A Captain forced me to load the bodies on the wagons."

"We are not like your army, young lady, and don't seek retribution on women. Why are you wearing a Union Army tunic and cap?"

"I am assigned to Company B of the 250th Pennsylvania of Richardson's Division of the Second Corps, sir."

"Then you are indeed our prisoner, young lady. It's too bad that your Commanding General doesn't have

a fraction of your courage, otherwise you would be in Richmond. Colonel Taylor,” the General barked.

“Yes, General,” an officious, well-dressed officer came forward.

“Have this young lady escorted personally to Mrs. Pember at Chimborazo. If a hair on her head is harmed, you will be loading bodies and digging trenches.”

“Yes, General.”

“Child, you are filthy,” Phoebe Yates Pember, the matron of Chimborazo Hospital, exclaimed in disgust. “We will burn those nasty Yankee clothes of yours.”

Looking prim and proper, Lucinda emerged in a clean skirt and blouse. Mrs. Pember explained that she was a stickler for cleanliness at her hospital, and that Lucinda would work as a nurse until she was paroled. The hospital matron was dedicated and effective, maintaining a high rate of survival, and she warmed to the little Yankee girl who worked tirelessly in the wards of her enemy. A worldly woman, Mrs. Pember knew the truth of the charming girl, but was too much of a lady to expose her and send her to the prison camp at Belle Isle. Besides, she was so gentle and kind, just like any well-bred young lady, and was too good a nurse to lose.

Two months after Lucinda was taken prisoner, a sudden surge of wounded hit the hospital, including three Union soldiers in bright red pantaloons, Duryea’s Zouaves, the wounded from Second Bull Run, or Manassas as Mrs. Pember called it. In the jubilation of another stunning Confederate success

that led to General Lee invading the north, Mrs. Pember allowed Lucinda free rein about the city, which she believed would soon be independent. What would a frail girl do anyway?

Given some freedom, Lucinda immediately made her way to Belle Isle to ask about men from the 250th. She found a dozen on the island who were jubilant to see their pretty little mascot. The men quickly gathered watches and coins that she could barter at the farmers market for fresh fruit and vegetables. Carrying a basket back to her comrades, she was greeted with a resounding cheer. Lucinda worked tirelessly at the hospital, but at the conclusion of her shift she would visit Belle Isle with a basket of food, until the entire camp thrilled to the sight of the young woman.

On a cold winter's day in December, Mrs. Pember called Lucinda into her office.

"The last prisoner exchange is happening this afternoon, You need to get to Rocketts Landing by 4:00 to board the boat. It will take you back north to Washington D.C. and you will be able to rejoin the Union Army afterwards. I could have let you go in any of the exchanges, as Colonel Taylor instructed, but you were such a valuable nurse that I was selfish and wanted to keep you as long as I could. I rationalized it by knowing that you were also helping those prisoners on Belle Isle. I will miss you, Lucinda Fairchild, or whatever your name really is. Please see me after the war. From what I hear after another battle like Fredericksburg, the North will soon give in and give us our independence."

The Battle of Fredericksburg had demoralized the Army of the Potomac, especially the troops of the Sec-

ond Corps who had made repeated suicidal attacks against well-positioned Confederate artillery and infantry at Marye's Heights, commanding the open ground beyond the small city. The 250th Pennsylvania had suffered over 150 casualties, and Company B was down to seven men. Captain McMahon had been wounded leading his troops in a forlorn hope against the Confederate left flank, but remained on duty with Sergeant Collins. Five men had deserted and now the regimental morale had collapsed. The soldiers did not drill, their huts were filthy, and Dr. Hall would regularly see entire companies on his daily sick call. The Union Army was experiencing its Valley Forge, while the Confederates basked across the Rappahannock River in their invincibility.

Luckily, the 250th escaped the humiliating Mud March in January, in which the Army foundered in an ill-advised campaign that wore men and animals to their very limits struggling through a knee-deep morass and sleet. The Colonel called his ragtag regiment to muster one morning and found sixty men and Lucinda fit for duty, Caroline having taken ill. The men marched to the depot at the mouth of Aquia Creek and boarded a steamer, delighted to leave their wretched camp at Falmouth. The Colonel advised them that they were going to conduct an expedition in the no-man's land along the shores of the Chesapeake and the mouth of the Rappahannock. Smugglers operated at will in the area, bringing essential goods from the north such as salt, shoes, even weapons in exchange for cotton which would keep the spinning mills of Massachusetts in business, and high priced items like tobacco and hams.

The U.S. Navy could not prevent the trade with the Confederates, as there was just too much shoreline

and too much money to be made in the illicit operation. In desperation Army regiments would search the region for storage barns with illegal goods.

Riding the Navy transport Mohonk, the soldiers relaxed, knowing for once they would not be involved in a pitched battle. The steamer dropped anchor off the mouth of a small marshy creek and the men debarked onto small launches rowed by the sailors. Company B was ordered to investigate a plantation, Arundel, five miles to the east, which had its own wharf. After a leisurely march, the soldiers fanned out and searched through the barns and outbuildings while the slaves looked on their activities with intense interest.

Sergeant Collins and Corporal Dawson immediately found what they were looking for, the plantation owner, a successful physician, Carter Brockenbrough, having become brazenly complacent. His barn held racks of hams, seven bales of cotton, and numerous luxury items marked for shipment to Philadelphia and New York. Captain McMahon politely ordered the doctor to accompany them to the ship from which he would be taken to Washington D.C. and jailed as a smuggler. The doctor, a dignified and intelligent man, quietly packed a valise while the soldiers lounged in the plantation yard.

A middle-aged slave with gray hair and a twinkle in his eye then approached Captain McMahon. "Sir, are you the officer in charge here?"

"Yes, why?"

"Is it true that if we go with you, we will be free?"

“It’s true, by order of President Lincoln.”

“Thank you, sir,” the older man quietly said and walked away.

In ten minutes thirty-three slaves ranging from two week old infants to an old woman of ninety who was born before the Revolutionary War all stood in front of the company.

“Sir, they call me Samuel, after the man in the Bible. We want to go with you.”

Just then, the doctor’s sister, a beautiful and poised woman emerged from the plantation house and approached Captain McMahon.

“Captain, are you taking away our people?”

“Ma’am, if they want to come, they can. “

The woman, Ellen Brockenbrough Anderson then faced her slaves with tears in her eyes.

“Do you want to go with these Yankees? If you do, I can’t and won’t stop you. But don’t think for a minute that you will be treated well up North. We have thought of you all as family and did our best by you at every turn.”

The slaves were touched by Mrs. Anderson’s words, but unmoved in their resolution and marched with Company B to the river and freedom while Mrs. Anderson retreated to the manor with a breaking heart.

Colonel Biddle congratulated Captain McMahon for his work, and the men sat around the shoreline waiting for the other companies to return. Lucinda

nodded off on one of the empty launches, trying to feel some warmth in her Army overcoat when Samuel approached her.

“Excuse me, Miss Yankee girl. Are all Yankee girls like you? Because if that’s true, how do they make baby Yankees?”

Lucinda looked as if she had been hit by a cannon blast. Nobody had yet confronted her directly on her real identity, but Samuel did not look malicious, only curious. She finally regained her composure.

“No, most Yankee girls are just like Confederate girls. Only I am this way.”

“So you are one of those boys that really want to be a girl.”

“Yes, I guess I am.”

“I have known boys like you. I even heard of a slave woman in Petersburg, one who knew the ancient African Voodoo magic, who turned a white planter’s son into a beautiful girl. She worked as a sporting woman in Richmond and married a legislator. “

Lucinda looked on the tale with hope but disbelief, which Samuel sensed.

“Oh, you don’t believe me, but it’s true, Missy. There is powerful magic out there that can make you a beautiful woman, even allow you to make baby Yankees.”

Lucinda wanted so much to believe Samuel but she changed the subject.

“Mrs. Anderson seemed like a good woman.”