



“Where’s the nearest hospital?” Luke blurted to a group of soldiers in passing.

Their gaze trailed to the limp girl tucked in his arms. One of them pointed farther down the street. “The two-story frame house a few blocks ahead, corner of Third and Main.”

With a brisk nod, he hurried on. Though the woman’s breaths were steady, they were extremely shallow. Every moment counted.

A soft moan emanated from the young woman, and Luke glanced down. She looked to be about his age or possibly a bit younger. Beautiful, despite the coat of ashes and soot soiling her features and the mass of burns lining her arms. It was a wonder she’d survived. And yet, the Lord had allowed them to find her. Surely, she was meant to live.

Or so he hoped.

There was something endearing about her long, dark lashes and the slight pout of her crimson lips. Who was she? Were other members of her family trapped beneath the rubble? Clothed in a drab mourning dress, she obviously had lost someone close to her—a father or brother? Surely not a husband.

His throat clamped. Could one so young be a widow? It

saddened him to even consider. Whoever she grieved had likely been taken from her by Union forces. And yet, her own Confederates had inflicted *this* travesty upon her.

He gently shifted the nameless girl in his arms, returning his gaze to the path ahead. When he'd arrived in the Confederate Capital, he'd been overjoyed at the long-awaited victory, never giving thought to the lives the conquest might affect. Seeing this lovely young woman clinging to life put the situation in a different light. When the Rebs set Richmond ablaze, chances are their intentions were to keep anything of value out of Union hands.

Not devastate the entire city or kill their own.

The scent of smoke grew fainter as he left behind the burnt-out business district and entered the part of town which had sustained less damage. A yellow flag with a green *H* designating the hospital came into view. Increasing his pace, he set his sights on the two-story frame house, its front and back lawns astir with activity. With heavy breaths, Luke upped the porch steps and pounded on the door with his foot.

A dark-haired lady opened, and with one glance at the listless girl, ushered him inside. "Take her in there," she directed, pointing to the room on the left.

With quick strides, Luke made his way into what must have once been an elegant parlor. Now, a dozen or more civilian patients lay clustered about the spacious room. Ever so gently, he lowered the girl to one of the few empty cots. Her eyes flickered open a brief instant and her brow creased as if in pain. Then, just as quickly, she retreated back into quiet slumber.

Troubled by the extent of her wounds and the limpness of her body, Luke sought out the closest nurse. "Where's the doctor? That girl over there needs help."

The woman raised a brow. "We have no doctors. They vacated the city before you Yanks arrived. There's only a few of us volunteers to tend the wounded."

"But she needs assistance. Now."

The nurse glanced to where the girl lay then returned to tending the badly burned man before her. "Like countless others. Her turn will come."

"But she's ..."

The woman's intense gaze fixated on Luke. "We'll get to her as soon as we're able, Corporal. We can only do so much."

Panic rose in Luke's chest. "Who's in charge here?"

She nodded to the lady who'd met him at the door. "Captain Sally Tompkins over there."

Luke tromped toward the woman who continued to direct patients to rooms. "Miss Tompkins?"

Turning, her dark eyes perused him. "*Captain* Tompkins." Even in her short response, her Southern drawl rang thick.

"I brought a young woman in just now who needs immediate attention, or I fear she won't make it." He gestured toward her, and the woman craned her neck for a look.

"Where is she injured?"

"Her arms and hands are badly burned, and she appeared to have taken a hit on the head." He fell into step behind her as she wove her way through the roomful of patients.

Bending down, she lifted first one of the girl's eyelids, then the other.

"Can you help her?"

She glared up at him. "We have the lowest mortality rate of any hospital here in Richmond. Supplies are low and we're short-staffed, but we'll do what we can."

"Is there anything I can do?"

Her expression softened. "Your concern for the girl is commendable, Corporal. But I assure you, she'll be well taken care of. Now, I'd appreciate if you'd leave me to my work."

With a tentative nod, Luke ventured a final glance at the young woman. It pained him to see someone so young caught in the hazards of war. Somehow, he felt responsible for her. And yet, all he could do was entrust her to the Lord's hands and pray this nurse knew what she was doing.

He turned to leave, then hesitated. “Could I check back tomorrow to see how she’s doing?”

Captain Tompkins paused from examining the burns on the girl’s arms. “Suit yourself. So long as you don’t get in the way.”

Luke fingered his kepi. “Thank you, Captain.”

As he turned to go, an overpowering sense of dread encompassed him. There was every chance the young woman would not survive. He whispered a silent prayer on her behalf, uncertain if he would have the heart to return and find out.

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*Robertson Hospital, Richmond*

*April 3, 1865, 10 p.m.*

SEARING pain and heat pulsed through Addie’s arms. She moaned and opened her eyes, her vision fading in and out as the dim glow of lantern light invaded her senses. Her eyes perused the plastered ceiling and the flickering shadows along the walls. Where was she?

She tried to move and cringed, an unbearable ache in her head forcing her to still. Thick bandages adorned both of her arms. What had happened to her?

Fragmented images pricked at her fogged memory. The last thing she recalled was struggling to pull Aunt Polly from the burning millinery shop.

*The fire.*

Her arms had been burned in the fire. But, why this throbbing pain in her head?

Wait. She squeezed her eyes shut, envisioning the burning building. Now she remembered. She’d lacked the strength to free her aunt and had gone for help. Something had struck her.

Tears welled in her eyes. Her poor aunt. She let out a string of coughs. “Why... would no one ... help us?”

“Shhh. Keep still. You’re safe now.”

A cool hand stroked her damp forehead. Addie slowly shifted her face toward the soft voice, wincing at the intense pain. Her brow pinched at sight of the woman standing over her, the *MS* on her sleeve designating her as Medical Staff. “Where am I?”

“Robertson Hospital.”

Addie cringed, her breaths heavy. “I-It hurts.”

“Here. Drink this.” The woman tipped Addie’s head forward and held a cup to her lips.

Addie took a tiny swallow and grimaced. “What is it?”

“Laudanum. It will help reduce the pain and allow you to rest.”

Reluctantly, she finished drinking the bitter medicine and laid her head back with a cough. Within moments, she could feel the medicine’s effects. A bit woozy, she closed her eyes and succumbed to the fatigue. When next she opened them, daylight streamed through the windows. She inhaled shallow breaths, the oppressive odor in the room making her thankful the windows were slightly ajar.

The woman she’d encountered in the night stood with her back to her, tending a patient on the cot next to Addie’s, her chestnut hair drawn in a tight chignon. Across the room, another nurse swabbed the forehead of an injured man. His eyes held a dazed expression as he stared unblinking at the ceiling. Several others in the room showed no sign of alertness whatsoever.

“Well, you’ve finally awakened. How are you feeling?”

Slowly turning her head toward the voice, Addie gazed into the face of the dark-haired nurse. “Tired.”

“Are you in a great deal of pain?”

Addie licked dry, chapped lips, managing a weak nod.

“Your arms or your head?”

“Both.” The gravelly voice barely seemed her own. “My head is throbbing and my arms feel as though they’re on fire.”

The nurse’s brunet eyes filled with compassion as she leaned in closer. “You’ve suffered extensive burns to your hands and arms, along with a blow to the head. We’ll do what we can to

make you comfortable, but I'm afraid we may not be able to completely alleviate your pain."

Addie glanced at her bandaged limbs. "At least my hands don't hurt."

The woman's eyes crimped, her mouth growing taut. "You feel no pain in your hands?"

"Only a little. They're more stiff than sore." She tried unsuccessfully to wriggle her fingers beneath the bandages. "I can't seem to move them, or hardly even feel them."

Something akin to alarm flickered in the caretaker's eyes.

Addie swallowed, the dryness in her throat hampering her speech. "Is that bad?"

The nurse's drawn-out breath and creased brow sent a tremor through Addie, but the woman merely passed off the question with a weak grin. "It's nothing to concern yourself with just now. Let's have a look at that bump of yours."

Gently, the nurse tilted Addie's head to the side. "Hmm. Still rather swollen. I think another cold compress is in order."

"Might I have a drink?"

"Certainly." Retrieving a pitcher, the nurse poured a half-filled glass of water and the remainder into a large bowl.

Addie stared up at her, mind bogged with questions. "How did I get here?"

Glass in hand, the nurse sat on the edge of the thin cot and tipped Addie's head up for a drink. "You were carried in by a soldier."

Greedy gulping the water, Addie choked slightly.

The nurse pulled the glass away. "Easy now. Not too fast."

After another sip, the nurse eased Addie down and dabbed her wet lips with a cloth. She followed the nurse's every move, her mind still seeking answers. "Do you recall the soldier's name? I'd like to thank him."

"I'm sorry. I don't." The woman dipped the cloth in the bowl of water and wrung it out. "But you may have your chance to

express your gratitude. He seemed quite concerned over you and promised to return. In fact, I could hardly prompt him to leave.”

A flash of heat spilled onto Addie’s cheeks, and she wished it away. “But I thought all our able-bodied men had fled the city?”

“They have.” Pressing the rag to Addie’s head wound, the woman raised a brow, an odd sort of expression spilling onto her face.

Addie flinched at the touch of the cold compress, her mind struggling to process the nurse’s unspoken implication. At last, her eyes flared wide. “You don’t mean. Not a Yankee?”

“Yes indeed. And a handsome one at that.”

Suddenly antsy, Adelaide shifted on the cot. “Then I’ve no wish to thank him at all. He can fall in a hole for all I care.” She gnawed at her lip. “What about my aunt? She was trapped inside the burning building. Did he find her as well?”

The woman gave a disheartening shake of her head. “I’m sorry. He brought only you and made no mention of anyone else.”

Tears stung Addie’s eyes as the weight of reality coursed through her. Then she truly had no one.

Seeming to sense her dismay, the nurse gave Addie’s shoulder a soft pat. “I wouldn’t give up entirely. It’s possible someone else found her and took her to a different hospital.”

A glimmer of hope rose within Addie, though recalling the severity of the fire, it seemed unlikely. “Perhaps.”

“Captain Sally?” The distraught voice pulled the caregiver’s attention to the approaching nurse.

“Yes?”

“The man’s fever is continuing to rise.”

She hung her head. “I was afraid of that. We need to get his temperature down. Fetch some chunks of ice, and I’ll be right over.”

With a nod, the nurse went on her way.

Addie searched her attendant’s dark eyes. “Captain?”

The woman nodded. "Yes. I'm Captain Sally Tompkins. Known to most as Captain Sally. I supervise this hospital."

Addie blinked. "A lady captain?"

"Unusual, I know, but in order to receive the necessary medical supplies, Richmond hospitals require military personnel to be in charge. Therefore, I was given the rank of captain." Her brow creased. "Though, I'm not sure it will matter much longer, what with the Yankee takeover."

Addie's eyes glossed over. "Then, it's true. The Federals have overtaken our glorious city. 'Tis a sorry day indeed."

Captain Sally sighed. "Richmond is not so glorious at the moment. From what I hear, most of the businesses, the ironworks, and warehouses are destroyed. Not to mention the bridges and ship fleet."

"Those wretched Yanks!" Addie shifted her head and moaned at the twinge of pain kneading through her.

"Easy, now. You must lie still." Bending low, the nurse placed a steadying hand on Addie's forehead. "And it wasn't the Federals who set the fires. It was our own soldiers."

Addie's brow creased. "You can't mean it."

"Indeed. From what I understand, our men were ordered to set the blazes to keep anything of importance from falling into enemy hands."

Addie clenched her teeth. "Then I don't blame them. I'd just as soon die as be subjected to Yankee rule. Perhaps it would be just as well if I did die."

Captain Sally shook her head. "Come now, one so young shouldn't speak of dying. You've your whole life ahead of you. And think of all those who'd mourn your loss."

The comment wielded a heavy blow, stirring further emptiness inside Addie. Moisture pooled in her eyes. "I've no one left to grieve me. Those horrid Yankees killed my father and brothers. My aunt is all that remains. *If* she survived."

Genuine remorse swept over the woman's face. "I'm truly



sorry. I hope she's found." She squeezed Addie's shoulder. "Rest now. I'll have Miss Jane bring you some nourishment."

Addie nodded, concerns for Aunt Polly's fate superseding any thought of food. She stared at a crack in the plastered ceiling. What would she do if her aunt wasn't found? In years past, she would have taken her worries to the Lord.

But not now. Not when He'd forsaken her and her family.

She had only herself to rely on.

That, and the hope her aunt still lived.